Higher Education Sustainability Initiative Global Event

11 July 2018, UNHQ, New York

<u>**Summary report**</u>

Background

The Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), a partnership between United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNESCO, United Nations Environment, UN Global Compact's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative, United Nations University (UNU), UN-HABITAT, UNCTAD, and UNITAR), was created in 2012 in the run-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). With commitments from over 300 universities from around the world, HESI accounted for more than one-third of all the voluntary commitments that were launched at Rio+20. Through its strong association with the United Nations, HESI provides higher education institutions with a unique interface between higher education, science, and policy making.

On the occasion of the 2018 session of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) – the United Nations' central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - the partners of HESI organized an event for higher education institutions to showcase how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the SDGs, is being integrated into sustainability strategies, research, teaching, pedagogy, and campus practices, and to position higher education institutions as key drivers for achieving the SDGs.

The full day event included two training and learning workshops organized in collaboration with a range of higher education institutions, as well a plenary session with a special presentation on how higher education institutions can engage with UN, and two interactive panel discussions. A special focus throughout the day was on the theme of 2018 HLPF - transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.

Participants of the HESI event included government officials, representatives of academia, higher educations and United Nations, as well major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Presentations, webcast of the proceedings, concept note and full programme can be found on the event website, at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018/HigherEducation

Learning and training workshops

Leveraging innovative partnerships with higher education institutions towards sustainable and resilient societies

Ms. Cristina Contreras, Research Associate at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University / Member of the Zofnass Program for Sustainable Infrastructure

Ms. Contreras introduced her research program, which focuses on developing tools and methods to help quantify sustainability in infrastructure projects as well as disseminate knowledge. Acknowledging that infrastructure is at the core of promoting growth and development, as well as building more resilient societies, she noted that not all the infrastructure development is good, but just the ones that are able to ensure a sustainable future.

She viewed the infrastructure as the key enabler on the delivery of the SDGs, which have motivated the research that the Zofnass Program for Sustainable Infrastructure has developed during the last years. She explained that in the beginning, our work focused on understanding the sustainability element on a project by project basis and now based on better understanding of how to approach sustainability at the project level, the project has been scaled up to understand how a sustainable city works. The research project has identified seven different infrastructure types (landscape, transportation, water, energy, solid waste, information, and food) to identify the synergies among these services. She highlighted the diversity of the stakeholders for the project with partners including NGO´s like The Nature Conservancy, Public agencies like LA Metro or private industry such as engineering and construction companies among others. She highlighted the collaboration with Multilateral Development Banks, which have been pushing the agenda on sustainable infrastructure for the last years. In conclusion, she made an open call to different stakeholders in order to look to higher level education as a partner in order to align our efforts and make sure that we go in the same direction.

Ms. Victoria W. Thoresen, Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL)

Ms. Thoresen informed how the PERL, the international partnership network of researchers and educators representing over 140 institutions, has been influencing lifestyle choices of people by focusing on educating for sustainable consumption; promoting sustainable lifestyles; creating innovative learning methodologies; undertaking research and building capacity; and encouraging social innovation, among others. She emphasized that the transition to sustainability is a "process" that requires constant renewal of awareness and understanding of human nature and sustainable culture.

Mr. Jakob Grandin, University of Bergen, Centre for Climate and Energy Transformation

Mr. Grandin highlighted the importance of accelerating sustainability actions through transformative collaboration amongst researchers, students and society. More specifically, he underlined the need for enhancing strategic partnerships between: higher education institutions; researchers and policy- makers towards actionable knowledge[1]; and students and researchers for reframing debates in field courses and the Collaboratory as well as promoting active and collaborative learning. He advocated for the old concept of universities, which are in active service within community they are based in and shared his observation that partnerships seemed most effective when people acknowledge and experience the concrete benefits of the collaborative efforts

Mr. David Howard, University of Oxford

Based on his research experience with cross-sectoral, multi-practice engagement, Mr. Howard shared his views on the enabling factors for successful partnerships: i) thinking small works the best while overambition can sabotage the result-based partnerships; ii) concentrating on something achievable (things that can be done rather than said); (iii) reviewing the impacts of partnerships for accountability and transparency; iv) cultivating strong interpersonal relationships; v) clearly defining expectations, responsibilities and approaches; vi) promoting collaboration with students and partners; and vii) ensuring continuity. Additional comment was made from the floor to point out the importance of respect, trust and humility for building effective partnerships.

