



## Developing Capacity in Female Academics teaching Environmental Health in Southern and East Africa

Ten female academics from higher education institutions offering environmental health across Southern and East Africa recently participated in the 2010 HERS-SA Academy in Cape Town during September 2010. The members of the group were supported through the Africa Academy for Environmental Health grant for Developing Gender Equity in Higher Education Institutions offering Environmental Health Project funded by the Association of African Universities MRCI grant.



The purpose of the grant is to empower women in the environmental health profession by giving them greater self-confidence, wider networks, and a greater ability to use information and resources to allow effective participation in the higher education forum. This is particularly pertinent in environmental health as it remains a male dominated profession despite the fact that many of the pertinent issues in environmental health predominantly affect the female gender.

The ten participants were from 8 countries and were: Dr Tracy Morse (project coordinator) and Christabel Kambala, University of Malawi; Dr Margaret Keraka (Project co-coordinator), Kenyatta University, Kenya; Dr Vera Ngowi, Muhimbili University, Tanzania; Margaret Macherera and Annah Anusa, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe; Patience Tirelo, University of Botswana; Thabsile Nkambule, University of Swaziland; Ruth Mubeezi, Makerere University, Uganda, and Ingrid Mokgobu, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa.



They joined eighty three women from thirty universities situated in Africa, the United States and Mauritius who spent a week at the University of Cape Town Graduate

School of Business in focusing on key aspects of higher education. The annual HERS-SA Academy brings together women in middle management or senior positions with leadership experience and those with leadership potential to participate in a dynamic, week-long professional development programme. “The HERS-SA



Academy aims to provide women with knowledge and networks to encourage them to aspire to and apply for the most senior positions in higher education institutions” said Dr. Sabie Surtee, Director of HERS-SA. “Currently women are under-represented in positions at leadership levels. HERS-SA is committed to seeking gender equity across all occupational levels within higher education institutions as this is

where our leaders of tomorrow are being educated.”

Morning plenary sessions provided a big-picture understanding of the higher education environment and the academic and administrative challenges facing universities. During the afternoon delegates were able to choose from a wide selection of workshops focused on individual career development. Members of the AAEH group facilitated two workshops during the Academy addressing the Interface between Environmental Health and Higher Education, and Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Institutions of Learning. These were well received by both EH and non EH academics.

In addition to the formal sessions, informal networking enabled delegates to interact with and learn from, colleagues from 16 South African universities, 12 universities from other parts of Africa and from one institution in the USA and Mauritius respectively. Discussions were lively and stimulating.

Christabel Kambala from the University of Malawi said “*I found it a worthwhile experience with rich and refreshing information*”.

The team who attended the Academy has a programme of activities for the coming 12 months to build upon the personal development and concepts from the HERS-SA Academy. These include:

- The distribution, analysis and reporting of a questionnaire addressing gender based issues in environmental health in higher education.
- The development and facilitation of regional workshops for female academics teaching in environmental health programmes to address areas such as research development, teaching and learning techniques and gender mainstreaming.
- Development of regional electronic forums to facilitate mentoring, research collaboration and open discussion on issues pertaining to environmental health.