



Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability submission for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012

1. Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS) is a non-profit member based organisation representing higher and further education institutions within Australia and New Zealand. ACTS aims to inspire, promote and support change towards best practice sustainability within the operations, curriculum and research of the tertiary education sector. ACTS seeks to build community and business partnerships at the local, regional and international level, in order to bring together a network of people for positive engagement, capacity building and change.
2. The annual ACTS conference was held in Adelaide from 28-30 September 2011. One of the sessions at the conference was devoted to discussions pertaining to Rio + 20 and organized under three themes, namely: (1) Tertiary education sector contributions to the Zero Draft document and subsequent implementation, (2) Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and (3) Institutional framework for sustainable development.
3. As an NGO operating within the Asia Pacific region, ACTS was involved in drafting the statements submitted by *Major Groups and Stakeholders Asia Pacific*, as well as *Asia Pacific NGOs* and we therefore strongly endorse and support both.
4. We believe that the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Rio+20) provides a critical and timely platform for governments at the highest level to secure renewed political commitment and action for sustainable development. Since 1992 the ecological crisis has worsened, whilst income and social inequalities have escalated even as high economic growth took place in several countries. Not enough has been done to achieve the paradigm shift required to change current unsustainable trends and we urgently call on governments to act on change towards sustainable development, rather than continue to debate the issue further.
5. The Rio+20 Conference should therefore honestly and openly appraise the implementation of the sustainable development commitments and action plans, and identify the gaps and obstacles, to ensure the transformation and integration of the economic, social and ecological dimensions. This needs to take place at the local, national, regional and international levels.
6. In moving towards sustainable development that also incorporates the inter-generational dimension, the critical role that tertiary education plays in

achieving a long-term and sustainable shift needs to be galvanised. Recognising that changes in social values and practices are necessary in addition to technical solutions, there should be a focus on ensuring educational structures provide appropriate and relevant sustainability related skills and knowledge to achieve long term change within society and economy. Furthermore, there must be recognition and promotion of indigenous and local knowledge systems and their interface with more formalised knowledge systems.

7. The role that tertiary education can, should and does play in achieving sustainable development has often gone unrecognized and/or under represented. Since 1992, it has become clear that tertiary education institutions play a number of critical roles, including those summarized below:

- They provide relevant and critical education to our future government, business, industry, education and community leaders. By integrating sustainable development into curriculum, skills training and student development, tertiary education will equip the future with people who have the knowledge and capacity to positively impact the global economic and educational systems and programs, to eradicate poverty and improve access to education for all;
- They are critical homes for the research that provides sustainable solutions to the complex problems of development. Indeed, Secretary Ban Ki-moon pointed out in his call for the world's academic community to find solutions to global hunger, water shortages, and energy issues, "the academic community can help us connect the dots";
- They serve as the "test beds" for examining the context in which innovative sustainability practices are executed. As these institutions implement a variety of context-specific sustainability practices through education and operations, they demonstrate the viability of these practices and provide models for sustainable development;
- They facilitate engagement of groups at the community level through building and maintaining strong links to government, business and civil society, as part of the core business of learning and teaching and as part of research; and
- They provide the opportunity for cross fertilization of knowledge and understanding through hosting students from the international community, who then transfer learnings into their own areas for the benefit of all.

8. These roles of tertiary institutions should be recognised while also acknowledging that:

- There is need to strengthen the holistic integration of environmental, social and economical dimensions of sustainable development;

- Through promoting sustainable societies it is essential to ensure gender equality, democracy, and human rights;
 - The importance of peoples' participation, particularly of youth, women and indigenous peoples, and providing for their empowerment and relevant, functional education to support inclusive sustainable development, is most readily done through the tertiary education system; and
 - There have been communities that have developed numerous solutions to sustainable development challenges in spite of a lack of leadership and support from high levels of government. These initiatives need to be fully recognized, supported and celebrated with a view to link, upscale and maintain efforts.
9. It is the fundamental role of tertiary education to innovate and be an open source of new technologies for the benefit and wellbeing of the global community. We therefore propose that tertiary education institutions need to be more open and transparent with regards to the sharing of information with the global community for the common good towards sustainable development.
10. Open sharing of information and innovation cannot be accomplished without the support and backing of business and government. We therefore request business and government to provide more substantial financial and in kind support to see such endeavours come to fruition.
11. Below are summarized the key issues, challenges and courses of action that have been identified and affirmed in the ACTS annual conference.

