

Higher education's essential contribution to the SDGs

Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), International Association of Universities (IAU)

None of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved without the contribution of higher education and research.

Through research, universities play a unique role in producing new knowledge and innovation to address global challenges, and providing evidence for informed public policy.

Through teaching, universities develop generations of new leaders and skilled professionals who will drive social and economic development.

Through community engagement, universities work with a rich variety of stakeholders – including governments, the private sector, and civil society – for local, national, and global impact.

Higher education has a direct impact on the development of every country. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will not be achieved without partnerships that include universities.

Considering SDG 4 (Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all) specifically:

- Higher education is an essential component of a strong and sustainable education system.
- Universities strengthen education policy and practice at all levels, by training teachers and through educational research.
- Access to quality higher education continues to be an issue for women and girls, people with disabilities, those living in rural areas, people on lower incomes, indigenous people, and those affected by conflict (targets 4.3 and 4.5).
- Higher education develops the critical thinking and skills required by engaged citizens (target 4.7).
- Scholarships designed for development impact can also be used to promote equity and inclusion, reward merit, and deliver widespread access – especially to those from disadvantaged backgrounds – at the same time as addressing global challenges (target 4.B).

As three global university networks together representing over 2,000 institutions, we call on:

- The higher education sector to:
 - Take steps to provide equitable access to quality higher education for all, raising levels of attainment as well as access
 - Adopt policies and practices which maximise their contribution to the 2030 Agenda across teaching, research, and community engagement, as well as through their own operations
 - Incorporate education about and for sustainable development into undergraduate curricula, in support of SDG Target 4.7
- The United Nations and its agencies to:
 - Respond to the need for strong higher education systems globally to achieve SDG 4
 - Recognise the contribution of higher education to Agenda 2030 and all SDGs beyond SDG 4
 - Provide platforms to engage the higher education sector as partners for development, building on the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative and UN Academic Impact Initiative
- National governments to:
 - Take concerted action on and deliver well-planned long-term financial investment in SDG Targets 4.3 and 4.B
 - Adopt a whole sector approach to the development of strong, equitable, quality education systems, recognising the contribution of higher education to SDG 4
 - Engage universities as partners for national development across all 17 SDGs



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