



HESI 2023 Global Forum

**17 July 2023, 10.00 AM – 01.00 PM, Conference Room 2, United Nations
Headquarters, New York**

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Introduction

The [Higher Education Sustainability Initiative \(HESI\)](#) is a 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.

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 Summit¹ 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 rethinking 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.

Each year, HESI organizes a global forum as a special event to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)² – 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) was 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 also reviewed 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 included 41 Voluntary National Reviews by member States on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The HESI 2023 Global Forum, held on 17 July 2023 as an in-person event at UNHQ, placed 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. The Forum was open to all relevant stakeholders, both in-person and virtually. It was attended by about 500 in-person and 800 virtual participants.

The Forum aimed to:

- Provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in higher education to accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.
- Build a higher education sector that is accessible to all and leaves no one behind.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit>

² <https://hlpf.un.org/>

- Highlight and boost key higher education initiatives that drive implementation of the 2030 Agenda through education, teaching, and learning - particularly around SDGs under review at HLPF (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,).
- Spotlight the levers of sector transformation, including cross-institutional partnerships or evolving practices in higher education quality metrics, academic publications, or increased demand for green jobs.
- Convene an evolving and action-oriented conversation on the critical role of higher education in achieving sustainable development.

Preparatory process

In preparation for the HESI 2023 Global Forum, an online stakeholder consultation was held to solicit views, experiences and proposals from members of the HESI Community and partners. In addition to the online survey, the HESI Secretariat hosted an interactive webinar on 11 April 2023 to gain additional input from the community. A summary of the consultation is available on the webpage [here](#).

Key messages and recommendations

- Urgent action is needed to achieve the SDGs, especially given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and conflicts.
- Higher education institutions must play a vital role in advancing the understanding and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by drawing on knowledge, technology, and innovation across disciplines.
- Investment from scientific and engineering communities, governments, and funding bodies is necessary to bridge global disparities in scientific capacity and knowledge access.
- Universities should focus on improving access to higher education for all, including efforts to increase science, technology and knowledge transfers from North to South and promote South-South collaborations.
- Quality education with equity and inclusion, including addressing gender disparities, is crucial in higher education institutions to support sustainable development.
- Artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionize education but requires careful consideration of ethical, legal, and privacy concerns.
- Universities should emphasize cross-institutional partnerships, innovative practices, quality education, academic publications on sustainable development, and the promotion of green jobs to achieve sustainable development.
- Various higher education initiatives and action groups play a vital role in driving the implementation of the SDGs.
- Students and young people must be actively engaged and given opportunities to voice their ideas and contribute to sustainable development efforts within higher education institutions.

- Higher education should prepare students for roles in sustainable development, integrate sustainability into all curricula, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration to address global challenges effectively.
- Education must be viewed as a right for all, regardless of financial status, and a focus on lifelong learning and knowledge exchange should be promoted.
- Higher education needs to evolve rapidly and focus on transformative change, with students at the center of discussions to ensure they receive the education they desire and need.

Sessions

Opening segment

Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, opened the Forum with sincere thanks to all speakers, presenters, participants and partners of the Forum and HESI for their participation both in-person and online, including a virtual viewing party taking place at United Nations University in Tokyo. Ms. Spatolisano highlighted the goal of HESI to serve as an open partnership between United Nations entities and the higher education community to provide an interface between higher education, science and policy making by raising the profile of higher education's sector in supporting sustainable development.

Ms. Spatolisano emphasized the urgent action required to achieve the SDGs, especially in light of the multiple closely inter-linked crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and ongoing conflicts. It is crucial to draw on the knowledge, technology and innovation of all scientific disciplines, including social sciences and humanities to advance the understanding on how to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Ms Spatolisano further spotlighted the need to ramp up investment from the scientific and engineering communities, governments and other funding bodies to bridge the uneven global distribution of scientific capacity and access to knowledge. The higher education community is uniquely positioned to spur action towards the SDGs, including increasing science and technology transfers from North to South and South-South collaborations.

