



Summary of consultation with the HESI Community on the HESI 2023 Global Forum

11 April 2023, 9:00 – 10:00 AM EDT, Virtual

Introduction

On 11 April 2023 9:00 – 10:00 AM EDT, a consultation open to all HESI members and partners was held by the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) Secretariat. This virtual consultation, in addition to a disseminated online survey, aimed to collect input from the HESI community and partners to the HESI 2023 Global Forum’s session topics, speakers and format.

The [Higher Education Sustainability Initiative](#) (HESI) is an open partnership between several United Nations entities and the higher education community, currently chaired by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the Sulitest Association - a non-profit organization and online platform aimed at improving sustainability literacy for all. Other UN partners include UNESCO, UN Environment Programme, UN Global Compact’s Principles for Responsible Management Education initiative, UN University, UN-HABITAT, UNCTAD, UNITAR, UN Office for Partnerships, and UN Academic Impact.

Each year, HESI organizes a global forum as a special event to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)¹ – UN’s main platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level - to highlight the critical role of higher education in achieving sustainable development. In 2023, HLPF (10-19 July 2023, New York) will be held under the theme “*Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels*”. It will also review in-depth Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals, and include 41 Voluntary National Reviews by member States on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The HESI 2023 Global Forum, which will be held on 17 July 2023 as an in-person event at UNHQ, will place a particular focus on understanding the challenges and opportunities to accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels, in line with the theme of HLPF in 2023.

Opening

Mr. Ola Goransson, Sustainable Development Officer, Outreach and Partnerships Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, opened the meeting thanking everyone for joining and for filling out the survey consultation. Mr. Goransson introduced the 2023 High-Level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC, including the Sustainable Development Goals under in-depth review (SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, 17), within which the HESI Global Forum will take place on 17 July. The annual HESI Global Forum aims to highlight challenges, opportunities, key initiatives, levers of sector transformation and convene an action-oriented conversation on the critical role higher education plays in implementing sustainable development.

Mr. Goransson also welcomed the UN Academic Impact as HESI's tenth United Nations partner.

Inputs from online survey

Mr. Jean-Christophe Carteron, President, Sulitest, summarized some key inputs from the HESI community to the online survey. Mr. Carteron introduced recommendations for topics to highlight at the forum including higher education's role in advancing the 2030 Agenda; monitoring and evaluation of programs; digitalization; research and development; feedback from [HESI Action Groups](#); guidelines for Voluntary University Reviews and partnerships. Suggestions for opportunities the higher education community has implement the SDGs to be emphasized at the Forum included partnerships; curricula; sharing and engagement with community; preparing students to work in sustainable development; research and development, particularly related to the recovery from COVID-19; innovation; digitalization and ensuring the right to quality education. Members also suggested challenges to be examined at the Forum including the competitive and often siloed work of academics; funding constraints; educating in conflict and crisis conditions; monitoring and evaluation; diversity; disconnection between higher education and policy makers and mental health for students. Lastly, members suggest ideas regarding the format of the Forum, including the option for hybrid participation, breakout groups and thematic symposia.

The survey will remain open until 5 May 2023 for HESI members and partners to provide their input.

Open dialogue - views from UN, HESI partners and members

Following the presentations, participants were invited to share their inputs. The inputs would be collected anonymously and compiled in a Mural below. All inputs will be taken into consideration in the planning of the Forum and future HESI plans.

Topics to be highlighted at the HESI Global Forum

Participants suggested a wide variety of topics they would like to see highlighted at the Forum. Some suggestions include sessions on the role of education in achieving specific goals and treaties, such as

the Paris Agreement; guidance for Voluntary University Reviews; narrowing the gap between research and policy; harness students' creativity, passion, and resources; how to get funding; the role of indigenous knowledge and digitalization in education.

