GLOBAL UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP ON ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY (GUPES)
THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: INPUTS FOR RIO+20
1600-1700 hours, Green Room,
22 February 2011, Tuesday
UNEP Head Quarters, Gigiri

Mr. Mahesh Pradhan, the new Head of the Environmental Education and Training Unit at UNEP chaired the Green Room Event (a side event at the UNEP Governing Council). Prior to panelists' presentations, he took the opportunity to provide an update on the new directions of EETU, focused around three pillars, namely: Education, Research and Training, as well as a cross-cutting pillar on Networking.

- **Prof Li Fengting** of the UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development (IESD) highlighted universities as key resources for knowledge. He stressed that a*pplied research* is very important for developing countries. In China, the central government allocates substantial finances to fund applied research. Universities could also play a leading role in the development of 'green Industries' in fast growing economies by developing and demonstrating 'green technologies'. He highlighted the need for 'Green Universities/Sustainable Campuses'.
- **Prof Gitile Naituli** of Multimedia University in Nairobi, Kenya, highlighted the experience of Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability into African Universities (MESA). He noted related environmentally sustainable development efforts in Africa, such as innovations in university curriculum development and community engagement efforts. He reiterated that MESA had successfully reactivated community engagement as a core business of participating African universities. He also stressed the need to establish lateral links with secondary and primary schools for greater impact. He attributed the success of MESA to its unique approaches: innovation, infusion, systems approaches, and policy responses.
- **Prof. Maria Ivanova** of the University of Massachusetts Boston, USA discussed the role of universities in bridging the research/science/knowledge/policy and practitioner gap, for which a key solution is *community engagement.* She quoted Abraham Lincoln, saying "The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of the government in the next." She also shared a motivating experience from the College of William and Mary, USA, where a group of committed students initiated campus sustainability efforts that were eventually adopted by the university's leadership.
- **Kepha Bosire** explained Kenya Commercial Bank's *Green Agenda* and the Sustainability Management Programme. He highlighted the shortage of qualified and appropriately trained employees, limited knowledge on the subject of sustainability, lack of exposure, competing interests, and limited resources as key challenges that prevent most businesses from implementing sustainability management programmes. He challenged universities to produce graduates who meet and can appropriately and contextually respond to the businesses' manpower needs. Specifically, he cited the need for universities to produce action-oriented graduates with holistic competencies in sustainability terms and applied practices. He also introduced participants to the Corporate Alliance for Environment and Sustainability (CAFES), a partnership with UNEP.

Contributions from the floor included the following:
- The need to adopt and implement the concept of 'Green Universities';
- The need to measure, monitor and continuously evaluate progress in terms of sustainability in universities and workplaces, through sustainability audits and sustainability reporting;
- The need to 'green curricula', ie: integrate environment and sustainability across the curricula of different faculties, schools, courses and programmes, specifically business schools;
- The need to foster closer collaboration between universities and businesses & industries;
- The need to make universities more relevant to policy implementation, and for university research and knowledge products to influence policy formulation processes;
- The need for adequate resources/funds for university research;
- The need to develop appropriate and functional models aimed at bridging the gap between Research/Science/Policy/and Practitioners.