Ms. Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), further stressed the role of higher education institutions as unique places that foster innovation and scientific breakthroughs among experts across disciplines working to solve current and future global challenges. Ms Giannini highlighted the need for universal access to higher education driven by quality, equity and inclusion. Women's enrollment in higher education has more than doubled in the past two decades, yet there are still wide discrepancies and inequalities, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNESCO is working to bridge the global divide in access to quality education and digitalization, aiming to make higher education more equitable, accessible and inclusive. Ms Giannini introduced the UNESCO initiative "Campus Africa" as a way to generate evidence-based solutions that can

support governments in achieving the SDGs and improve enrollment in higher education institutions in Africa. Ms. Giannini underscored the importance of mobility and free circulation of students and researchers to fully implement the core mission of universities.

Lastly, Ms. Giannini congratulated the 22 State parties that signed the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#), providing the framework for the recognition for qualification degrees across borders in a fair, transparent and standardized manner.

Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector and Under-Secretary-General, United Nations University, delivered the keynote address titled “Transforming higher education in a disruptive digital era”, focusing on the necessary adaptations of higher education in a rapidly evolving and increasingly technological world. Professor Marwala recognized education as a powerful enabler, but also a significant divider requiring a rethinking of its purpose grounded in a new social contract for education prioritizing a right to accessible, quality education throughout life. Professor Marwala highlighted the need for universities to foster critical thinking, problem solving and adaptability to empower students to navigate the new era of quickly changing information.

Professor Marwala explored the potential of artificial intelligence to revolutionize education. Artificial intelligence can be used to personalize learning; provide adaptive feedback to learning; support individualized instruction and cater to various learning styles and needs of students and educators. With that, there are many possible obstacles to consider with artificial intelligence such as legal and ethical considerations; transparency; fairness; equitable access; privacy and data security. To combat possible obstacles there needs to be guidelines and regulations that govern artificial intelligence use within higher education, accounting for the needs of the Global North and South with universities playing a vital role in promoting responsible practice. Efforts must be made to address ethical, cultural and socio-economic barriers to leave no one behind and promote collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Professor Marwala underscored the need to identify levers of transformation for sustainable development in each sector. The higher education community must emphasize cross-institutional partnerships; promote innovative practices; provide quality education; promote academic publications on sustainable development topics and respond to an increasing demand for green jobs.

United Nations University (UNU) works to prioritize multi-stakeholder efforts on education for sustainable development by learning from the inspirations and insights provided by the local community to spur localized actions towards sustainable development. UNU implemented the [Regional Center of Expertise for Education on Sustainable Development network](#) to build the capacity for local communities to implement sustainable development and the [UNU SDG-Universities Platform](#) to integrate the SDGs into post-graduate curricula. Lastly, Professor Marwala highlighted the need to involve students in the discussions and initiatives surrounding higher education.

High-level panel with university leaders - The role of higher education in accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.

Mr. Nikhil Seth, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, Executive Director, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), moderated the first session of the HESI Global Forum, focusing on the challenges and opportunities in higher education to accelerate the recovery from COVID- 19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Mr. Seth commented on the overarching aim of everyone attending and participating in HLPF, to urgently get the SDGs back on track in both the Global North and South, including the role of universities through education, research and think tanks.

Mr. Ángel Cabrera, President, Georgia Institute of Technology, called attention the group of participants from Montclair State University in the room, acknowledging that all universities should be providing access and content to the SDGs through hands-on experience. Mr. Cabrera explained that Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) is a public, research-intense university that aims to prioritize access to education. He detailed that sometimes universities place their focus on prestige and reputation rather than actually focusing on how they can be accessible to more people. He indicated that COVID-19 showcased that, despite previous philosophies, online learning can be a valuable tool to improve access to education. Mr. Cabrera stressed that the number one goal of universities at this time should be improving access to higher education for all.

Ms. Julia Christensen Hughes, President and Vice-Chancellor, Yorkville University, noted that sustainable development in universities is seen in the campus infrastructure, research and teaching and learning. Ms. Hughes explained that accessibility in teaching and learning can be viewed in cost including tuition charges; curriculum through transitioning teaching from knowledge to skills and values; and context such as online, asynchronous learning that allows students to learn at any time from anywhere. Yorkville University's prioritization of accessibility to education allows students who are unable to attend traditional degree programs the opportunity to receive ongoing, quality education. Ms. Hughes implored Canadian universities that still require post graduate students to have received their undergraduate degree from their institution to change their rules to adapt to a changing world where not everyone has the same abilities to attend university.

