

POLICYBRIEF



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Developing Leaders for Sustainable Development: Networking in Higher Education

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Transforming universities to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires policies that support new methods of learning, teaching, research, governance, and outreach. For universities to produce a new generation of innovative and sustainability-oriented leaders, they need to join hands with like-minded partners.

Universities must integrate topics of sustainable development in their teaching and learning curricula.

To transform their education system, universities should initiate or join diverse stakeholder networks, to exchange ideas and share good practice. Innovative approaches that transform their operations and curricula can then be piloted and then up-scaled.

To gain full benefit from these networks, universities must commit the entire faculty, staff and management, institutionalizing this in all departments and at all operational levels.

Leadership for Sustainable Development

Creating sustainable societies requires leadership familiar with sustainable development topics. Current education systems lack the structure to bring up leaders with the necessary competencies to tackle sustainability challenges. Higher education needs reforming to integrate the vision of sustainability in curricula. Networking is a strategic tool to generate that transformation.

Transformative leadership at all levels of governance is required to advance the sustainability agenda. Our societies need leaders with a vision, who will translate a global agenda into national and local policies, challenge the status quo, and foster sustainable ways of living. They must also be cultural-sensitive and respectful of indigenous knowledge. This requires an educational system that develops the right capacities, motivates people to relate personal and organizational goals to community needs, and fosters good governance.

There is an increasing urgency to reform basic and higher education: Remodeling education programmes and expanding the capacity of formal and non-formal systems to increase public awareness on sustainability. Topics relevant to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs must be integrated into teaching and learning. They should be designed in a participatory, learner-centered way. Education is cross-cutting and plays a role in the realization of different SDGs. SDG 4 aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning for all. Target 4.7 envisions that all learners have the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development by 2030.

Networking: A Strategy to Foster Sustainability-Minded Leadership

Acquisition, transfer and application of knowledge happen in a wider context, involving people from different sectors. Networking strengthens such frameworks, linking science, policy and society.

When international networking bridges education and development, global agendas can be tailored and translated into local actions. In higher education, networking is an effective strategy to promote innovation and research collaborations, facilitating cross-cultural and multidisciplinary dialogue.

The United Nations University – Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU- IAS) flagship project, ProSPER.Net -

Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network - is an alliance of leading universities in Asia-Pacific.

ProSPER.Net’s commitment to integrate sustainable development into postgraduate curricula is a good example of how a network can strengthen the role of universities in sustainable development. ProSPER.Net has been an inspiration for change and transformed institutional policy. Scholars and students have had to rethink the role of higher education and its potential impact on society through different educational processes, for example through research projects.

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References

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