

Universities embrace centres of expertise for sustainable dev't

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UCU Vice-chancellor, Dr. John Senyonyi. Photo/File

EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

KAMPALA - A number of universities in Uganda have embraced the idea of establishing Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) for promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

They include Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), Busitema and Uganda Christian University (UCU).

RCEs were recommended by the United Nations University in response to the United Nations Decade of ESD.

ESD empowers learners to make informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and just society for the present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.

ESD is holistic and transformational and addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment with the purpose of transforming society.

Speaking at a stakeholders Workshop for the Regional Centre of Expertise on ESD held at Uganda Christian University (UCU) on Wednesday, Dr. Rosie Agoi the Secretary-General of the National Commission for UNESCO observed the need to re-orient the education system in Uganda to bring ESD on board.

So far in Uganda only MUST, Busitema and UMU have regional centres of expertise while UCU is in the process of registering one.

Agoi revealed that the UNESCO Commission in Uganda has come up with a draft policy to guide ESD in schools. The draft policy is currently before the cabinet, she said.

“If ESD is embraced in Uganda, people should be able to imagine a better future knowing where they are heading. ESD also promotes critical thinking that empowers the masses and encourages dialogue and negotiation in communities,” Agoi said.

Agoi wondered whether lecturers in Ugandan Universities today link what they teach to sustainable development and production. “Do we produce students with integrity? Do we allow students to participate in decision making?” She wondered.

“If the ESD is implemented, we should be able to respect our cultural diversity and live in harmony with one another. We should also be able to look at ourselves as human beings created by one God regardless of our different physical appearances,” she said.

At the same function, the Director, District Support Coordination and Public Education at the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) Dr. Daniel Babikwa noted that Regional Centres of Expertise are intended to break the barriers between learning institutions and the communities they serve.

“Universities have skills which on many occasions are confined within the university yet they should help communities in solving their problems,” Babikwa noted. “When you have young people with mental and physical energies, engage them in helping communities to solve problems.”

He also advised Universities to convert the knowledge they generate into money by pitching projects to industrial players and local governments in their respective communities.

In his speech, UCU Vice-chancellor, Dr. John Senyonyi observed that the Regional Centres of Expertise should be used as an opportunity for universities to ask the key question like whether the knowledge Universities generate has an impact to society.

“It would be unfair to learn that what the University teaches is never practiced even within its premises,” he said. “Whatever we take outside must first be visible amongst us.”

Senyonyi urges all Ugandans to take responsibility for God’s creation such as forests instead of destroying it.

According to the experts at the workshop, creating regional centers of expertise is one way of sharing knowledge at the local and global levels that is necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.