



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Capacity-building for environment and sustainable development through South-South cooperation

Region	Asia and the Pacific
Award Scheme	Shanghai Manual
Themes	Others
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Goal 17 - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Summary

The UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development (IESD), established in 2002, plays a pivotal role in promoting South-South cooperation for environmental governance and sustainable development.

Background and Objective

With the increasing complexity of global environmental governance, particularly since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, capacity-building for sustainable development has encountered numerous challenges. These include difficulties in transferring technology and knowledge, limited technical capacity, and inadequate infrastructure in recipient countries. Additionally, social and cultural factors such as social structure, gender equality, and education levels can significantly impact the effectiveness of projects. In response to these challenges, Tongji University and UNEP established the UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development (IESD) in 2002. IESD aims to develop international talent with a global perspective on environmental governance and sustainable development. Over two decades, the Institute has successfully created a distinctive talent training system that supports South-South cooperation, contributing to the global capacity for environmental and sustainable development through knowledge transfer and policy improvement.

Actions and Implementation

IESD has implemented a range of programs that span over 50 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe, focusing on capacity-building through South-South cooperation. One significant initiative is the Asia-Pacific Leadership Programme on Environment for Sustainable Development (APLP), launched in 2004, which trains future leaders in sustainable development. The program, which attracts participants from around the world, emphasizes systemic thinking and decision-making in environmental, social, and economic contexts. Another important program is the China-Africa Green



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Cities Mayors Workshop, which facilitates exchanges on sustainable city planning and environmental management between China and African nations. Furthermore, IESD hosts the International Student Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development, a major global event that provides young people with a platform to discuss pressing environmental issues and share ideas. Through these programs, IESD has created a robust international network, enhancing cooperation between governments, NGOs, and the private sector.

Outcomes and Impacts

IESD's initiatives have achieved substantial success, training over 400 individuals from 45 countries through the APLP and reaching thousands more through its conferences and degree programs. Participants have gone on to apply their knowledge in various global environmental governance roles. For example, alumni have contributed to significant projects such as advancing research on climate change in Africa and managing water resources in Ethiopia. The impact of these programs is evident in the recognition IESD has received, including the Special Contribution Award for South-South Cooperation from the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and other prestigious honours. The institute's efforts in promoting South-South cooperation have been instrumental in fostering knowledge sharing and enhancing sustainable development practices in the participating regions.

Sustainability and Scalability

IESD's approach emphasizes sustainability by building long-term mechanisms that ensure the continuation of its work. These include establishing a network of international partnerships, providing scholarships, and offering continuous support to program alumni. By encouraging participants to set up similar capacity-building platforms in their home countries, IESD fosters a self-sustaining model that amplifies the impact of its initiatives. This strategy ensures that the skills and knowledge gained through IESD's programs can be applied long after participants return to their respective countries, contributing to the ongoing global effort to address sustainable development challenges.

Gender and Social Inclusivity

IESD places a strong emphasis on gender and social inclusivity, integrating local social and cultural contexts into its programs. By carefully considering the unique needs of recipient countries, IESD adapts its training methods to ensure relevance and effectiveness. This inclusive approach not only promotes gender equality but also ensures that marginalized groups are actively involved in the capacity-building process. Such strategies help increase the effectiveness of knowledge transfer and foster broader participation in sustainability projects.



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Innovative Initiative

One of IESD's most innovative contributions is the creation of a high-level "point-chain-network" cooperation platform. This platform connects governments, international organizations, NGOs, and private enterprises, fostering collaboration on sustainable development initiatives. Through this multi-tiered network, IESD facilitates the exchange of best practices and promotes a comprehensive approach to environmental governance that integrates education, research, and policymaking. This innovative model enhances the global cooperation necessary to address complex environmental challenges.

Resources devoted to delivery

IESD has invested significant resources into delivering its programs, including funding scholarships, establishing partnerships with international organizations, and offering a wide range of educational opportunities. The Institute provides over 30 interdisciplinary environmental courses, organizes workshops, and facilitates international degree programs. These resources ensure that participants receive high-quality education and practical training that they can apply in their home countries. The success of IESD's programs is underpinned by its dedicated team of experts, who lead various initiatives and ensure the ongoing impact of the Institute's work.

Conclusion

Through its comprehensive capacity-building initiatives, IESD has made a substantial contribution to global environmental governance and sustainable development. By focusing on South-South cooperation, IESD has empowered individuals, governments, and organizations in developing countries to tackle pressing environmental challenges and work toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Its innovative approach to talent training and knowledge transfer provides a valuable model for future capacity-building efforts, fostering collaboration and mutual learning among countries.