

In Sierra Leone

UNIMAK Leads Education for Sustainable Development

By Emmanuel A.B. Turay

“To care about sustainable development means to accept responsibility for the well-being of future generations and also of our habitat, of our planet. An affirmative attitude towards sustainability has to be an integral part of the moral foundation of our activities and of your lifestyle. This means that promoting sustainable development must be an important aspect of the educational agenda at all levels.”(Professor Dr Konrad Osterwalder, Under Secretary General of the UN, Rector of the United Nations University (Osterwalder 2009))

The Vice Chancellor of UNIMAK Rev. Prof. Joseph A. Turay is of the opinion that with the advent of new extractive industries in Sierra Leone and in the north in particular, a sustainable approach to enterprise and mining must be implemented for the common good.

The impetus for focusing on the implementation of Sustainable Development (SD) and Education for sustainable development at UNIMAK was due, in large part to the calls by the UN for government departments and private sector to incorporate the principles and guidelines of Sustainable Development into their operations, programs and activities.

It is against this background that the University of Makeni (UNIMAK) since 2010 started a Masters programme in the area of Sustainable Development with a view to addressing the deficiency of the human capital in enhancing this new development challenge after the folding of MDGs that did not properly address several issues geared toward sustainable development.

Sustainable development is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The latter will depend on how well we balance social, cultural, economic, and environmental objectives when making decisions today. Combating poverty is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Economic growth and social development is essential to reduce poverty. However, we must not forget the environmental component of sustainability. The international community has recognised that development can be sustainable only if all natural resources are used in such a way that present and future generations around the world have an equal opportunity to live and prosper.

Sierra Leone is among the other nations around the world that have endorsed sustainable development as a way forward strategy in enhancing development and management of its resources and the environment. His Excellency in his statement to World Leaders at the New York conference

on sustainable development on Tuesday 25th September 2015 stated that 'Since 2012, Sierra Leone proactively tailored its development framework to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ... for socio-economic development as contained in my government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) III, and articulated in the "Agenda for Prosperity" (A4P), was launched in July 2013 as Sierra Leone's roadmap to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Agenda for Prosperity aims to build a sustainable future for all Sierra Leoneans. It demonstrates our firm commitment towards putting Sierra Leone on the path to resilience and sustainability'.

If media coverage is any indication, the world at large is seriously concerned about our environment, population growth and climate change. There has been little improvement of the well-being of the average person living on earth, and in many countries the gap between rich and poor has grown considerably. Yet, despite the fact that education is seen as a key transformative factor in the improvement of the environment and our future sustainability, and the fact that there has been considerable discussion regarding education for sustainable development (ESD) at a policy level, very few countries and communities have moved to integrate ESD into their educational curriculum, let alone implemented it as the basis of a reorienting or transforming education.

This bold step taken by UNIMAK in promoting sustainable development in the country will go a long way in building the capacity and empowering citizens on the SDGs. According to President Koroma 'with the commitment of leaving no one behind, it is essential that we objectively follow a pragmatic approach, with renewed vigour and commitment, to provide for our people a future that would guarantee justice, sustainable peace and security, strengthened accountable and democratic governance, employment opportunities, the transparent and equitable distribution of wealth, a safe and sustainable environment, improved health and relevant education. It is also important that conflicts are resolved around the world, if the Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved, as there can be no development without peace'.

The above statement by HE the President could only be achieved when the think tank institutions within the country put shoulders to the wheel to ensure that we have the required human capital and resources to promote this world agenda through the establishment of sustainable local enterprises or businesses that will enhance economic growth. As experts from UNIMAK's Sustainable Development would always say that Prosperity is about flourishing (good governance, environmental security, etc.), Growth is respect for the economic needs taking into consideration our ecological limits (climate, water, land, air, etc.), the government has the responsibility to build an enabling environment for people to flourish.

Government and civil society as well as individuals must hold the responsibility for a more sustainable future of Sierra Leone. All must contribute in their own way. The 40 chapters of Agenda 21 describe ways forward in many areas, from agriculture to waste disposal. Nevertheless, the education community has a special role to perform. Explicitly mentioned in each of the chapters, education is an essential ingredient for a more sustainable future. For example, it is through education that the next generation of citizens, voters, workers, professionals and leaders are prepared for life-long learning. Without education, progress towards a more sustainable future will be compromised. Indeed, we must learn our way forward.

There is no doubt therefore why UNIMAK is now classed as Sierra Leone's top university, as a mere vision manifested five years ago, the nation can now boast of professionals at Masters level to marshal the nation toward this world development agenda. The SDGs form the nucleus of the university's strategic plan 2015-2020 notably where UNIMAK is at the Moment, where does it want to go and how will it get there? The courses are tailored around this strategic management plan with a view to not only targeting the job market but also for the common good through its outreach programmes. Through its outreach programmes UNIMAK contributes to sustainable development by advancing policy recommendations on international trade and investment, economic policy, climate change, urban planning, measurement and assessment, and natural resources management.

UNIMAK trains young professionals to become sustainability leaders, conducts research in best practices in leadership training, monitors changes in the sustainability sector, and researches the skills and leadership gap. The University offers the values required in Sustainable Development leaders, including capacity for innovation, global mindset, passion for sustainability and commitment to and Sustainable Development lifestyle. UNIMAK's mission is customer oriented and therefore realises the leadership gap for Sustainable Development is real and urgent.

Based on the University's self concept, taking into consideration its strengths and competitive advantage in the country, the strategic plan takes into consideration the demographic shifts that are occurring, the sustainability job market is growing, and to achieve sustainability they need to inspire and engage the new generation. They need people who can work in interdisciplinary fields, not in silos.

"The evidence is unequivocal: education saves lives and transforms lives, it is the bedrock of sustainability," says UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova."This is why we must work together across all development areas to make it a universal right."

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