



HESI **HIGHER EDUCATION** **SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE**

2017 Summary Report

“Higher education institutions - which act as hubs for innovation and critical thinking, nurturing each generation of leaders, policy makers, entrepreneurs, scientists, researchers, and educators - have a crucial role to play in raising awareness and fostering better understanding about the SDGs and their interconnectedness; all key elements of making progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda.” -Ambassador Peter Thomson

BACKGROUND

Implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda requires the action of governments, stakeholders, and citizens alike. The **Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI)** was developed in the run-up to the Rio+20 Conference, as a way for higher education institutions (HEIs) to show their commitment towards comprehensively integrating sustainable development practices into their core mission. After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in September 2015, HESI has served as a space for HEIs to learn and share ways that academia is supporting implementation of the SDGs.

In 2017, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Division for Sustainable Development (UNDESA-DSD), and the UN Global Compact’s Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative co-chaired HESI, in partnership with five other UN entities:

- UNESCO
- United Nations Environment
- United Nations University (UNU)
- UN-Habitat
- UNCTAD

HESI provides higher education institutions with a unique interface between higher education, science, and policy making, and an opportunity to share their innovative work towards implementation of the SDGs on a global platform with the support of several prominent UN agencies. **It also provides one of the most comprehensive and concrete opportunities to connect young people to the 2030 Agenda, ensuring that the future generation has the knowledge and capacity to achieve the SDGs.** Over 300 higher education institutions around the world have made commitments and participated in the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative.

Higher education institutions part of HESI have committed to:

- Teach sustainable development across all disciplines of study,
- Encourage research and dissemination of sustainable development knowledge,
- Green campuses and support local sustainability efforts, and
- Engage and share information with international networks.

2017 SUMMARY

2017 saw a notable increase in higher education institutions' interest in engaging with and contributing to implementation of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda. A high-profile event was held during the 2017 High-Level Political Forum, "Higher Education Institutions – Key Drivers of the Sustainable Development Goals", which helped to catalyze increased awareness and interest from HEIs. To better understand the interests, needs, and contributions of higher education institutions in the implementation of the SDGs, DESA-DSD launched an online survey in October 2017. 36 institutions representing North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia completed the survey. HESI partners also carried-out a broad portfolio of work to support higher education institutions' contributions to achieving the 2030 Agenda, described in more detail below.

SURVEY RESULTS

The following are the list of activities which survey participants would find most useful to support their work on the SDGs (in order of popularity):

- **a platform of best practices of higher education institutions' work on the SDGs** (64% of participants would find this useful)
- **an SDG fellowship program** (56%)
- **opportunities to highlight SDG programs on a global stage (including through UN events)** (53%)
- **curricula and other resources to teach the SDGs** (50%)
- **opportunities for students/faculty to connect with peers on other campuses** (50%)

Survey participants listed a number of ongoing SDG initiatives, such as integrating the SDGs into coursework, expertise and R&D on specific SDGs, encouraging SDG research, and working with local stakeholders to support the implementation of the SDGs in their communities. Key challenges included receiving support from senior leadership, raising awareness of the SDGs among students and faculty, and developing strategies to integrate the SDGs into curriculum in a cross-cutting and holistic manner.

HLPF EVENT: “HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS – KEY DRIVERS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS”

On 19 July 2017, on the occasion of the 2017 session of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development - United Nations’ central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - and in conjunction with the 2017 Global Forum for Responsible Management Education, the partners of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) organized an event to showcase how higher education institutions are integrating the SDGs into sustainability strategies in the form of research, teaching, pedagogy, and campus practices, and to position Higher Education Institutions as key drivers for achieving the SDGs. Over 500 participants from governments, the United Nations (UN) system, academia, and Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders attend the two-hour event, which presented concrete case studies from a wide range of higher education institutions and initiatives on how they are contributing to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

HEI actions highlighted at the event:

Monash Business School (Australia)

The School is currently working on a new module to integrate the SDGs into its school curricula across all disciplines. Monash University has also launched the Monash Sustainable Development Institute which focuses on large-scale, interdisciplinary projects that address global issues aligned with the SDGs.

ESPAE-ESPOL (Ecuador)

ESPAE-ESPOL has developed a partnership with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development to integrate environmental issues into its university strategies. At this year’s Conference, five companies will present their experiences and progress in aligning their strategies with the SDGs through use of the SDG Compass.

