

*International Conference on the Sustainable Development of
Natural Resources in Africa – Creating a nexus between
research and policy for sustainable management of Africa's
natural resources, marking the 25th anniversary of UNU-INRA
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United Nations University

“Advancing knowledge for human security, peace and development”

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Opening remarks

Prof. Ernest Aryeetey, Vice Chancellor, University of Ghana

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome. I would like to express my warmest greetings to you today. It is a great pleasure for me to be with you in Accra for this international conference on the sustainable development of natural resources in Africa – organized to mark the 25th anniversary of the United Nations University's Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA). In particular, I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this international conference possible.

Like many other ambitious academic institutions around the world, the UN University will be a widely recognized international postgraduate research and teaching institution, best known for:

- its emphasis on ensuring the highest possible quality in its research, teaching, and academic support services;
- its strict adherence to the methods and tools of social and natural sciences and of engineering;
- its high ethical standards, including integrity, trust, tolerance, and acceptance of rights as well as obligations;
- its striving to implement the principles of gender balance;
- its spirit of cooperation, collegiality, and a dedication to creating a sense of community;
- its equity and openness in access to UNU research, teaching, capacity development, and dissemination;
- its intellectual vitality and openness;
- its academic freedom and autonomy with commensurate accountability; and
- its social responsibility and the environmental sustainability of its own operations.

Unlike most other universities, due to its special mission it is also true that the UN University will be ***different*** in many aspects, such as:

- its global structure, with institutes and programmes in 13 different countries;
- its being an institution of the United Nations, therefore its close collaboration with many UN and governmental offices in research and in placing students for internships and the like;
- its acting as a think tank for the United Nations and its member states;
- its ability to bring in experts from other UN agencies and from the political/diplomatic world;
- its collaboration with the best universities in many countries, developed and developing;
- its focus on problems and themes, not on disciplines; its structure that is problem-focused;
- its high relevance to the problems of sustainability, in particular of developing countries and the United Nations system;
- its focus on user needs both in research and in teaching; and

- its efforts to bridge the gaps between the developed and the developing world by building partnerships in research and in teaching (see II.1.1 Twin Institutes, page 4).

It is the totality of all these special aspects that allow the UN University to exploit its comparative advantages as both a United Nations organization built on the principle of partnership between the different parts of the world as well as a high-level research and teaching institution emphasizing a systems-oriented, interdisciplinary, problem-solving approach in its work.

UNU Twin Institutes

A Twin Institute is an ordinary institute or programme¹ with two (in exceptional cases three or maximally four) different locations, one of them being in a developed country, the other one being in a developing country. In both locations, there is a group of researchers, teachers, and students (called a Twin or a Twinning Partner). The two Twins will develop a joint research and teaching agenda. As a rule of thumb, they will spend more than 50% of their time on joint projects. The students, in the course of a programme, will usually spend time in both locations and the researchers will meet regularly for exchanging ideas and they

¹ Institute or programme is synonymous with the term “research and training centre or programme” as defined in the UNU Charter.

might want to organize at least one joint scientific meeting per year. In addition, UNU's e-learning facilities and capacities will be a crucial tool for a resource-effective way to share and build up educational programmes and curricula. In this way, UNU's capacity development in the developing world will be strengthened and the scholars in the developed countries will be better versed to respond to very specific conditions.

The Twin Institute structure will also strengthen the academic basis of the developing host country. "Brain drain" is an unlikely consequence since the reputation and scientific quality of the groups in the developing and in the developed country in the two twinning partners will eventually become equal at a high level.

Financial base of a twin institute:

For the basic funding of a Twin Institute, the cost of the twin in the developed country has to be covered by its host country. For the twin in the developing country, it is crucial that a certain share of the funding is derived from its host country too (at least 30%). There should be no part of an institute in a country whose government is not interested in making at least a partial contribution. The remaining financial resources have to come from research and teaching projects that are formulated by

the two twins jointly and that are submitted to funding agencies or other donors in the developed country or elsewhere.

The first Twin Institute of UNU is being set up by merging two existing UNU institutes: the UNU Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP) located in Tokyo, Japan and UNU-INRA located here in Accra. The main topics of UNU-ISP's interest are: peace and security, international cooperation and development and global change. These topics looked at superficially seem to be quite far apart from each other. The main focus of UNU-INRA has been on food security through enhanced management of African natural resources (soil, water, plants, minerals). It is clear that these topics have a lot to do with all three topics being taken up by UNU-ISP in Japan. We are all very curious to see what will come out of the cooperation between these two groups of researchers.

Building up the twin institute structure will be one of the major tasks of the near future. But these should not be in the way of UNU-INRA's cultivating collaboration with its five operating units located in Zambia, Namibia, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon thereby trying to pull into the partnership with the group in Tokyo.

Finally, as twinning is not the same as building a network, it has to be said that any institute of UNU twinned or not should carefully build up a network. This is particularly true and important for UNU-INRA in Ghana not only because neighbouring countries are contributing to the financing of the Institute's work, but also because as many other institutes working on related problems in Africa and elsewhere should be engaged.

Since its foundation in December 1986, UNU-INRA has undergone many changes and it has seen many ups and downs. I see this day today as an opportunity to promote and support a rejuvenation of the Institute. I am grateful to all the prominent people who have agreed to join us be it as speakers or as participants. I am sure that these three days will bring us a lot of interesting and challenging science. However, the important point, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that after the end of this meeting you don't just go home remembering three interesting days in Accra, but that you all actively think of how to support this Institute, its operating units in different parts of Africa and its twinning partner in Tokyo. And in the end, I challenge you not to leave it with your ideas, but to actually do it.

We have to do it - that is the slogan for today and for the future.

Thank you very much.