

Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate

Background

Higher education institutions have a crucial role in shaping knowledge, skills, and values related to climate change and the environment. They contribute to knowledge creation and technological advancements that can impact climate change and ecosystems positively.

Climate-U is multi-country project that initially brought together universities from UK, Brazil, Fiji, Mozambique, Tanzania, Indonesia, India, Morocco and Kenya, but has since expanded to other partners.

In Kenya, three Kenyan universities: Kenyatta University, Kisii University, and Kenya Methodist University were involved in setting up Participatory Action Research (PAR) groups to facilitate discussions and actions related to climate change. PAR groups consist of members from university management, faculty, students, county government, local community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) representatives.

The focus in Kenya underscores the vital role of higher education institutions in addressing climate change and sustainability by enhancing climate literacy. Through curriculum interventions and the influence of university graduates, these institutions aim to create positive impacts on climate change awareness and action within local communities.



KeMU PAR Framework and Activities

Kenya Methodist University PAR framework mainly focused on addressing the subject guided by three questions:

- ◆ What efforts existed or were ongoing in the university before the Climate-U PAR initiatives, and how can these be advanced in a sustainable manner even as new initiatives are introduced?
- ◆ In which modality or modalities of the university (education, public debate, campus operations, etc.) can PAR make the most significant contribution?
- ◆ What are the most significant challenges and opportunities that face PAR activities and how will these



Connecting Climate-U PAR Initiatives with Previous Efforts:

The university's strengths in agriculture and theological education were seen as assets for advancing climate justice.

Climate-U PAR initiatives align with and build upon KeMU's history of community service and outreach.

KeMU's emphasis on tapping into indigenous knowledge and incorporating it into its programs fosters closer interactions with the community.

Collaboration with diverse stakeholders and student-led initiatives play a crucial role in advancing sustainable practices and positive ecological behaviors.

KeMU are making a significant contribution in the modality of education, specifically through curriculum review and pedagogical changes to mainstream climate change action. They expand the university's role in addressing climate change and sustainability issues, incorporating greening activities that provide students with practical experience. The initiative is not only about addressing climate change but also enhancing the quality of education delivery.



Greening Activities

KeMU is adopting a systems approach to address climate change and environmental concerns within the university. Diverse personnel, including university management, Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Senate members, and representatives from various departments, are involved in these efforts.

Ongoing greening initiatives, both on and off-campus, have reinvigorated enthusiasm among faculty, management, students, and the broader community. The university is actively working with its student body to mentor and train young students on sustainable natural resource management. The university supports student organizations in conducting outreach programs focused on activities like tree planting and environmental clean-up.

These programmes aim to foster a sense of ownership among students and align with the university's mandate, which includes community engagement and sustainability. KeMU is developing an institutional policy to guide staff and students toward adopting sustainable lifestyles. The goal is to make KeMU one of the first higher education institutions to integrate sustainability into its operations and practices.

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Documentation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK)

KeMU has conducted a qualitative study on the role of Njuri Ncheke council of elders on resource natural resources conservation and management.

This documentation serves the dual purpose of preserving indigenous knowledge and aligning it with contemporary issues like climate change.

The inventory of indigenous knowledge will be accessible to students and future generations, providing insights into historical community efforts related to environmental issues.



Challenges and Opportunities

While the Climate-U PAR activities at KeMU can be considered successful, they were faced by challenges related to relationship-building among many players, power dynamics on who should lead, intervention selection, and sustainability. However, they also presented opportunities for collaboration, curriculum integration, community engagement, partnerships, and scaling impact to address climate change and sustainability effectively.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the PAR model has proven to be a valuable approach in addressing complex societal challenges such as climate change and sustainability. The Climate-U PAR activities at KeMU and other participating universities have highlighted several key takeaways:

- 1. Collaborative Co-Design:** PAR has facilitated collaboration among stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to co-design interventions to address climate change challenges. This inclusive approach has allowed for the sharing of ideas and perspectives to develop informed solutions.
- 2. Integration of Green Education:** The Climate-U PAR activities have resulted in the integration of climate change and sustainability content into university curricula. This ensures that graduates are well-informed about climate issues and sustainability, contributing to a more environmentally conscious workforce.
- 3. Recognition of Indigenous Knowledge:** Indigenous knowledge (IK) has been acknowledged as a valuable resource in informing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Communities can draw on their IK to design sustainable practices to address specific challenges.
- 4. Universities as Catalysts:** Universities have been recognized as centers of knowledge creation and innovation. They play a pivotal role in assisting communities in transitioning to sustainable lifestyles and practices.
- 5. Continued Collaboration:** Beyond the Climate-U project, universities like KeMU, Kenyatta University (KU), and Kisii University remain committed to engaging in collective actions with local communities to address sustainability. This long-term commitment can further be advanced by bringing on board other universities in Kenya.
- 6. Government and Private Sector Engagement:** Collaboration with government agencies and the private sector is crucial for advancing climate action. Government agencies can provide policy support and funding, while the private sector can contribute to specific community-based climate change adaptation programmes.
- 7. Knowledge Dissemination:** The PAR activities have emphasized the importance of disseminating climate change knowledge to the public using simple, understandable, and applicable language. This ensures that climate literacy becomes common knowledge among ordinary citizens and especially students.
- 8. Sustainable Practices:** The project has encouraged the adoption of sustainable practices, such as water harvesting and waste management, to mitigate the impact of climate change.
- 9. Interdisciplinary Approach:** An interdisciplinary approach involving various stakeholders has been highlighted as essential for holistic and impactful climate change interventions.

Summary

The Climate-U PAR activities have not only addressed climate change and sustainability but have also promoted collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the recognition of the vital role that universities and communities play in addressing pressing societal challenges. These lessons and outcomes can serve as valuable insights for future climate change initiatives and partnerships between universities, governments, and communities.

The faith-based background, community support, unique strengths, and proximity to natural resources have positioned KeMU's Climate-U PAR initiatives favourably for addressing climate change and sustainability in collaboration with the community. The inclusion of indigenous knowledge and engagement with Njuri Ncheke, Ameru council of elders adds depth and relevance to these efforts.