Business School Lausanne (Switzerland)

The Business School Lausanne supports and is driving forward the GAPFRAME - a national and global framework for business and other key stakeholders to work towards a better world in concrete and measurable ways. Its easy-to-use data visualization tool, designed to give practical support to everyone working towards a sustainable and safe future, translates the SDGs into four sustainability dimensions: planet, society, economy, and governance. The GAPFRAME provides a concrete starting point for strategic discussions on sustainability, and is an effective decision-making tool to help business, governments and academia focus on activities that can produce the best outcomes in closing the gaps and reaching a safe space for all.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (United States)

MIT has an extensive portfolio of work on sustainability including innovative research, campus sustainability practices, and the development of a new generation of sustainability models that advance the mission of academic excellence, and putting higher education at the forefront of developing pioneering ideas for tackling today's global challenges. The MIT Office of Sustainability (MITOS), whose mission is to transform MIT into a powerful model that generates new and proven ways of responding to unprecedented challenges, organizes its work into four areas of responsibility 1) Sustainable Campus Systems: Reimagining systems on campus to advance the well-being and resilience of people and the environment 2) Campus as an Urban Living Laboratory: Utilizing the campus and its urban surroundings as a test-bed for innovation and knowledge generation through research and education 3) Collaborative Partnerships: Harnessing the collective intelligence of networks and communities to solve shared problems, and 4) Leadership and Capacity Building: Engaging and empowering faculty, students, and staff in shaping, applying, and continuously improving the sustainability of MIT and beyond

Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden)

Chalmers emphasized the importance of trans-disciplinary work with stakeholders outside universities, to not only search for answers together, but also define questions together. In this regard, organizational structure can be critical, and moving away from traditional line organizational structures to challenge driven co-creation with faculty, departments and divisions at the core could generate great impact. They believe in the importance of creating an enabling environment for students to be a part of sustainability transitions, as students often challenge underlying assumptions, are inherently curious, eager for change, and seldom represent anyone but themselves. As an example, the ChallengeLab.org of Chalmers University of Technology provides a broad platform for students to engage and take on the planet's biggest challenges in collaboration with industry, governments and academia.

Stanford University (United States)

Sustainable Stanford is a university-wide effort to reduce Stanford's environmental impact, preserve resources, and show sustainability in action, and the Sustainable Urban Systems (SUS) initiative – an initiative which applies multiple engineering knowledge fields in an integrated approach to shape the future of cities. For the past year, SUS has been working with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and a variety of local stakeholders in the California Bay Area to test SDG localization strategies, collecting relevant actionable data at the city level to achieve the SDGs. Collected data will be made publicly available online, and communicated in a way that motivates understanding, critical analysis and effective decision-making.

AIESEC (Global Initiative)

AIESEC's Youth 4 Global Goals initiative activates the leadership potential of young people by engaging them in purposeful and cross-cultural projects around the globe designed to impact the SDGs. The initiative has engaged more than 55,000 students in various activities and reached over 12,000,000 people globally. AIESEC has also launched the SDG Curriculum, which is designed by, and targeted to, young people between the ages of 15 and 25.

Key take-aways from the event

Panelists stressed that higher education institutions can have a great impact in supporting implementation of the SDGs by being conveners for multi-stakeholder engagement, addressing the data gap, informing policy makers through academic research, and developing sustainable solutions in broad collaboration with society. It was also noted that there is often too much focus on institutional structures and hierarchies within universities, which often impede interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research and studies. A self-organizational approach to management could therefore have a considerable impact on spurring innovation and actionable research. Focus should be placed on supporting students, rather than teaching them, and providing space for students to be a part of management and informal institutional governance. By setting up the right partnerships, students can be directly involved in informing policy making, and provide a gateway for students to be engaged in making the public sector more effective.

For more information, please see the full event summary [here](#).

HESI PARTNER UPDATES

PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education

The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative is the largest organised relationship between the United Nations and higher education institutions for business and management education. The global network reaches nearly 700 schools across 86 countries. And with support from key partners and the PRME Steering Committee, the values of sustainability and responsibility that underscore PRME's mission are now exposed to millions of students worldwide.

2017 was the 10th Anniversary of PRME, and has been one of the most impactful years yet, highlights from the year include:

- The 2017 Global Forum for Responsible Management Education, held on 17-19 July at Fordham University in New York, gathered over 300 deans, faculty, thought leaders, business executives, students, and UN officials to mark 10 Years of PRME;
- 12 PRME Regional Meetings showcased the power of local collaboration and partnership, rooting the Six Principles in diverse regional contexts;
- PRME Chapter France & Benelux was launched, bringing the total number of Regional Chapters to 15;

- The PRME SDG Student Engagement Platform, particularly the AIM2Flourish, WikiRate, and Breakthrough Innovation Challenge platforms, engaged more students around values of sustainability and ethics than ever before;
- The Impact Report was launched, showcasing how the PRME initiative is helping to shape a more sustainable business education landscape globally;
- The PRME Champions concluded the 2016-17 cycle, providing leadership to the PRME community on how to engage with the Six Principles and the SDGs;
- PRME Working Groups continued to produce cutting-edge research and dialogue around key issue areas of importance to business and management education;
- Over 150 Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports were submitted with a wide variety of examples showing leadership and innovation.