Several participants also stressed that the Forum should place particular emphasis on education for all. The Vision Statement by the Secretary-General on Transforming Education, "*Transforming Education: an urgent political imperative for our collective future*" – the formal outcome of the Transforming Education Summit held in 2022 – notes that education is a great enabler, but today, in many cases, it is also the great divider. The Vision Statement further notes that education is in crisis and requires our immediate, mid-term and longer-term responses including a fundamental rethink of the purpose and content of education, grounded in two principles of a new social contract for education, namely ensuring the right to quality education throughout life and strengthening education as a public endeavor and a common good.

Opportunities for Higher Education in accelerating recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels

Participants also shared the opportunities for Higher Education that they would like to see explored at the Forum. Suggestions for this include potential or existing international university networks; knowledge sharing; AI technology and its impacts on learning; sustainable urban design and architecture and the connecting technical solutions with policy.

Challenges facing Higher Education

Participants further proposed challenges and obstacles the higher education community faces in implementing sustainable development they would like to see examined at the Forum. Proposals for this include equity in education, primarily education in times of crises; limited incentives for students to engage with SDGs; difficulty partnering with the private sector; limited transfer of knowledge between disciplines and minimal frameworks for interdisciplinary work.

Format of the HESI Global Forum

As the Forum is the first in-person HESI event in many years, the Secretariat highlighted the importance of the input from the HESI community regarding the format of the Forum. Participants emphasized the desire to include hybrid participation at the Forum to increase the possibility of participants for those who cannot travel to New York. Participants further underscored the importance of direct engagement of participants, using roundtable or breakout group activities.

Student participation and engagement was highlighted as a crucial aspect of the Forum. Lastly, participants emphasized the value of live interpretation and translation of any background documents.

Closing

In closing, Mr. Goransson thanked everyone for their participation and encouraged anyone who had not done so already to fill out the online survey and participate fully in the HESI Global Forum in July.



HESI 2023 Global Forum Consultation

Topics to highlight at the Forum	Opportunities for Higher Education	Challenges to examine	Format of the Forum	Initiatives/ Examples to highlight
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role of education in achieving Paris Agreement - more specific than role in achieving all SDGs • Guidance for Voluntary University Reviews • Review 4 Cs- Campus, Community, Consultancy and Research, Curriculum • How to narrow gap between research and policy • How to make more science- based decisions • Include students- harness students' creativity, passion and resources • Funding programmes- where is it possible to get funding for interdisciplinary work? • How universities utilize citizen driven data • What and how to teach at universities in light of advancing AI technology • "Transforming higher education in a disruptive digital era: Challenges and opportunities". • equitable AI for education and how to partner with private sector for having AI affordable and accessible to all the marginalized • Highlight role of indigenous knowledge • Disconnect between SDGs, targets, and how students can work towards them • Session on urban design and architecture open to all sectors • highlight not just new and different programs/initiatives but the efforts that have demonstrated success in advancing the SDGs in higher ed for the past several years (SDG Accord, Green Gown Awards, STARS, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • international university networks to connect and share knowledge • "bottom- up" learning • AI technology impacts on learning • Sustainable urban design/ architecture • Reinventing PhD to connect to sustainable development • HEI has a role in achieving 2030 Agenda- connect technical solutions with policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equity in education - especially in times of crisis • Education for all • How students are presented the SDGs • Gap between research and policy • Incentives for students to engage with SDGs • How to partner with private sector • Transfer of knowledge from disciplines • Framework for interdisciplinary work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include students at Forum • Roundtable activities (depending on size of session) • integrate in-person and virtual participants • HESI Secretariat will post information on the HESI website all side events organized by HESI members • Invite some government representatives to speak about their engagement with HEI • Live interpretation, AI translated, summary in multiple languages • Hybrid approach is essential, especially to include students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNU Masters Degree on achieving Paris Agreement • Association of Commonwealth Universities • AASHE grant from Microsoft https://www.aashe.org/news/aashe-awarded-microsoft-grant/ • OECD at their recent International Conference on AI • examples of corporations that are actively advancing sustainability in higher education

Figure 1 - Overview of inputs from dialogue