

# **Higher Education for the Sustainable Development Goals**

This book's unique focus on Global North and Global South perspectives on the role that HEIs can play in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals makes it a must read for both policy makers and researchers.

—*Prof Melissa S. Fisher, Cultural Anthropologist Visiting Scholar,  
NYU Institute for Public Knowledge*

Human activity has placed significant pressure on our planet's resources, yet HEIs have failed to successfully harness our intellectual capacity to ensure a habitable future. HEIs should play a pivotal role in helping create a future in which socioeconomic prosperity is shared across the globe on a healthy and sustainable planet. This can be achieved through innovation and the exploration of more just and sustainable futures. In this context, an evolution of HEIs must occur bridging existing gaps between the Global North and South. A new formulation of HEIs must be designed to substantially contribute to this global mission and by accelerating innovation and producing much larger research, teaching, and real-world impact in critical areas that meet the urgent human and planetary crises now and into the future. This book goes a long way to addressing these critical issues.

—*Prof Eusebio Scornavacca, Interim Director & Professor of Innovation  
Policy – School for the Future of Innovation in Society,  
College of Global Futures; and Professor of Global Digital  
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# Higher Education for the Sustainable Development Goals: Bridging the Global North and South

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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**Stella-Maria Yerokhin** completed her Bachelor of Science degree at the Technical University of Dresden (TUD). She is currently in the second semester of her Master's program in Business Administration at TUD, specializing in Environmental Management with a focus on Biodiversity and Sustainability Reporting. During her Bachelor's studies, she already emphasized her interest in Sustainability Management and Energy Economics. In 2022, she worked alongside Mrs Lin Feuer at the Chair of Business Administration, particularly in the field of Environmental Management, as part of the eku-project 'Saxon Network for Biodiversity-Friendly Textiles'. This experience provided her with valuable professional exposure. Another significant milestone is her involvement in the 'University Sustainability Indicator Monitoring System (UNISIMS)' project. This project funded by Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt aims to explore sustainability indicators in the areas of Teaching, Research, Knowledge Transfer, Governance, and Operations, and establish them through an indicator catalogue in German universities. She contributed to this project, further expanding her knowledge in the field of sustainability. Mrs Yerokhin aspires to pursue an academic career and has a keen interest in researching Sustainability Reporting. Her educational background and professional experience prepare her well for this path, and she is determined to contribute to the advancement of sustainable development.

**Stefano Za** is Associate Professor of Organization Studies and Information Systems at University 'G. d'Annunzio' of Chieti – Pescara. He is a Member of ERCIS ([www.ergis.org](http://www.ergis.org)) and the President of the Italian chapter of AIS (<http://www.itais.org>). He is a Member of Program Committees and Reviewer for national and international conferences and journals in the domains of Information Systems and Organization Studies. His main research interest is the analysis and design of digital artefacts and organizational systems. He is currently focussed on digital innovations and business transformation affecting people and organizations in the digital ecosystem. He has published in international conference proceedings (e.g. ICIS, ECIS, HICSS), journals (e.g. GIQ, I&M, CAIS, ISeBM), and book series.

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# Foreword

Education has always been an important aspect of my life. My father, who grew up in Afghanistan was given a unique opportunity to unleash his potential through an inclusive, high-quality education supported by the United Nations (UN) system. He instilled in me the drive to never stop learning, to pursue continuous learning and have an infinite mindset.

I hold a PhD in Education Technology, and I have witnessed firsthand how technology has profoundly changed education. Today massive amounts of information (books, audio, images, and videos) are available at one's fingertips through the Internet, and opportunities for formal learning are accessible online worldwide through Coursera, the Khan Academy and FutureLearn, among others.

I joined the UN when the focus was on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which then witnessed the transition towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022<sup>1</sup> paints a worrying picture of our progress. It states that 'cascading and interlinked crises are putting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in grave danger, along with humanity's very own survival'.

Climate change presents the single biggest threat to sustainable development. UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed called for a holistic approach<sup>2</sup> in addressing the drivers of environmental degradation and for strengthening nature's capacity to protect us from hazards and extreme events. He spoke at the General Assembly's high-level thematic debate titled 'Moment for Nature' in New York. The Global Goals are inherently interconnected. Action taken towards one goal can support or hinder the achievement of others.

UNESCO argues that having a holistic approach to education is essential to address global development challenges. UNESCO leads the global Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) agenda<sup>3</sup> and actively supports education on biodiversity.