For more information, Info@unprme.org

UN Environment

Highlights from 2017:

- UNESCO Week for Peace and Sustainable Development, Ottawa, March 2017: UN Environment participated in this meeting, which also served as a Review Forum for the Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). At the meeting, UN Environment organized a workshop on Sustainability Indicators for Universities, based on work UN Environment has been in doing in Latin America through its Regional Office in Panama, and in collaboration with RISU, the Red de Indicadores de Sustentabilidad en las Universidades. Also, UN Environment participated in a panel on the role of Indigenous People in ESD.
- Regional Technical Workshop on Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education, Nairobi, July 2017: UN Environment was invited to participate in this workshop, and to Chair a thematic panel on Education for Sustainable Development and the Global Action Programme (GAP). The workshop, organized by UNESCO within the framework of the 2030 Education Agenda, brought together technical focal points from the 13 countries under the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, as well as key experts and partners.
- At the 2017 HESI event during the HLPF, UN Environment presented the 2016 UN Environment Assembly Resolution 2/3 on Environmental Education; as well as its flagship initiative on higher education, the Global Universities Partnership on Environment for Sustainability (GUPES), which aims at promoting the integration of environmental and sustainability concerns into teaching, research, community engagement, greening of university infrastructure, facilities, and operations, as well as enhancing student engagement and participation in sustainability activities through a network of over 800 partner universities worldwide.

- 9th World Environmental Education Congress (WEEC), Vancouver, September 2017: The World Environmental Education Congress is one of the largest gatherings of environmental educators and policy makers worldwide. Held on a biennial basis, the main theme for this years' congress was Cultureenvironment: Weaving new connections. Mr Elliott C. Harris, Assistant Secretary General and Head of UN Environment's New York Office participated in the Opening Plenary. Also, UN Environment organized 2 workshops, 1. Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles in Higher Education; and 2. Supporting Policy through Education - No More Plastic Bags in Kenya, in collaboration with the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) Kenya.
- Global Action Programme on ESD. Throughout 2017 UN Environment has continued to participate in the different calls, webinars and reports of the different GAP Partner Networks it is involved in. In particular, Partner Network 2, Transforming Learning and Training Environments through GUPES; and Partner Network 5, Accelerating Sustainable Solutions.
- Environmental Education Resolution. Throughout 2017 UN Environment has continued to work with Member States on the implementation of Resolution 2/3 on Environmental Education -approved by Member States at the 2016 UN Environment Assembly- within the context of Global Action Programme on ESD.

UNESCO

The UNESCO Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), was launched in 2014 in the follow-up of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (2005-2014), seeking to generate and scale-up Education for Sustainable Development and accelerate progress towards sustainable development. Universities and higher education institutions (HEI) have a key role to play in all 5 GAP Priority Action Areas. First, universities and higher education networks can contribute to needs analysis and diagnosis of sustainability challenges to inform policy. They can conduct research and provide advice and guidance on strengthening national education systems as well as aspects of capacity building for sustainable development across different sectors. Second, many higher education institutions are pioneers in adopting a whole-institution approach and are leading this movement globally. Third, they are the key institutions that train teachers as well as decision makers. Fourth, colleges, universities and higher education institutions are where many youth leaders are engaging in action as students. Finally, higher education institutions can provide expertise and support to local ESD initiatives. They can combine the knowledge and experience at the local level with information housed at higher levels.

A number of higher education institutions, including UNESCO Chairs, are GAP Key Partners and UNESCO works with them to expand and enhance integration of education, learning and collaboration for sustainable development. This includes for instance working with the IAU, networks like GUPES, a number of teacher training colleges, as well as Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCEs) coordinated by UNU. Those HEIs who are GAP Key Partners were

solicited to provide data to prepare the 2017 GAP Mid-term implementation report, which was discussed at the 2017 GAP Review Forum in Ottawa (Canada); were invited to contribute and participate in different global events such as the June 2017 UN Education High Level Meeting, as well as in various side-events held during the Climate Change COP 23 Education Day; were asked to provide comments on various draft documents and publications.

To advocate ESD as an instrument to achieve progress across all SDGs and ensure the integration of all SDGs into teaching and learning, UNESCO has published the Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives guidance framework for education policy-makers, curriculum developers and educators. Launched during the UNESCO Week for Peace and Sustainable Development in Ottawa, Canada (March 2017), it is available in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Portuguese. As the first UNESCO pedagogical guidance on addressing the SDGs through ESD, it contains clear learning objectives as well as suggestions for learning activities for each of the 17 SDGs, and sets the agenda for ESD teaching at all levels of education in the coming years.