Ms. Susan Rundell Singer, President, St. Olaf College, introduced the College's aim to prepare students to live life on purpose for the common good, focusing on lifting the liberal arts approach to learning regardless of what major is being pursued. Ms. Singer highlighted the need to pinpoint what is motivating students, such as the issues addressed in the SDGs, to empower students with the skills and confidence to face and contribute to solutions to such issues. St. Olaf College showcases the prioritization of the SDGs through renewable energy sources on campus; community engagement; ensuring access to a global semester at no added charge and the creation of guided pathways through the undergraduate experience for students to critically think about how their motivations impact their action and time spent. This combination of priorities allows students to graduate with their own narrative about how their education has prepared them to work towards their passion.

Ms. Romeela Mohee, Commissioner of the Higher Education Commission, Mauritius, mentioned that, like many universities, the COVID-19 pandemic completely transformed the methods of teaching in Mauritius from face-to-face to virtual learning. Through a study, it was evident that SDG 4 on education was challenged due to the abrupt change in learning techniques and an overall lack of preparation to switch to online learning. Ms. Mohee stressed the innovative efforts being made to ensure that higher education evolves in a way that learning doesn't stop, including the need to create flexible learning pathways for all students.

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University, stressed the University's unique forward-looking culture of equality and engagement. In the future, higher education has to acknowledge that students entering the sector have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts, changing the way students experience teaching from prior generations of students. In South Africa, the curriculum was trimmed to ensure that learners finish their previously set curriculum, leaving gaps in the knowledge and skills obtained during their education. To combat this, universities must be prepared to assist student transitions from grade school to higher education in a more intentional and developmental way, including through foundational, augmented and extended curricula. Higher education requires transformation through problem posing education to help students critically discriminate and desegregate information that is available on the internet and translate what is learned in the classroom into their real lives. Ms. Fraser-Moleketi urged the community to look at how to bring institutions together globally to address the current issues, including inequality.

Mr. Seth asked the panelists to consider how higher education can work to break siloes and promote inter-disciplinarity among faculty, staff and students. Mr. Cabrera discussed that, like many universities, Georgia Tech implemented a strategic plan with a mission statement and developed leaders to advance technology and improve the human condition, promoting inter-disciplinary collaboration and sustainable innovation. Ms. Singer added that general education requirements are an under-utilized tool that can be adapted to build integrated, inter-disciplinary education plans for all students. Ms. Mohee noted that the Commission provides funds primarily to multi-disciplinary initiatives to create incentives to collaborate across departments.

Mr. Seth followed up with a question regarding equitable access to students in remote and hard to reach areas and what support is needed from the developed world. Ms. Hughes noted that the Canadian federal government promotes immigration for education, increasing the international population at universities. Ms. Hughes further added that the curricula Yorkville University offers is specifically designed for international students building on their prior education. Ms. Mohee commented that Mauritius has implemented an initiative that provides funds to those who would not otherwise be able to afford continuing education. Ms. Fraser-Moleketi explored the access issues based on race, highlighting that the participation of African students is increasing at a slower rate than non-African students, partly due to financial constraints and student debt. She further added that there is an increasing rate of unemployed graduates due to a job shortage stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and a mismatch between work experience and education.

Mr. Seth closed the session asking the panelists to consider what higher education institutions can do to help each other. **Mr. Cabrera** discussed the creation of the [University Global Coalition](#), a coalition of universities working together to find partners, exchange ideas, run programs and have a voice for universities for the SDGs. **Ms. Hughes** stressed the essential need for top-level commitment to the SDGs such as Yorkville University's five-year plan with a commitment to small class sizes and inclusive accessibility. **Ms. Singer** further stressed the importance of local partnerships to implement the SDGs. **Ms. Mohee** highlighted an opportunity for higher education to create networks to transform assessments considering artificial intelligence and to protect student mental health and well-being. **Ms. Fraser-Moleketi** underscored the need for higher education to partner across disciplines and with local communities to implement the SDGs.