Issues, Challenges and Ways Forward

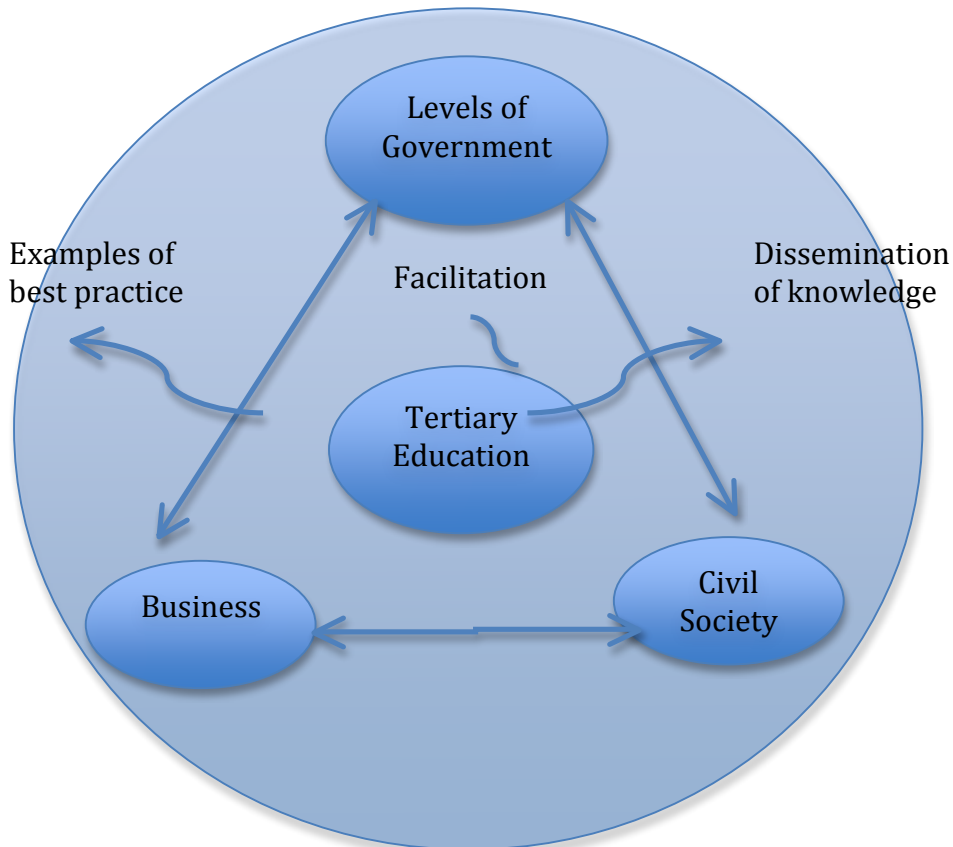
On Tertiary Education sector contributions to the Zero Draft document and subsequent implementation

12. We believe that the language that is used within the Zero Draft document and any subsequent documents must be directive and commitment-oriented to avoid any misunderstanding or 'ways out' from implementing the intention of the document and in order to achieve the paradigm shift required to move beyond rhetoric to action towards sustainable development.
13. We strongly feel that the role of tertiary education should be prominent throughout the Zero Draft document and any subsequent documents in order for the intent of Rio and Rio + 20 to be realised. The role of tertiary education should therefore not be relegated to inclusion as an ad hoc after thought.
14. We further believe that relevant and appropriate education at all levels is essential, as is support from pillars of society such as government and business. The recognition that informal learning processes are just as important as formal learning processes is essential, particularly to empower and encompass the marginalised youth, women and indigenous groups in

society. These two approaches to learning can be used in conjunction to ensure the most beneficial outcomes at a variety of levels and learning. Education for all is an important cornerstone of civilisation, whether provided through formal or informal means.

15. Community engagement is part of the core business of higher and further education. We therefore believe that tertiary education institutions are in a strong position to facilitate the partnerships between government, business and civil society (including individuals and community groups) at the community level, as part of the implementation of goals and objectives associated with Rio + 20 outcomes (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Implementation for Change Model



16. We submit that tertiary education be recognised as playing a significant role in the Zero Draft document and in its subsequent implementation to achieving the commitments of Rio and Rio + 20 and in particular, as summarised below:

- Tertiary institutions, business/industry groups and governments alike should provide resources and funding to facilitate the fundamental shift to embed sustainability in the curriculum, research, and

operations of tertiary education. The development of tools, resources and appropriate professional development for academics and institutional leaders are required for this fundamental shift in our collective approach to sustainable development to be successful

- Each tertiary institution within developed countries should partner and work with a tertiary institution from a developing country, for the purpose and mutual benefit of research, knowledge and resource exchange. Each institution should make this partnership explicit through registering on a dedicated page, coordinated by the apex body discussed further below
- Every tertiary institution should commit to sharing and learning from one another in the spirit of international partnership and long-term global societal benefit. As importantly, institutions should commit to working more closely with local community and business to facilitate dialogue, capacity building and change at the local level.

On Green Economy in the Context of Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development

17. We firmly believe that current prevailing economic models promote unsustainable consumption and production patterns, facilitate grossly inequitable economic systems that fail to eradicate poverty, assist exploitation of natural resources towards the verge of extinction, and need to be replaced by sustainable economies in the community, local, national, regional and international spheres.

