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Access to Knowledge — A Prerequisite to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

In September 2000, the international donor community agreed upon the so-called millennium development goals as the main development cooperation agenda. In April 2001, the German government issued a respective Plan of Action 2015. In 2002, the World Bank published a fundamental study on the relevance of higher education as an important contributor to sustainable development. However, there is a preoccupying imbalance between theory and practice. Development issues are still to a large part missing in higher education curricula. The implementation of functioning systems in basic education, public health, or environmental protection is scheduled to fail if the higher education sector in the developing countries is not actively involved in planning development programs that are appropriate to their countries. Sophisticated development models such as sector wide approaches (SWAPs), poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP), fast track initiatives (FTI) are still to a large extent donor country based enterprises. In order to assure that such models will benefit the people in the target countries, they must be implanted into the local higher education systems where knowledge and its various applications should be enriched with local content. Intellectual ownership is required in order to enable societies to apply and further develop knowledge in a way that relates to their specific needs, traditions and cultures.

Consequently, a number of questions arise that call for appropriate answers, for instance — How to develop responsible partnerships between the international donor community and higher education institutions in the target countries? How can higher education institutions contribute to an effective use of development cooperation inputs? How can the gap between the uneducated people and the intellectual elites be reduced? What kinds of approaches are needed in order to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education to sustainable development? How can also higher education institutions in the developed countries enhance their focus upon development agendas such as the Plan of Action 2015? Particular reference will be made in this paper to best practices in the field of agriculture and forestry.

Keywords: Higher education, knowledge management, partnership, intellectual ownership