Rapid presentations on levers of sector transformation- Featuring key higher education initiatives and action groups that drive implementation for the SDGs, particularly for Goals under review at HLPF in 2023

Mr. Jean-Christophe Carteron, President, Sulitest, co-chair of HESI, moderated the second session of the Forum on key higher education initiatives and actions groups that drive implementation for the SDGs. Mr. Carteron stressed that HESI has always held the belief that higher education has the duty and opportunity to implement sustainable development. Mr. Carteron asked each group to explain their overall goal, what they have achieved or learned so far and what they hope to achieve in the next year.

HESI Education for Green Jobs Action Group - Ms. Debra Rowe, Co-Chair, HESI Education for Green Jobs Action Group, presented the goals and work of the Action Group to increase the rate and quality of workforce preparation for inclusive transitions to green and sustainable human societies globally by providing practical tools, key opportunities, actionable guidance and a virtual international community of practice. The Group focuses on student recruitment and career advising; employee placements and retention; curricular upgrades and integration; professional development and inclusion.

This year, the Action Group has expanded the virtual community to over 4,000 participants from over 100 countries; created seven Solutions Summits; supported the creation of cross- sector stakeholder alliances; compiled and shared resources; developed a toolkit highlight opportunities and good practices; connected cities, students and experts with an emphasis on the Global South and empowered youth to be change agents. In the future, the Action Group plans to increase collaboration within and across countries for better workforce development, placement, inclusion and retention; deepen efforts within the virtual community to fill in the gaps in existing efforts and empower and support key system shifts to accelerator workforce development and meet the needs for an inclusive transition to sustainable societies.

HESI Ratings, Rankings and Assessments Action Group - Mr. Duncan Ross, Co-Chair, HESI Ratings, Rankings and Assessments Action Group, presented the goals and work of the Action Group to encourage higher education institutions and organizations to focus on the appropriate

measures of sustainability as identified by a number of ranking, rating and assessment organizations that assess institutions' performances.

This year, the Action Group worked with the joint task force on outcomes to understand how measurement of activities across all aspects of sustainability can move from measuring inputs to differential outcomes; gathered data on existing initiatives; and reviewed several methodologies. In the future, the Action Group plans to encourage accreditations agencies to adopt sustainability into their requirements; work with bibliometrics suppliers to explore ways of evaluating the SDGs; and continue to evaluate existing rankings and ratings.

Sulitest - Mr. Aurélien Decamps, Managing Director and Co-Founder, Sulitest, presented on the goals and work of Sulitest to increase the sustainability literacy of all current and future decision makers; build the common language that enables individuals to collaborate and act for a sustainable future and equip higher education institutions with relevant tools and data to pilot and demonstrate their impact on sustainable literacy.

This year, Sulitest formed "*TASK- The Assessment of Sustainability Knowledge*", an online, robust assessment and systemic model of sustainability knowledge, producing reliable and comparable data and a certificate to demonstrate a level of sustainability knowledge. Sulitest also created a community of "Change Leaders", higher education institutions committed to mainstreaming sustainability literacy and learning from their peers and stakeholders. In the future, Sulitest plans that TASK will set a new international standard of sustainability knowledge and have a systemic impact on curriculum redesign and education.

HESI SDG Publishers Compact Action Group - Mr. Chirag Jay Patel, Head of Sales, Americas Human+AI, SDGs, Science Communications, Cactus communications, presented on the goals and work of the Action Group to provide practical tools and actionable guidance that publishers, editors, researchers and practitioners can use to prioritize SDGs in the research agenda and in educational materials while improving connections between practice and research.

This year, the Action Group published and presented "8 Top Action Tip Guides" at targeted training and engagement events; developed the "SDG Rubric for Textbooks" and created cross-stakeholder alliances. The Group learned that there is a lot of support for the SDGs, but incentive structures don't always align with the SDGs. In the future, the Group plans to increase the number of members of the SDG Publishers Compact; grow the community connected to the SDG Compact Fellows; host more summits; motivate more stakeholder to publish and implement Top Action Tops; publish more SDG related content emphasizing research outcomes and leverage artificial intelligence to improve SDG usability and accessibility.