Business schools have a critical role to play today in educating future leaders in corporations, governments, universities, and international organizations. As crucial as the SDGs are, they aren't written in a language that is familiar to business schools or most academic institutions, and there are no clear directives on how

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<sup>1</sup><https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/>

<sup>2</sup><https://press.un.org/en/2022/dsgsm1767.doc.htm>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.unesco.org/en/education-sustainable-development/need-know>

students can internalize this in their thinking, nor how teachers can integrate this into their curriculum. An article published in the *Internal Journal of Management Education*<sup>4</sup> points to numerous challenges in teaching SDGs in higher education.

I love museums because they offer a glimpse into the history of mankind. In most paintings depicting education, there are ancient scenes of schools. The teacher lectures from a podium at the front of the room while the students sit in rows and listen. Many classrooms today around the world do not look much different, except maybe now it is on a screen and students are sitting behind a computer screen. Traditionally, SDG education was implemented through a traditional approach: defining the problem, addressing the variables that make it complicated, and agreeing on the best way forward. Because of the latest research this book offers, we know that fact-based education in SDGs will not change our future, but rather that a radical approach centred around the following principles is needed.

### *1. Curiosity in Education*

According to a survey of 3,000 employees conducted by Francesca Gino of the Harvard Business School, only 24% reported feeling curious about their jobs on a regular basis and 70% said they face barriers to ask more questions at work.

Curiosity, however, is vital for unleashing innovation, collaboration, and exchange of ideas. Encouraging students to embrace their curiosity is an important part of learning and encouraging questions in education is the foundation of this.

Welcome Club17 for Africa teachers and students created with UNESCO's support focuses on a starter kit for teachers to unleash questioning in students thinking towards the SDGs. This is one of many examples of how SDG-related curriculum in higher education is moving away from fact-based information sharing.

### *2. Active Learning Happens in the Real World*

By experimenting – observing, touching, and playing – students can address problems. Students now need to be actively involved in their learning, rather than passively participating. Employing action learning principles within a course enables students to resolve and take action on real problems in real time and learn while doing so.

As part of the Global Leadership Skills course, at the University of Antwerp, students actively take part in an Action Learning Project that they will accomplish together with a cross-functional team of students. The purpose of this project is to give students an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the sustainability challenges organizations face and to exercise cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary leadership and teamwork skills to contribute to the realization of one of the SDGs.

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<sup>4</sup>Business schools are embracing the SDGs – But is it enough? (Weybrecht, 2022)

Business schools should follow the example of the more than 10,000 businesses participating in the UN Global Compact that have convened and identified regionally relevant action lines for their stakeholder communities.

### *3. Social Learning: the Power of Collaboration*

Students don't learn in isolation. They are continually interacting with other students, teachers, and family. Collaboration enables integration and inclusion; in other words, an effective learning process can support a global viewpoint thus reducing the distance between the Global North and the Global South.

A good example of this practice is the United Nations Social Development Network (UNSDN)<sup>5</sup> which serves as a global platform for sharing experiences and good practices in social development. The network offers a platform for young people to connect, collaborate, and integrate their ideas and perspectives into national and regional pathways for the implementation of the SDGs.

### *4. The Need to Address Both Technical and Human Skills*

Students at all levels will need to learn how to use the technical knowledge of the SDGs to make the most of what they offer. In addition, students will also need to acquire skills that will help guide them in the real world. These include organizational and communication skills, as well as adapting to change, system-thinking, influencing resilience and humility. The Australian Council of International Development<sup>6</sup> has created a toolkit of the SDGs with a focus on tackling SDG challenges with a system-thinking lens.

I end with this quote from Albert Einstein: '*Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school*'. There will be groundbreaking innovations, even failures on the SDGs as students go out in the real world to tackle these. The one thing we know is the strong link between higher education, re-thinking curriculum and the SDGs which is a positive force for change and for the greater good.

I would like to warmly congratulate the publishers and the editors on their initiative in bringing together, for the first time, a book dedicated to expanding the approaches of sensemaking, scanning, and experimentation for students and teachers to support the SDGs. This book provides a widely useful compilation of ideas, cases, innovative approaches, and practical strategies for enhancing business school education on the SDGs.

Mariam Kakkar,  
Head, Global Learning & Development Center, UNHCR

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<sup>5</sup><https://social.desa.un.org/sdn/about-us>

<sup>6</sup><https://acfid.asn.au/>