Ms. Patrícia Iglecias, Head of Environmental Affairs, University of Sao Paulo

Introducing the UN Global Compact Cities Programme in Brazil, Ms. Iglecias shared the demand-driven approach and experience of the academia, municipal governments, the private sector and the civil society organizations coming together with respective expertise to identify local problems, co-create local solutions, pull funding from multiple sources and take collective actions. She highlighted the need for engaging other public universities for better division of labor and also ensuring quality assurance through designing robust indicators and reviewing whether SDGs are adequately mainstreamed in the work of the given municipality.

Additionally, the meeting participants re-iterated the importance of "co-learning" and pointed out the pressing need for: putting in place the right compliance framework and mechanism to address the conflict of interest in partnerships amongst governments and academic institutions; using universities' convening power to scale up and expedite the localization of SDGs implementation; taking more systemic approach for ultimate behavioral

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[1] Hordaklim project

changes; and promoting more accessible and inclusive learning for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups including the elderly.

Student engagement towards realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Ms. Katarina Popovic, Secretary General, International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), Professor for Adult Education at the University of Belgrade

Stressing the importance of global adult education and the true lifelong learning, Ms. Popovic. introduced the annual partnership platforms organized by ICAE and other partners in different continents focusing on the SDGs including the goals in focus each year. She underlined the need for enhanced capacity building for leaders and scholars and consistent networking efforts.

Mr. Iain Patton, Chief Executive, Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges, The Global Alliance SDG Accord: Collaborations for change

Mr. Patton noted that a growing number of universities, professors and researchers are aware of unique opportunities the SDGs present. He mentioned many student unions do not know about the SDGs, but they care about the issues and want the topics to be reflected in their curriculums. He stressed the need to create new partnerships to share the new learning experience, arguing that there would be no systemic changes until we make one voice. His recommended the UN to celebrate more the power of learning, calling HESI as an integral part of this effort. He also encouraged the students to sign the Accord, start the conversation about SDGs and support the innovation and learning as a change agent for SDGs.

Mr. John Shiling, The Global University System (GUS)

Mr. Shiling discussed how he applied the iSDG System Dynamic Model with Global University System (GUS) including through: i) educating and training local people on SDGs, clean energy and iSDG model use; ii) setting up local Community and Country Advisory GUS Councils in each country; iii) engaging local universities, businesses, communities and governments to participate in SDG model building, simulating and job training courses on clean energy, role-play games and university pilot projects on clean energy, online courses and Carbon Challenge team competition cross universities and identifying local policy actions needed in addition to national and regional policies; iv) scaling up from countries to regions, and eventually worldwide (e-UN) by integrating country SDG models into regional and global models; and v) measuring impact on student, educators, entrepreneurs and policy-makers

Mr. Aurelien Decamps, Sustainability Literacy Test (SULITEST)

Mr. Decamps introduced about the Sulitest, which is an international movement contributing to the global agenda by developing online, easy to use and adaptable tools to improve

sustainability literacy. With over 90,000 people already having partaken the test, he considers it as a good tool for starting communications on SDGs; measuring results; and mapping out sustainability awareness. He noted that the tool is raising awareness amongst students, faculty and university staff members; helping to bring the concept of sustainability into the classroom; and building collaboration amongst students, faculty, researchers and businesses. He informs his plan to promote co-creation of student learning content on collaborative platforms; use the new SDGs Modules; and launch tools in research communities in different countries to fine-tune the tool towards more robust assessment.

The meeting participants discussed other issues including connecting students to broader realities of SDGs including through experiential, immersive learning. Some also pointed out that the real problem lies not in the lack of information or skills, but in the culture intolerant of co-existence.

Plenary session

Opening segment

The opening segment was moderated by **Ms. Lotta Tähtinen**, Chief of Outreach and Communications Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA, which in the outset thanked HESI partners for their active contribution in organizing this year's event (UNESCO, UNEP, UN Global Compact, UN University, UN-Habitat and UNITAR).

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, DESA, highlighted the great efforts that Higher Education Institutions were taking to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the collaboration of the United Nations with higher education institutions. Mr. Liu reminded that the HESI initiative provided a unique interface between higher education and global policy making around the SDGs, bringing higher education institutions together with key UN system entities to collaborate, share knowledge and expertise in tackling the implementation of the SDGs. Mr. Liu reminded the role of higher education institutions in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by inspiring and providing future generations of learners the skills, mindsets and attitudes to truly transform organizations and societies as well as by supporting innovative research and embodying sustainable campus practices. Finally, Mr. Liu reinforced the crucial role of higher education institutions in raising awareness and fostering better understanding about the SDGs and their interconnectedness.