United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) - Ms. Jayashri Wyatt, Chief Education Outreach at United Nations Department of Global Communications and United Nations Academic Impact, presented on the goals and work of UNAI to engage higher education institutions to support and contribute to the realization of the Organization's purposes and principles, including the SDGs and

the 10 UNAI principles to enable a sharing of experiences and best practices and Voluntary University Reviews.

This year, UNAI hosted a series of workshops and trainings to build capacity for higher education institutions, emphasizing the contributions of academia in advancing the SDGs. UNAI partners with aggregators of research to create informational SDG toolkits to provide platforms of discussion for side events and to engage at upcoming conferences in learning and sharing best practices. In addition, UNAI is guiding member institutions in the formation of a standardized method for delivering Voluntary University Reviews intended for institutions to track their own progress and increase the UN's analytical capacity in implementing the SDGs.

HESI Partner Programme - Mr. Ola Göransson, Sustainable Development Officer, Outreach and Partnerships Branch, DSDG, UN DESA, presented the goals and work of the Action Group to address the knowledge gap on integrating the SDGs into higher education globally; connect higher education institutions, networks and student organizations to facilitate transfer of knowledge; and focus on curricula, research and development, and campus practices.

This year, the HESI Partner Programme mapped expertise and conducted needs analysis of its members; organized the first brainstorming workshop and held the first workshop of the Curricula focus group. In the future, the Programme will continue to organize workshops for the other focus groups, continue deepening relationships and partnerships and expand membership of the Programme.

Ms. Vera Arezina, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade and active member of the HESI Partner Programme, further added that the Programme is promoting crucial collaboration across higher education institutions particularly in campus practices, curricula and research.

SDG Accord- Ms. Fiona Goodwin, Director of Operations and Planning, The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC), presented the SDG Accord's efforts to embed the SDGs through their education, research, leadership, operational and engagement activities by 2030 and report their progress. This year, reporting signatories covered 30 countries across five UN regions. Funding and staff capacity remain the highest barriers limiting SDG progress. Embedding the SDGs in institutions enables dialogue on sustainability issues and showing the contribution to local and global efforts.

Student and youth led panel – Harnessing the creativity, passion and innovation of students and young people for driving implementation of the SDGs.

Mr. Brighton Kaoma, Global Director, SDSN Youth, moderated the final session of the Forum on harnessing the creativity, passion and innovation of students and young people for driving implementation of the SDGs. This session focused on how universities can better prepare students for roles in sustainable development, prepare students for and to utilize changing technologies and ensure an equitable, quality education is available to all while protecting the mental health of

students. Mr. Kaoma highlighted the need to meaningfully engage with young people and students and give them the space and opportunity to share their voice.

Ms. Ellen Dixon, Project Lead, The SDG Students Program (SSP), SDSN Youth, shared the work of SSP to support education and sustainable development through student peer-to-peer education models, campus lead initiatives and partnering with academia, strongly believing students should be included in such partnerships. Higher education is transversal to all SDGs, requiring transdisciplinary work to address social needs, methodologies and knowledge transfer. Ms. Dixon underscored the impact higher education has on society, policy, research and governance. She further added that education cannot be transformative when students are not seen as essential partners. When students are included, student platforms and guidance can establish social guidance, as seen in the SDG Student Program Student Hubs in which students actualize their learnings into concrete and localized action.

Ms. Eliane El Haber, Ambassador, Higher Education for Good Foundation, highlighted the need for higher education institutions to urgently align what is being taught with sustainable development in order to prepare students for future roles. Ms. El Haber added that the values being taught must also be transformed to a sustainable mindset. Furthermore, higher education must work with students as co-collaborators to transform curriculum, including training for evolving technology. Ms. El Haber suggested a global framework to define curricula and guarantee quality across all institutions with the flexibility required for local adaptations.

Ms. Benedicta Neysa Nathania, LearningPlanet Youth Fellow, LearningPlanet Alliance, underscored the need for higher education institutions to equip students with the right knowledge, skills and mindsets to tackle the current global issues. Ms. Nathania suggested that universities integrate sustainable development into all curricula and disciplines to provide students with holistic knowledge on sustainable development to collaborate to identify and address the issues in their future roles. To prepare students for changing technologies, Ms. Nathania suggests universities partner with technology companies and emerging industries to give students experience and work opportunities.

