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SLUSE: an innovative field-based learning and research approach

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Introduction

This paper discusses the implementation and experiences of an academic capacity building programme at universities in Denmark, southern Africa and South-East Asia for the promotion of sustainable land use and natural resource management. In 1998 three Danish universities (see table 1) received funding from the Danish Government for the establishment of the Danish University Consortium for Environment and Development on Sustainable Land Use and Natural Resource Management (DUCED SLUSE).

During 1999 and 2000 consortia were established in Malaysia (MUCED SLUSE) and Thailand (TUCED SLUSE), and in late 2001 funding was given for the implementation of a collaboration between four southern African universities: SACUDE SLUSE (see Table 1). After end funding (in 2007) collaboration has additionally been established with universities in Cambodia and Indonesia.

SLUSE Objectives

- to promote joint education and research across institutions, regions and disciplines.
- to develop interdisciplinary environmental postgraduate curricula at universities in Denmark, Malaysia, Thailand and southern Africa;
- to assist in the empowerment of communities through the teaching and research activities as well as fostering partnerships with a range of stakeholders;
- to enhance the human capacity within participating countries in the above areas.

Activities and Collaboration

The SLUSE consortia have several main points of collaboration:

- The development of a three-week field course jointly organized by the different consortia during which interdisciplinary groups of students from all three Danish Universities visit southern Africa, Malaysia or Thailand and work together in the field with groups of African or Asian students. Between the four consortia, over 1000 Master students have registered for SLUSE degrees.

SLUSE Objectives

- Joint teaching and curriculum development by staff from the different consortia universities;
- Development of joint research projects. As a direct result of SLUSE 8 research projects in SE Asia and southern Africa have been developed and funded. These projects investigated sustainable land use and natural resource management issues through interdisciplinary and problem-oriented approaches.

The SLUSE framework

The basic premise for the approach implemented by the SLUSE consortia is the acknowledgement that natural resource management cannot be adequately studied and understood from a mono-disciplinary point of view. Furthermore, the practical knowledge obtained from field experiences can, at the same time, educate and qualify researchers and benefit recipient communities. The synergy of practical and theoretical knowledge can produce both academic qualifications and practical solutions that will enhance sustainable land use, as illustrated in the SLUSE model (see Figure 2).

For further information on the SLUSE initiative see www.sluse.dk