

## The role of business schools in advancing sustainable development objectives:

### Commitment and diversity in a School of Management

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A School of Management must address a broader range of issues than a business school; the more so if it is based in an emerging economy, such as Colombia. From its founding in 1972, University of los Andes School of Management (UASM) has committed to academic excellence in management education.

A broad perspective is a tradition at los Andes, since 1948 the first university in Colombia to require two years of liberal arts for all undergraduates pursuing a professional degree. The complex cultural, economic and political context of our society has driven UASM to broaden the MBA content. We address issues concerned with civic, social and environmental responsibility in order to fulfil our mission to educate leaders capable of delivering value to businesses, public agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

Following are UASM milestones in broadening our commitment to sustainable development since the start of the twenty-first century:

- 2001: UASM became a founding member of SEKN - The Social Enterprise Knowledge Network, led by the Harvard Business School, “to advance the frontiers of knowledge and practice in social enterprise.”
- 2007: UASM launched a Ph.D. programme for the express purpose of training faculty for other management schools in Latin America.
- 2007: UASM adopted the six Principles for Responsible Management Education - PRME.
- 2008: UASM launched a Master’s in Environmental Management, with support from the Moore Foundation; and soon established a joint degree program with Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.
- 2009: UASM became a member of the **Global Business School Network**, aiming to build management education capacity in the developing world.
- 2011: UASM was invited by Columbia University Earth Institute, in New York, to become one of 23 schools worldwide to offer the Master’s in Development Practice (MDP).
- 2012 UASM launched its MDP programme, thanks to support from the MacArthur Foundation.

In 2011, the School’s mission statement was revisited. An assembly of the UASM faculty forthrightly committed themselves to “the innovative and sustainable development of organizations.” This explicit declaration was in keeping with what differentiates UASM from other business schools. The new mission reiterated was already under way.

Beyond being part of international networks and initiatives such as those described, the School plays a lead role in preparing change agents for the Latin American region, influencing public policy in Colombia, organizing field projects in poor communities, and aligning all its academic and Executive Education programmes to ensure that the sustainable development discourse goes beyond words, and is instilled in the behaviours of our students.

Key to the School’s commitment to sustainability is a diverse, interdisciplinary and increasingly international faculty: Biologists, Engineers, Historians, Psychologists, Economists, Philosophers and Sociologists, and a distinguished core of business leaders in residence, who challenge and contribute to build the School’s broad perspective.

In sum, at los Andes we challenge Kenneth Amaeshi’s proposition, published in *The Guardian* earlier this year, entitled: “Business schools: ‘the silent but fatal barrier to the sustainability agenda’”. UASM has neither been silent nor a barrier to an agenda that is opening new opportunities to businesses, indeed to every organization. We cordially invite Professor Amaeshi, who is visiting fellow at Cranfield School of Management and director of the Sustainable Business Initiative, to visit Colombia and suggest feasible ways whereby our School’s research and education efforts can make an even greater impact on sustainable development.