An ESD volume of the Education on the Move series will be published in early 2018 addressing recent issues and topics on ESD, especially related to the SDGs and the five GAP Key Priority Action Areas, and sets the way forward for future discussions on ESD.

UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat has established a partnership with universities worldwide called the UN-Habitat Universities Partners Initiative – [UN-Habitat UNI](#).

At the end of 2017, UNI has gathered over 210 universities members and nearly 1,500 individual members (scholars, researchers, university's academic staff). UNI supports the establishment of Hubs which are consortia of universities that agree to develop joint projects in education, research, and extension projects through which universities engage with communities and cities around a common thematic focus. UN-Habitat facilitates knowledge exchange and promotes the development of activities that bring global urbanization issues, the New Urban Agenda, and SDG11 to the forefront of education. The goal is to create the conditions for the formation of a new generation of urban managers and planners that can have the skills and knowledge to address the challenges of urbanization. In addition, UNI has established a portal for this communication <www.uni.unhabitat.org> which is continuously being improved and used by members of UNI. One of the knowledge products of this initiative is the [Global Urban Lectures Series](#). This series currently includes 56 lectures on critical issues related to sustainable urbanization delivered by partners as well as global experts and UN-Habitat staff. The series has become UN-Habitat's most viewed video resource and was selected as the best MOOC on cities. The Global Urban Lecture Series has reached more than 126,000 viewers from 65 different countries.

UNCTAD

UNCTAD recently launched the [Business Schools for Impact](#) initiative to address a key component to unlocking finance for development and aligning corporate strategies. The initiative aims to equip future business leaders with the necessary skills to impact the SDGs.

Updates from other HESI Initiatives:

SULITEST

Since 2014, the [Sulitest](#) (sustainability literacy test) has been used as a flagship initiative of HESI. By assessing global awareness on Sustainable development, Sulitest provides useful information on trends and knowledge gaps related to the SDGs. To date, 79,000 students from 700 universities have taken the Sulitest. Results of the Sulitest were presented at the 2017 HLPF. The module on the SDGs Framework shows that candidates are on average more aware of specific SDGs than of the 2030 Agenda itself and related UN processes.

The SDG Accord

[The SDG Accord](#) was launched in 2017, “to inspire, celebrate and advance the critical role that education has in delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the value it brings to governments, business and wider society.” In addition, it serves as a commitment learning institutions are making to one another to do more to deliver the goals, to annually report on each signatory's progress, and to do so in ways which share the learning with others both nationally and internationally. The SDG Accord will collect data from HEIs regarding their work towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda, to be presented annually at the High-Level Political Forum.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS FROM 2017

Awareness from HEIs regarding their role in implementation of the SDGs is growing at a rapid rate. HEIs are seeking support from HESI to better align their research, curricula, and campus practices with the Sustainable Development Goals. While some institutions are requesting resources on how to carry-out this important work, others have taken a leading role in integrating the SDGs into their institutions. **Therefore, it is an opportune moment to share the numerous innovative and concrete practices of implementation of the 2030 Agenda from HEIs around the world, highlighting and acknowledging their important achievements, while providing specific examples of actions for Member States and other HEIs who are starting to incorporate SDG strategies at their institutions.** The need for HESI, and its work in streamlining and coordinating the UN system's support of higher education institutions' work towards the 2030 Agenda continues to grow, as the number of projects and initiatives in this area continue to expand responding to increasing demand for resources and capacity-building from HEIs.

NEXT STEPS FOR 2018

HESI will build off the strong momentum created in 2017, through a number of core activities, including:

- The development of an online platform of best practices/partnerships from HESI members
- A call for contributions to a “HESI SDG Actions” briefing outlining best practices from higher education institutions on work towards the goals under in-depth review at the 2018 High-Level Political Forum: 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 17, to be shared widely in the auspices of the HLPF; in addition to using the HESI network to substantively contribute to the thematic review of the SDGs under in-depth discussion
- A dedicated HESI event on 11 July during the 2018 High-Level Political Forum
- Workshops and lectures on higher education institutions’ work towards the SDGs in partnership with UNITAR through the Learning Center during the 2018 HLPF
- Building a library of resources and best practices on integrating the SDGs into HEIs’ curriculum
- Supporting Sulitest in launching and disseminating learning modules for each of the 17 SDGs
- Supporting the SDG Accord and its contributions to the 2018 HLPF
- Continuing to provide and expand opportunities for connections and interactions among HESI members
- Sharing and coordinating the work of HESI partners in supporting HEIs’ contributions towards the 2030 Agenda
- Assessing the feasibility of developing an SDG Fellowship Program among HESI institutions
