

AN important event took place in Paris, France last week in support of sustainable development, in general, and climate change action, in particular.

The latter marked the XXI Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) hosted by the French government. Themed From Rio to Paris: Higher Education for Climate Change Action, a network of United Nations entities, including United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations University was involved in the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) in the lead-up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, popularly called Rio+20. The aim is to provide higher education institutions with a unique interface between education, science and policy-making. With the involvement of some 300 universities around the world, it accounted for more



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than one-third of voluntary commitments that came out of Rio+20.

Since its inception, HESI has facilitated commitments on behalf of 272 organisations from 47 countries to take an active role in building a more sustainable society, representing 36 per cent of commitments made during the Rio+20 Conference. According to a report made as a background for the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in November 2014, a promising 73 per cent

of all pledging institutions were found to have made at least partial progress on their commitments, either directly or

development. A Sustainability Literacy Test was also initiated in an effort to set and track the agenda beyond 2014.

With such a rich experience and enormous effort expended over more than a decade, the HESI event held in Paris was poised to provide invaluable academic facilitation, "best practices" and scientific inputs to COP21, especially in the attempt to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate change, and also other related initiatives that are aligned to GAP. After all, the HESI network is committed to teach sustainable development across all disciplines of study; encourage research and dissemination of sustainable development knowledge; green campuses and support

indirectly. This provides an "optimistic" outlook that the majority of the institutions involved are, in some shape or form, moving sustainable development forward, albeit at varying levels of progress. Notwithstanding this, there are noteworthy patterns in the types of outcomes and implementation methodologies used to achieve these outcomes, especially related to education, research, operations and outreach programmes.

In short, the trend is encouraging, particularly for those "new" to the field of sustainability education. For these institutions, Rio+20 provided a much needed platform to join the movement, notably by catalysing or reinforcing participation in international sustainability networks from which they could learn and grow. This was further substantiated at the International Conference on Higher Education for Sustainable Development: Higher Education Beyond 2014

for local sustainability efforts; and engage and share information with international networks.

Towards this end, the HESI and Climate Change Action report and an Open Letter from a global alliance of the world's university and college sustainability networks were presented to Paris COP21 secretary-general Pierre Henri Guignard as a mark of global commitment in recognition of article VI of UNFCCC which stimulates the promotion of education, training and public awareness on climate change. Indeed, the 2014 UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development demanded higher education institutions to make more profound contributions to

held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan on Nov 9, 2014 to celebrate achievements and review initiatives that were developed throughout the United Nations Decades of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). It was further enhanced by the contributions made by the Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development which met a week earlier in Okayama.

The five priority actions that were focused on include advancing policy; transforming learning and training environments, namely, the whole-institution approach; building capacities of educators and trainers; empowering and mobilising youth; and accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level. They are well in line with the two-pronged Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development

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achieving sustainable development through transformative changes in their vision, leadership, knowledge structure and engagement, while acknowledging the challenges face in upscaling and mainstreaming of new and innovative practices in learning and knowledge development, as well as creating a conducive environment for facilitating the transformative processes. Malaysian institutions must not squander such transformative global opportunities while soaring upwards.

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post-2014 aimed at reorienting education and learning so that everyone has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills, values and attitudes — and make a difference — and strengthening education and learning in all agendas, programmes and activities to promote sustainable development.

Other major documents that outlined higher education commitments include: the Rio+20 People's Sustainability Treaty on Higher Education, the International Association of Universities Statement on Higher Education for Sustainable Development and the Nagoya Declaration on Higher Education for Sustainable De-