



Vice-Chancellor's Quarterly

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In this Quarterly the Vice-Chancellor continues with the discussion on sustainability which had been the framing theme in the previous Quarterly.

This issue looks at the impact of the present global climate threat on life.

The VC explores how an institution like ours can play its part in reducing the effects of environmental pollution through its knowledge production and everyday practices.

Sustainability of our Institution (Continued)

The *Vice-Chancellor's Quarterly* of June 2009 had Sustainability as theme.

As a result of the feedback from staff, and in acknowledgement of the importance and scope of the theme, *Quarterly 3* will once again cover aspects of the theme, in an attempt to address those elements that were not adequately covered in *Quarterly 2*. These include environmental sustainability and the role of knowledge producers in that field.

A narrow focus on just financial sustainability for the Institution creates an uncomfortable silence on broader and more urgent issues of sustainability.

Put in other words, institutional survival and continuity can have no meaning if continuity of life on this planet is not properly managed.

Good governance practices

Good governance entails among other things awareness by a company, in this case CPUT, that it should minimize its [negative] impact on the natural environment within which it operates. As an institution we are called to "protect, enhance and invest in the well-being of society and in the natural ecology" (Summary of Report on Governance for South Africa-2009, 18). This institutional responsibility can best be responded to through a Sustainability Policy, as suggested by a respondent, through which the individual members of the community are given a clear direction. In addition, CPUT should be able to monitor its own progress on the issue.

It is incumbent upon an institution like ours, with its band of researchers and students, to foreground the issue of environmental awareness. This can be approached from various angles. The promotion of civic awareness that underpins our Service Learning (SL) approach can be an important facet in the curriculum where environmental sustainability is instilled in the minds of young citizens. Through SL our students and staff, as they pursue their aca-



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ademic work, are exposed to communities living under different conditions. Whatever circumstances – be they economically depressed living areas, affluent residences, farming communities - there must be sensitivity in the way the people interact with the environment.

In other areas of learning like engineering, it should not be just about competences to understand the principles of engineering, or, at more advanced levels of creating engineering innovations: researchers should consider the medium and long term impact of their work on the environment.

Related activities include the search for alternate energy resources a field of research to which CPUT has made a special contribution through its networking with local and international experts by holding workshops and conferences and also running short courses.

Activism for the promotion of environmental sustainability

Our era is characterized by a number of developments that are life-threatening and those that have the capacity to sustain life. Advances in manufacturing processes with its emissions into the atmosphere and the earth's waters constitute a real threat. However, the emergence of Greenpeace Movements the world over, are a positive development that calls on humanity to begin to take the survival of the planet in their hands.

Activism and support of mass movements is an experience of some South Africans. Perhaps the time has come to utilize such experiences to galvanise communities around a cause, to create a groundswell of community awareness on environmental sustainability. Historically university communities have been good at mobilizing civic society, nothing stops CPUT from taking on that role for a good cause.

Possible activities that the CPUT community can embark upon

The respondent went on to propose a number of activities

that the CPUT community could embark upon. On this matter, a longer list of suggestions could easily be generated by engaging staff and students in workshops or planning meetings.

Recycling

This approach is well established in a number of countries, and involves re-using material that would otherwise have been thrown away as waste. This entails collecting the material and forwarding it to facilities for re-use. An institution of higher learning uses a lot of paper in the execution of its tasks. CPUT has for a long time had initiatives to collect paper for recycling. Ways of improving and strengthening moves to recycle and save paper should be explored by all.

Saving energy

The outages our country faced two years ago were a reminder of the urgency we all have to take in conserving energy both at an institutional and individual level. Besides on-going research on producing gadgets that can help in reducing power consumption, a cultivation of good habits can be instilled in the CPUT community. Such habits could include switching currency off when not in use; being conscious about wastage of water that takes place through licking taps; taking extra care about saving paper by, for example, doing drafts on paper that has already been used. More ideas can always be generated through discussions.

Conclusion

There is an inter-dependence of the various facets of sustainability. An effective search for financial viability and ways of curbing wastage can be attained through activities to promote environmental sustainability, like recycling and saving energy. An institution-wide effort to promote sustainability in its broadest sense can only benefit CPUT in the medium and long term.

'Have your say'...

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