

DRAFT REPORT

(By Espen Ronneberg; amended 19/08/04 by K. Mustafa Touré)

EXPLORING THE FEASIBILITY OF A SIDS UNIVERSITIES CONSORTIUM WORKSHOP, ST. THOMAS, US VIRGIN ISLANDS, AUGUST 3 -6, 2004

Developing the SIDS Universities Consortium in the context of the Barbados Program of Action

Introduction

The meeting to explore the feasibility of a SIDS Universities Consortium was held at the University of the Virgin Islands, Saint Thomas, United States Virgin Islands, from 3 to 6 August, 2004. The opening ceremony was chaired by Dr. Gwen-Marie Moolenaar, Provost of UVI who welcomed participants. Opening remarks were given by Professor Lino Briguglio (University of Malta), Dr. Carlyle Corbin, Representative for External Affairs (USVI), Dr. LaVerne Ragster (President, UVI). His Excellency The Honorable Charles W. Turnbull, Governor of the USVI welcomed the participants to USVI. His Excellency Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul, Chairman of the Alliance of Small Island States made closing remarks.

Brief Background

The proposal for a consortium of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Universities originated within a UNDP sponsored process on vulnerability reduction and resilience building in SIDS. The initial concept emerged at the SIDS Ministerial Meeting held in Montego Bay, Jamaica in May 2002 as part of the preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

At an expert meeting on Capacity Building for the Sustainable Development of SIDS held from 3-8 December 2003 at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji Islands, sponsored by the UNDP the issue was further developed. That meeting brought together experts from all SIDS regions, from a variety of backgrounds such as Government officials, from educational institutions, tourism, private business, non-governmental organizations and other community based organizations. The purpose was to assess the current state of capacity development within SIDS for implementing the sustainable development paradigm called for by the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA). It was also convened to develop a set of recommendations for submission to the January 2004 Inter-regional Meeting of the SIDS in preparation for the International Meeting to review progress with the Implementation of the BPOA, in August 2004. Through the intervention of knowledgeable presenters, the meeting reviewed the background of the issues involved, assessed the status of critical weaknesses in SIDS, and identified that the major capacity obstacle to sustainable development lies in limited individual capacity, which subsequently has a negative impact on institutional and systemic capacity.

As a result of those discussions, and building on formal and informal contacts that have been made through the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), it was agreed that a formal process would be established to bring into fruition the SIDS Universities Consortium. It was agreed that the University of the US Virgin Islands would coordinate, and would host the first of the preparatory meetings of Vice-Chancellors and Senior Staff.

Meeting outcomes

The meeting discussed a wide range of issues pertaining to the feasibility of the University consortium. These were ranging from practical issues relating to accreditation, and to issues relating to academic programs and the expertise of each institutions.

Presentations were made by Prof. Kanyathy Koshy, USP, Dr. LaVerne Ragster, UVI, Ms. Judy Pouono, National University of Samoa, Assoc. Prof. Parmseeven.Veerapen University of Mauritius, Prof. Lino Briguglio, University of Malta, Prof. John Roff, Arcadia University, Prof. Scott Q. Turn, University of Hawaii on the experiences of these universities in promoting sustainable development. In their presentations it was also highlighted how their universities were structured. They also provided details about what in their view were the strengths of their institutions. Courses that could be recommended for cross-accreditation within the consortium were also discussed.

Presentations were also made by Ms. Seema Deo (Education for Sustainable Development & Public Outreach), K. Mustafa Touré (Using ICT: Virtual Classrooms over the Internet), Dr. Winsome Gordon (on the UNESCO UNITWIN opportunities) and Cletus Springer (promoting sustainable development through education).

It was generally agreed that certain first steps will need to be taken. As a preliminary goal it was agreed that a first target would be the establishment of a graduate program on islands management (although the actual title was not agreed) that would combine the best available resources from each of the core institutions. A scholar would enroll in one of the core institutions, but would be enabled to choose courses from the others. A list of approved courses would have to be developed.

It was also agreed that in the longer term courses would also have to be offered at the undergraduate level as well as in the form of continuing education courses. There would also be a need to further study the delivery mode and teacher-training aspects.

Three working groups were established. Working group 1 was asked to deal with accreditation and delivery, to consider existing processes, and the possibility of posting of information on a common website, perhaps under UNESCO, to be mirrored by SIDSNet. The use of ICT and current status of availability was also considered by this group.

Working group 2 on programs, evaluation and template development sought to ensure that an interdisciplinary focus and integration of studies could be delivered. This will require upgrading of teachers through team-work. Program development will have to be expanded at a future stage.

Working group 3 on resource mobilization was also tasked to do the vision statement and mission statement of the consortium. It should look at existing resources and the ability to access these, as well as other innovative ways of raising funds.

The working groups produced their preliminary findings, and it was decided that each group should continue to develop these findings by email.

It was agreed that a steering committee was to be established, chaired [coordinated] by K. Mustafa Touré, and consisting of Lino Briguglio, Parmaseeven Veerapen, Kanyathy Koshy, Henry Smith, Cletus Springer, Albert Binger and David Smith. The steering committee would be charged with the further development of the working group findings and ensuring that the key issues be resolved in sufficient time for a final presentation and signing ceremony at Mauritius.

Conclusion

The SIDS Universities Consortium is well underway to becoming a reality. Several key milestones lay ahead. A presentation will be required to be given as an explanation of the process to AOSIS, either in the context of an AOSIS plenary meeting or in the context of the UNESCO Conference in October. A further opportunity exists in the context of the AOSIS Negotiations Workshop to be held in Cape Verde in November 2004.

It was agreed that the design of a set of proposals for UNESCO and for CIDA (through its UPCDP section) would be developed and that a Letter of Intent would be drafted for the steering committee. Initial outlines for proposals to move the distinct elements forward – such as teacher orientation, development of resource mobilization, etc. would also be completed. Capacity building in education is seen as very important in this regard and it was agreed to seek AOSIS support for inclusion of this as an item at the IM.

In late October it was proposed to present reports of the three working groups (accreditation, programs and resource mobilization) and to finalize plans for the IM.

In early November each core institution should prepare to present to the Rectors a refined project document, with a draft MOU which includes details of the vision statement. Financing elements will also be covered in this document. A meeting of Rectors will either be at the UNESCO Paris Meeting or at the AOSIS Cape Verde Negotiations Meeting.

In November a presentation at General Assembly of the Consortium Project will be given to the session dealing with the UN Decade for Education for sustainable development.

The core group for the consortium will be USP, UWI, UVI, U of Malta and U of Mauritius.