Ms. Iman Cumberbatch, PRELS Scholar XR Lead at Computational Sensory Laboratory; and Project Manager at PSEG Institute for Sustainability Studies (PSEG ISS), stressed the importance of establishing interdisciplinary collaboration to show students how sustainability fits into their current and future goals, no matter their current major or focus. This collaboration encourages support in research initiatives to tackle real world experience and problems. Ms. Cumberbatch highlighted the challenge in invoking urgency due to a misunderstanding of data, underscoring the way that virtual reality can be used to create an immersive experience to create the necessary urgency.

Ms. Anoushka Sinha, Girls Belong Here Ambassador, Plan International Canada, stressed the need to create inclusive, experiential learning opportunities within the existing learning curricula, including financial support to stimulate innovation and opportunity of all interested students. In the spirit of Goal 17, universities can partner with international development and humanitarian

organizations to better prepare students for future roles with leadership and practical skills. Ms. Sinha added that preparing students for changing technology directly aligns with Goal 9 on infrastructure and prepares students for future careers. Ms. Sinha emphasized the need to address the barriers preventing women and girls from receiving quality education, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Veronica Dzeagu, Chief Technical Officer, All-Africa Students Union, explained that the mission of the Union is to raise awareness and empower students to be involved in solving the challenges facing Africa and the world. The Union focuses on advocacy, networking and partnerships with a deliberate effort to align the work with the SDGs. Ms. Dzeagu highlighted the power students and young people have to drive the implementation of the SDGs through awareness raising, engaging in policy making, leading sustainable initiatives on campuses and getting involved in local community projects. Ms. Dzeagu spotlighted the opportunity provided by integrating collaborative professional skills in learning as opposed to theoretical learning. Ms. Dzeagu further emphasized the need to recognize the work being done by students and young people in their communities.

Mr. Horia Onita, Vice President, European Students' Union, highlighted the key instruments needed to achieve the SDGs in higher education such as policies, stakeholders, funding, and provisions at the global level. Mr. Onita stated that the area lacking the most is provisions, including the lack of a students' rights charter. Mr. Onita underscored that while all panelists have agreed on what needs to be done, there is no regulation or binding agreement on how to achieve the Goals with student involvement and rights protection, including the use of artificial intelligence in higher education.

Mr. Kaoma invited questions from the floor in which the panelists were asked to cover the topics of life-long learning, access to programs for sustainable development and the definition of sustainable profit.

The **United Nations University (UNU)** virtual viewing party of fifteen students in Tokyo, represented by Mr. Bright Osei Yeboah, were invited to share a few questions and comments with the panel. The party asked what kind of tools are needed by students, explaining that UNU prioritizes sustainability research skills, guiding students to conduct sustainable research with professional skill development. UNU highlighted the need for collaboration to enhance holistic development for students in all areas of the world. UNU further stressed that students are the beneficiaries of higher education and must push for what they want out of their education.

Ms. El Haber addressed the question on accessibility and financing for education programs, stressing that education must be viewed as a right regardless of the financial status of the student. Ms. Dixon underscored the tendency to focus on formal learning and profit model instead of social enterprises with a focus on informal community education where the two need to be viewed as complements to each other not competition. Ms. Nathania emphasized the value of engaging in communities of practice to promote lifelong learning and knowledge exchange. Ms. Cumberbatch highlighted the need to prepare students for the future by connecting students with industry partners to provide hands-on experience.

Closing

Mr. Sam Barratt, Chief, Environmental Education and Youth Unit, United Nations Environment Programme, Co-Chair of HESI, closed the Forum by highlighting the need for education to evolve quickly and not go back to what was normal before the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Barratt further emphasized that the role of students in changing education needs to be at the center of the discussion to ensure they get the education what they want and not only accept what is currently being offered. Higher education is more likely to transform when it is considered as critical agent of change. Lastly, Mr. Barratt pointed to the lack of the necessary urgency in the discussions and initiatives of higher education.