Presentation

Mr. Jonas Haertle, Head, Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), UN Global Compact, shared a presentation on behalf of the HESI partners. Mr. Haertle reminded the HESI UN Partner Organizations, key milestones of HESI's work since its establishment in

2012 and mentioned examples of several important initiatives launched by HESI and its UN partners, including UNESCO, UNITAR, UN-Habitat, UN Global Compact (PRME), the SDG Accord and Sulitest. Mr. Haertle flagged his expectations that, in the years to come, more in terms of engagement of higher education institutions would be available for sharing at the HLPF. He encouraged all participants to engage with the HESI network.

Panel discussion 1 - Highlighting innovative collaborations between Higher Education Institutions and the United Nations

Ms. Lily Gray, *Liaison Officer, UNESCO Liaison Office in New York*, as the moderator and introducing the panel, informed that UNESCO was refining the programmatic approach of the organization with regards to education for sustainable development, focusing on translating the international agreements on sustainability to the work done on the ground. She recognized the value of partnering with HESI and the importance of promoting stronger partnerships between the United Nations and higher education institutions to prepare learners for sustainable development and the 21st century skills. Ms. Gray also reminded that Universities and Higher Education institutions are supporting with awareness raising on the sustainability agreements; providing advice on how to strengthen national education systems; training teachers and decision-makers and providing expertise and support to local SDG initiatives.

Ms. Cara Smyth, *Vice-President and Founding Director of the Fair Fashion Center, Glasgow Caledonian, New York College*, explained that the campus of Glasgow Caledonian in New York focuses on fashion and finance and is working on delivering the SDGs through the fashion industry. She reminded that fashion is considered the second highest pollution industry, being responsible for 20% of industrial water waste and for 10% of carbon emissions. At the same time, the industry has 75% women in its supply chain. The University has created the "Fair Fashion Center", currently working with 46 Fashion Industry CEOs which, accordingly to Ms. Smyth, is the only industry CEO-alliance group, engaging 253 brands, 300 billion US dollars in businesses and 12% of the global industry on sustainable fashion and in collaboratively delivering the SDGs.

Mr. Angel Cabrera, *President, George Mason University*, representing the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, reminded the long-term engagement of public universities in attracting students from abroad and shared his concerns that current public political messages of disengagement were already bringing negative consequences, including with the decrease in number of foreign students being attracted, registered for the first time in 10 years. Mr. Cabrera flagged the importance of promoting international mobility of students to address the interconnection and interdependence among countries, educate generations of people that are 'globally minded' and support in delivering on the SDGs. He informed that the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities is establishing

a declaration on global engagement, in partnership with the United Nations, reaffirming their commitment to the SDGs and global collaboration, including on research.

Mr. Bruce Stiftel, *Professor, Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning,* shared insights on the UN-Habitat University Network Initiative (Habitat UNI), which was launched in 2011 and currently has 90 universities and around 1500 individuals affiliated from around the world. Habitat UNI signature project is the 'thematic hubs', focused on different UN-Habitat initiative related subjects and led by one of the Partner Universities. Those hubs organize conferences, fund research projects and connect investigators across universities.

Mr. Stiftel informed about the Georgia Tech's decade-long "Quality Enhancement Programme" (QEP) which established to pursue a path of "serve, learn and sustain" (SLS Initiative), aiming at exposing all students at Georgia Tech to principles and practices of sustainability and of community engagement. Under the SLS Initiative, students are encouraged to take a series of foundation courses, a lecture series is organized related to sustainability and has also created a programme of fellows that come together on a sustainability theme every year. Finally, Mr. Stiftel mentioned the "Sustainable Cities Miner", initiated two years ago, which allow for more in-depth learning opportunities on sustainable related issues for students around the campus.

Dr. Amy R. Tuininga, from *Montclair State University,* highlighted the presence of students from the University's "Green Team Programme". Through this Initiative, interdisciplinary teams of five students partner with large corporations, non-profits and municipalities agents to address some of the issues of the SDGs. The Programme has mobilized students from 18 other universities in 2018. Dr. Tuininga invited participants of the HESI event to send students to join the programme, to offer to mentor some of the groups or, in the case of businesses or non-profit organizations, to apply to have a team of students to address the SDGs at their organizations.

Mr. Athanasios Giannakopoulos, *Dag Hammarskjöld Library*, reflected on how to manage the amount of research information produced by universities, collect and offer it to researchers and, moreover, how to make sure that this information actually reaches students and the broader public. Mr. Giannakopoulos informed that the UN HQ Library was reviewing its "UN depository library programme", which was born in 1946, connecting 360 libraries, from 135 countries, 65% of which in academic institutions.