18. We have concerns about the term 'green economy', and indeed, striving towards a 'green economy' as it leaves the current economic system open to 'greenwashing' without fundamentally changing a system that is significantly contributing to unsustainable practices.

19. The use of jargonistic titles such as 'green' to describe the economy only confuses the matter and the outcomes that need to be reached in order to realise sustainable development. We therefore propose that the approach is based on sustainable economies, the key attributes of which promote and encapsulate:

- Cultural change towards sustainable development from the bottom-up, moving towards less unnecessary consumption;
- Sustainable production and consumption patterns, ensuring social and environmental wellbeing in that process;
- Decent work and livelihoods, ensuring that social benefits are distributed equitably among all peoples;
- The upholding of social justice, human rights, equity, and gender equality;
- Allows and supports the achievement of economic sufficiency;
- Safeguarding animal welfare and protection of ecosystems; and

- Regulation of financial markets, holding firms accountable for the social and environmental impacts of their operations.
20. We further question the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measurement for growth and instead believe a more appropriate index be used, one which is based on people's wellbeing, inclusiveness, social equity, human rights, gender equality, decent work, biodiversity and ecological footprint.
 21. We present that tertiary education institutions can play a significant role in developing the methodologies required to measure progress towards sustainable economies and indeed, sustainable development. Through our core business, we have the capacity to question terminology and measurement of non-economic factors, bearing in mind our reluctance to inappropriately value the environment.
 22. We believe that technological fixes alone will not solve environmental problems that are consequences of social and economic factors. Fundamental issues such as assessment of the potential impacts of new and untested technologies (e.g., geo-engineering, ocean fertilization, etc.) before they are released in the environment and deployed commercially must be addressed in the development and transfer of technologies.
 23. We present that tertiary education has a significant role to play in ensuring the issue of assessment of potential impacts is addressed. Through our research we have the capacity to question current technologies, and innovate and appropriately assess future technologies prior to release, and importantly, to continue monitoring and evaluation once technologies are in place.
 24. We further present that tertiary education can play a significant role in achieving sustainable economies in an accelerated timeframe through embedding sustainability across curriculum and by enabling it to be delivered through relevant learning and teaching practices that are based on best knowledge, unbiased and distanced commercial conflicts of interest to ensure the current skills and knowledge gap does not exist into the future.
 25. We believe that stronger partnerships among governments, civil society organisations, private businesses and stakeholder groups must be established for promoting sustainable economies. Such partnerships need to be within frameworks of accountability and transparency including regulation. In line with this, tertiary education institutions and other stakeholder groups are enjoined to support good practice case studies and promote dissemination of information on such good practices for promoting sustainable economies in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

On the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD)

26. We believe it is necessary to build a strong apex body on sustainable development that works at the global level and can integrate the work of disparate multilateral bodies currently working on each of the three dimensions of sustainable development. This apex body needs to include the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation to ensure ALL dimensions of sustainable development are considered, and those with the ability to influence change are involved in decision-making processes. Options to be explored include transforming the Commission on Sustainable Development into a Council on Sustainable Development, or establishing a UN Organization on Sustainable Development. The unifying mandate of this body should be the promotion of sustainable development as a fundamental right of all.
27. We further believe it is essential to immediately establish a broad inclusive multi-stakeholder consultative body or network which is tasked with supporting the apex body through provision of information to assist in realising outcomes and monitoring the implementation of commitments and actions since 1992. Such a body should be participatory, democratic, and have an integral multi-stakeholder character that accords civil society with equal rights and equal voice as those of governments.
28. At the regional level, corresponding sustainable development bodies should be established. Sub-regional analogues could also be created where size and diversity of the region warrant it, such as in the Asia-Pacific.
29. At the national level, governments must establish multi-stakeholder councils for sustainable development (NCSOs) where absent, and strengthen them where already existing. NCSOs must coordinate planning, policy making, issues resolution, and reporting to the corresponding sub-regional/regional and global sustainable development bodies to ensure vertical coherence from implementation levels to the global level.
30. To be effective, the national sustainable development councils should be (a) organized at highest possible level, i.e., chaired by the Head of State/Government; (b) lodged with an appropriate coordinating body such Office of the Prime Minister or highest level elected represented body; (c) composed of relevant ministries and major groups/stakeholders including local authorities; and (d) institutionally stable by virtue of a strong legal mandate and endowed with a dedicated budget.
31. Local authorities are closest to the ground and directly serve the people. They must be given appropriate responsibility and be involved in decision-making that concerns sustainable development.
32. We strongly assert that it is essential for the apex body and governments to recognize the existing efforts of communities and NGOs such as ACTS in promoting sustainable development at the national and local levels. Recognition needs to be accompanied by support, with the provision of

platforms to mainstream and link these efforts to have more sustained impacts on development.

33. The above proposals are initial steps to start fundamental changes that are necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st century and ensure a sustainable global civilisation in the centuries beyond. In the long term this may include updating the Charter of the UN.

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