



## **RUCAS Tempus Project on Reorienting University Curricula to Address Sustainability: *Two and a half years of achievements***

**By Dr. Nancy Kanbar, RUCAS Institutional Coordinator, NDU-Louaize**

Currently, the world is facing many environmental problems, economic crises and severe political issues. Despite the “Arab Springs”, the Arab region is increasingly in peril. Clearly, there is no challenge facing our region that is more essential than achieving a sustainable future. Sustainability is about living in ways that leave the same or better options for future generations as we enjoy today. The great challenge of the 21st century for institutions of higher learning is to train professionals in favor of sustainable development. *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a vision of education that seeks to empower people to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future.* According to UNESCO, higher education systems in the Arab Region are facing many challenges that are negatively influencing their capacity to achieve the desired ESD goals. This situation requires that educational programs of universities should be reoriented in order to infuse ESD and sensitize students and other stakeholders towards sustainable development.

A number of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe joined efforts with a number of HEIs and NGOs from the Arab region to tackle the issue of ESD within the scope of an EU-funded TEMPUS project. The “Reorient University Curricula to Address Sustainability’ (RUCAS) project was launched in October 2010. ***Its main goal is to help six partner HEIs in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt to embed ESD into their curricula and teaching methodology through capacity building of university staff.***

### **E.U. partners**

- University of Crete, Greece
- University of Athens, Greece
- Dublin City University, Ireland
- Stockholm University, Sweden
- University of Padova, Italy
- University of Bordeaux3, France
- MIO/ECSDE/MEdIES (Mediterranean Information Office for Education Culture & Sustainable Development/ Mediterranean Education Initiative for Environment and Sustainability)

### **Arab Region partners**

- Notre Dame University- Louaize, Lebanon
- Université de La Sagesse, Lebanon
- Hashemite University, Jordan
- University of Jordan, Jordan
- Suez Canal University, Egypt
- Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development, Egypt
- UNESCO Regional Office Beirut for the Arab States, Lebanon
- SEKEM Development Foundation, Egypt
- League of Independent Activists (IndyACT), Lebanon

## **Road map project’s activities: An update**

### **I. Kick-Off meeting**

The project Kick-off meeting was held in Crete in December 2010. Dr. Nancy Kanbar and Dr. Jacques Harb attended the meeting. The project main goals, objectives, administrative and managerial structures were presented.



Kick off meeting in Crete (left to right): Michaelis Kleisarchakis (University of Crete, Greece), Iro Alempoi (MIO/Medies, Greece), Jasmin Ateia (SEKEM/ Heliopolis university, Egypt), Dr. Abdel Moneim Osman (UNESCO, Lebanon), Dr. Jacques Harb (NDU), Dr. Vassilis Makrakis (University of Crete, Greece, RUCAS project coordinator), Dr. Michele Biasutti (Padova University, Italy), Dr. Nancy Kanbar (NDU, RUCAS institutional coordinator)

## **II. Pilot assessment on ESD competencies**

RUCAS defined and validated core ESD student competence framework. A sample of 3,757 students was surveyed from the 12 participating universities. *The pilot study for the development and validation of the framework was carried out at NDU.*

## **III. Revisiting Universities Curricula**

A curriculum analysis was carried out to examine how and to what extent sustainability problems and principles of ESD are represented in the study programs of the participating institutions. The curricula were evaluated based on (1) sustainability themes; (2) goals of education for sustainable development; (3) competencies to be developed, (4) teaching methods, and (5) forms of evaluation.

## **IV. Capacity development and strengthening**

Three regional workshops were held in the three partner countries:

### ***First Regional Workshop: NDU, 23 – 25 October 2011***

The workshop introduced the faculty members from Arab partner universities in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon to the teaching methods, concepts, principles, processes and practices in ESD curriculum design. Themes, teaching methods, goals and competencies that need to be addressed for curriculum revision were discussed. A communication platform, the RUCAS Community of Practice, was initiated to support the process of curriculum revision and design.



Left to right: Drs. Talal Salem, Layla Khalaf-Kairouz, Jacques Harb



Participants in the workshop



Dr. Assaad Eid launching the workshop



Dr. Aref Al-Soufi, national Tempus coordinator



Dr. Vassilis Makrakis, project coordinator



Dr. Michele Biasutti (University of Padova, Italy), Dr. Nancy Kanbar (FBAE, NDU-RUCAS institutional coordinator)



Working group sessions on different themes



Workshop participants

***Second Regional Workshop: SEKEM Farm, Cairo, 7-9 January 2012***

Faculty members, Drs. Kanbar, Hage, Doumit, Labaki, Samra and Salem attended the workshop and discussed the revised syllabi they have developed to infuse sustainability. They also reviewed the actions needed to integrate sustainability into the university mission, faculties and other university structures.



Plenary session on syllabi revision



Showing: Dr. Jacqueline Doumit and Dr. Tanos El-Hage



Dr. Sami Samra



Dr. Nancy Kanbar  
Working sessions





Tempus group visiting the pyramids

***Third Regional Workshop: University of Jordan, Amman, 17-20 April, 2012***

NDU faculty members, Drs. Kanbar, Zgheib, Hage, Khalaf-Kairouz, Doumit, Harb, Salem, Samra, and Labaki, joined the third regional workshop that examined the implementation process of the revised courses. They discussed with the other partners the process and outcomes of disseminating project results and examined the strategies for the institutionalization of ESD.



Opening of the plenary session



Showing: Drs. Talal Salem and Tanos El Hage from NDU

### **V. Communication platform at NDU: Virtual Center**

An ESD Curriculum Design Toolkit and a virtual center for curriculum reform and professional development were established in every partner university in the Arab region. The facility is hosted at the computer center at NDU.



Dr. Fawzi Baroud guiding the monitoring team in the virtual center in the presence of VP Assaad Eid.

## VI. Evaluating progress

NDU hosted the first **monitoring visit** for RUCAS in January 2012. The visit was attended by Ms. Roisin Mc-Cabe from the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels, Drs. Aref Al soufi and Amer Helewan (National Tempus Office, Lebanon). The monitoring team met representatives from NDU, as well as representatives from La Sagesse University. The feedback that the NDU team received after the visit was very positive.



Dr. Kanbar presenting the progress of the project to the monitoring team



NDU group with LaSagesse participants and the monitoring team