Mr. Giannakopoulos informed that the UN HQ Library is transforming the "UN Depository Library Programme" into a collaboration forum to address a common responsibility to make the scholarly communication cycle sustainable. The objective is to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the SDGs, mobilizing the capacities of members of the depository programme, working with academic libraries to address systemic issues.

Mr. Orrin F. Summerell, presented the *United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) initiative,* which is housed at the UN Department of Public Information. The initiative was launched in

2010 and connects more than 1200 institutions around the world. Mr. Summerell highlighted the role of academic and higher education institutions as innovators. UNAI promotes 10 guiding principles and its members are requested to organize at least one activity every year related to one of those principles. UNAI supports with publicizing the initiatives to the public, connect to like-minded institutions, facilitate interaction with appropriate UN Offices and support in bringing some of what is done to the attention of Member States.

Interactive Dialogue

Participants questioned the challenges of making 'education for all' a reality, especially in accessing academia in America; the collection and management of data and what will be done with it. Others questioned about how universities were communicating their commitment to the SDGs, including in their branding and values.

Panelists commented that sustainability is encouraging universities to think beyond the degree programme and that education and learning opportunities and multi-disciplinary programmes need to be provided in different ways. A panelist remined that the SDGs present an opportunity and framework for all to work towards and that higher education can provide tools for this new approach. The role of the UN, including UNDESA, in facilitating for data to be available online was highlighted.

In another round of debates, participants questioned about employability and working on SDG-related issues, including at the academic world. Another participant flagged the role of the SDGs in bringing all stakeholders to the same table, including at the municipal level. Another comment questioned the ranking system that measures Universities which may not value the engagement on 'common good' issues such as the SDGs.

Panelists referred to studies that are already showing that companies using sustainable standards are featuring higher at Walls Street.

Panel discussion 2 - How are Higher Education Institutions mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into curricula, research and programmes

Mr. Nikhil Seth, Executive Director, UNITAR, as moderator, proposed for panelists to discuss what were they doing differently since the adoption of the SDGs.

Dr. Ignacio de la Vega, *Dean, EGADE Business School, Tecnologico de Monterrey*, informed that they were incrementing impact in terms of learning activities, research and outreach. Their work focus on educating about and for sustainability and in building capacity. In the past few years, Tecnologico de Monterrey has been using technology to achieve more impact, starting cooperation projects and helping to move the sustainability agenda.

Dr. Joanna Newman, *Chief Executive & Secretary General, Association of Commonwealth Universities,* reminded that the Commonwealth of Nations came together in a common charter to support the SDGs. Ms. Newman shared two examples of activities: 1) addressing brain drain, including through scholarship schemes and experimenting with split-site PhDs. Another example referred to working with researchers in Sub-Saharan countries to demonstrate the impact of their research and working with governments to build research offices and research infrastructure to retain the talent. Challenge has not been on working differently after the adoption of the SDGs but on how to count what universities were doing in support to the SDGs.

Professor Jean-Marc Triscone, *Vice Rector, Geneva University, Geneva Tsinghua Initiative for the Sustainable Development Goals,* introduced two education initiatives from the Geneva University. One was a cross-cutting sustainable development course open to all bachelor students, followed by two years of specialized courses. Mr. Triscone then presented the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative for the SDGs (GTI), launched in 2016. The main purposes of this initiative are to collaborate on the SDGs with partners in international Geneva and to introduce students to multi-cultural environment to address the SDGs, with China as an example of a developing region tackling several aspects of SDG implementation. Challenged-based learning is the pedagogical approach, with students spending much of their time in multi-disciplinary teams to solve real world problems related to the SDGs, inspired and mentored by experts from International organizations and partners. GTI included: 1) a dual master with 1 year spent in Geneva and another year in Tsinghua; 2) executive education; 3) a Summer school; 4) online learning. In May 2017, a "SDG Solutions Space" was set up at one of the Geneva University *campi* where most of the 'hands-on learning' activities occur. Mr. Triscone emphasized that GTI was open for collaboration and invited interested partners to visit the SDG Solutions Space.

Ms. Eugenie Birch, *Professor, University of Pennsylvania*, shared about the recent work of three of their centers on sustainable urban development. The theme "Global shifts: urbanization, migration and demography" has been stimulated for the past two years, starting with a mapping that identified that 45 faculties were engaged in research in those themes. Additionally, they promoted a series of 10 new papers on sustainable urban development and the SDGs which were publicized at the World Urban Forum. They also promoted the participation of students in relevant events to discuss some of those issues.

Professor Chalapan Kaluwin, *Acting Dean of Natural and Physical Science, University of Papua New Guinea, Centre for Climate Change and Sustainable Development,* reminded that Universities play an important role in advising small islands governments, travelling around the world to learn and becoming a resource for their governments in policy development. Mr. Kaluwin informed that the government has created scholarships to support students to get sustainable development degrees. On database and research, the focus is on longer term data and in develpoing a Sustainable Development Index for SIDS. Mr. Kaluwin finalized by informing that his University has now a sustainable development degree, and Bachelors in Sustainable Development Laws and Comprehensive risk management.

Ms. Maria Cortes-Puch, *Head, National and Regional Networks, Sustainable Development Solutions Network*, flagged that the complexity of the SDGs implies for a paradigm transformation in universities. SDSN has been focusing on tools and on facilitating processes for university engagement, including through the development of the guide: "How to get started with the SDGs for Universities".

Inviting for a second round of comments, the moderator asked panelists to discuss ways of scaling up the work currently done by Universities as well as if the SDGs have been reflected in research funding.

Dr. Vega, highlighted referred to the "1000 Leaders of Tomorrow" programme, fully sponsored for Mexicans and LA young populations. Mr. Vega mentioned the social entrepreneurship work dedicated to offering solutions to communities and a nanotechnology research center on sustainability, currently being established with MIT. Dr. Vega also referred to a "Centre on Councils Leadership", focusing on covering all the SDGs through leadership education.

Dr. Newman, called attention to the role played by technology in not only bringing disruption and challenging institutions but also in providing new opportunities and new ways of thinking about supply and demand on education. Universities need to collaborate more and the challenge is to spread collaboration to countries with more demanding sets of circumstances that made it far more difficult for universities to develop and flourish. Dr. Newman called for better join-up across governments, including on establishing research funds related to the SDGs.

Professor Triscone, informed that, on the Geneva Tsinghua Initiative for the SDGs, students are inspired by current global issues and turning projects into researches. The Canton of Geneva has allocated resources for a "SDG Accelerator" to allow for these projects to develop further.

Professor Birch, highlighted the need of engaging further in explaining and making the SDGs knowledgeable, including through setting up multi-stakeholder partnerships to bring the financing, the understanding and the energy towards SDG implementation. Another important aspect relates to inspiring students to engage on the SDGs and on proposing solutions and becoming entrepreneurs.

Professor Kaluwin, flagged the need to raise awareness about sustainable development and the SDGs and the responsbilities that Universities also have to channel the information to primary schools. Mr. Kaluwin mentioned the need of developing a "Sustainable Development Index" for SIDS countries, which would be an important contribution to policy development. Finally, he highlighted the contribution of Universities to monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

Ms. Cortes-Puch, referred to the structure of the SDSN Guide to Universities, launched in 2017 by their Asia-Pacific network: 1) What is the business case for Universities to align themselves with the SDGs and main pillars for this engagement; 2) Step-by-step for becoming an engaged University; 3) Tools and 4) Examples.

Interactive Dialogue

Participants questioned about how United Nations entities could support with acknowledging the work of higher education institutions with regards to the SDGs. Another question referred to the role of Universities in advocating for political change and on how to scale-up and 'scale- to communities. One participant noted the increasing privatization of funding for research and questioned the potential implications for "common good' research. Finally, panelists were questioned about how to tie the concept of 'conscious leadership' to the acceleration needed for SDG implementation.

Panelists commented that when higher education institutions are integrated into policies of sustainable development, it allows for broader partnerships, engagement and access to resources. On conscious leadership, the example of programmes developed with private companies, where they pay a fee and get support from higher education institutions were mentioned. Another panelist commented on the 'tyranny of rankings' and that they usually ignore or even mitigate against the inclusion of the SDGs in Universities portfolios, which also impact on research funding. The need of research to support the implementation of the SDGs was reinforced as well as the need of multi-stakeholder partnerships to raise awareness and political support.

Closing

In closing the panel, the moderator, Mr. Seth, summarized some main takeaways from the discussions:

1) Good things are happening but they are still not enough;
2) Changes driven by technology and attitudes are shacking up universities and the education sector and the SDGs can provide a good organizing framework for this change;
3) International cooperation in education should remain a high priority and governments must find a way to support and enhance what higher education institutions are doing;
4) Need a clear balance between academic learning and hands-on experiences to adjust to the new ways of learning;
5) More on raising awareness and reaching out is necessary to scale up action;
6) The critical role of multi-stakeholder partnerships, and;
7) Data and evidence is crucial to inject into the curricula everywhere.

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