Higher Education Sustainability Initiative Global Event:

Green Jobs & Green Minds: How can Education Rewire the Future of the Planet?

10 July 2019, UNHQ, New York

Summary report

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).

The Higher Education Sustainability Initiative is supported by a wide range of global and international networks of Universities and other higher education institutions, national and regional organizations, and several student organizations (the full list is available on the HESI website). 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 a space for higher education institutions with a unique interface between higher education, science, and policy making across the UN.

On the occasion of the 2019 session of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development – the United Nations' central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - the HESI partners organized an event for HLPF delegates, with participation from higher education institutions and

other interested stakeholders. More than 300 participants attended the event from governments, universities, private sector and civil society.

The event explored how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is changing the way higher education institutions are working and how they engage critically with the SDGs, with a specific focus on SDG 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 17 (Partnership for the Goals). It built on the work of the [SDG Accord](#) which has five core areas of work including:

1) Teaching sustainable development across all disciplines of study, including through online based platforms,
2) Encouraging research and dissemination of sustainable development knowledge,
3) Green campuses and supporting local sustainability efforts,
4) Engaging and share information with and through international networks,
5) Engaging universities in local and national government, as well as city development projects.

Opening

H.E. Ms. H. Elizabeth Thompson, *Permanent Representative of Barbados*, one of the founders of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) at Rio + 20, opened the HESI Global Event. She mentioned that HESI was conceived to broaden the scope of education, develop a culture of sustainability at the tertiary level, and teach sustainability across every sector and discipline. The core objective of HESI is as relevant now as it was at the conception. Ambassador Thompson underlined the need to accelerate the number of universities involved in the initiative, especially in the developing world. Given the need to speed up innovation around sustainability, universities can play a key role as important incubators for innovation. They are also important to inform governments and decisionmakers how to go in the right direction for sustainability.

HESI Co-Chair, Mr. Sam Barratt, *Chief of Education and Youth,* UN Environment introduced the objectives of the event and noted that HESI is a collective of both UN and other partners, with a broad ownership. He thanked all participants for coming to the event and noted that we are here to get things done and make a difference collectively where we can't achieve this on our own. Some of the questions that the event would address were: *What incentives matter the most to Universities when it comes to engaging with the 2030 Agenda and investing in sustainability? Given young people are the main beneficiaries of higher education, what more could universities be offering to building the skillset, place the sign-posts and work with public and private sector to create more green jobs? Are companies hiring the right kind of young talent with the*

right kind of skills for the sustainability and energy transformation the world needs to undertake? How to get more government support for these issues? While we are here as citizens of the world to think about what we can do to make a difference, the precious window of time is closing to do so.

Session 1: SDG4 in Higher Education: An ecosystem in movement

The session was moderated by **Mr. Jean-Christophe Carteron**, *HESI Senior Advisor and Director of Corporate Social Responsibility Kedge Business School,* who highlighted the growing societal interest about sustainability issues, including higher education institutions, students and learners.

Ms. Stefania Giannini, *Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO*, in her opening remarks emphasized that education is the driver for development and sustainability. UNESCO is leading the coordination of the Education 2030 Agenda and is the only UN agency covering the higher education dimension. In the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, higher education institutions have a crucial role in ensuring that graduates are well equipped to make informed decisions and to find innovative solutions to the global challenges, such as climate change, migration, ageing societies and demographic trends, among others. Ms. Giannini called upon higher education institutions to forge partnerships to advance the achievement of the SDGs through a transdisciplinary approach beyond traditional knowledge silos and disciplinary orientations. Finally, the UNESCO representative underlined that universities should promote not only excellence and quality but also inclusiveness, open access, freedom of thought, and circulation of ideas and knowledge. In this context, she shared that this year UNESCO General Conference will discuss the Qualification passport in Higher Education that will facilitate the enrolment of refugees and displaced persons.

Ms. Fiona Goodwin, *Global Alliance & The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education Institution*, presented the SDG Accord, a network that brings together 1046 signatories across from 85 countries. The SDG Accord aims to foster discussion on the challenges that institutions in higher education face and to facilitate exchange of best practices to address them. Ms. Goodwin underscored that despite significant progress, many institutions still endure challenges related to a lack of funding, capacity and student engagement. Ms. Goodwin's recommendations included inclusion of education in governmental Voluntary National Reviews and mandatory SDG implementation, public reporting of institutions on their SDG research and student engagement, encouragement of students to demand the inclusion of SDGs in their curricula, and more information-sharing on best practices among institutions; concluding that "we can't solve a crisis without treating it like a crisis, and we need to take action NOW."

Dr. Joanna Newman, *Association of Commonwealth Universities* and **Dr. Hilligjevan't Land**, *International Association of Universities*, delivered a joint statement on behalf of their respective

organizations and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, which together represent more than 2,000 universities across 5 continents. Ms. Newman and Ms. van't Land emphasized that universities play a unique role in producing new knowledge and innovation to address the global challenges outlined in the 2030 Agenda. The speakers called on the higher education sector to raise levels of attainment and access, adopt policies and practices which maximize their contribution to the 2030 Agenda, and incorporate education for sustainable development into undergraduate curricula. Touching upon the lack of funding, a call was made to the national governments to deliver well-planned long-term financial investment and adopt a whole sector approach to the development of strong, equitable, quality education systems. Finally, representatives acknowledged UNESCO UIS database that allowed to spread the call for action among the universities worldwide.

Mr. Dan LeClair, *CEO - Global Business School Network*, spoke on the global assessment of the progress that institutions are making on delivering the SDGs through higher education. He expounded upon the rationale behind assessments - these help institutions and stakeholders plan, make decisions, monitor progress regarding said plans and adapt accordingly. The "what" and "how" is the challenge, - ratings vs. rankings, accreditations, the role of consultants and peer review in development of standards, and so on. Discussing partnerships and platforms for higher education, he underlined a need for a stronger alignment between the needs of stakeholders and institutions in a way that advances society. As an example, he mentioned the Positive Impact Rating for business schools, an evolving multistakeholder initiative that crowdsourced business schools' desired impacts towards SDG implementation for assessment, compared to more traditional rankings.

Mr. Ross Duncan, *Chief Data Officer - Times Higher Education*, provided an overview of the university rankings landscape: given that 1.7% of gross world product is spent on higher education, it was imperative to demonstrate the value added to justify the expenditures vis-à-vis societal benefit, especially in the face of an increasing global trend of government cuts to higher education. Given the extensive global media exposure provided by university rankings, the latter have huge potential impact on universities' behaviors. The *Times Higher Education* therefore launched a new Impact Ranking this year using the SDGs as a consistent framework by which university actions could be interpreted. A large number of universities from all over the world (560) participated in the inaugural ranking: this focused on 11 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals this year given limited capacity available, but all 17 SDGs would be covered by the ranking next year..

Mr. Elliot Harris, *Assistant Secretary-General, DESA, as moderator*, noted that the session would explore in further detail how universities and other actors work in partnership to accelerate SDG implementation and ensure inclusive quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Mr. Harris underlined that by partnering and pooling their resources, different actors can bring together their comparative advantages to achieve more: more impact, greater efficiency, more sustainability and increased value to all. This is also true for HESI, which exemplifies a great partnership among UN agencies and universities which pooled their resources to organize this global event today.

Mr. Kazuhiro Yoshida, *Co-Chair of the SDG Steering Committee and Director, Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education, Hiroshima University*, highlighted how the voice of the Steering Committee could represent collective views of a multi-stakeholder education community. This had enabled effective dialogue with UN, member states and other partners. Some of the outcomes produced were: a single education framework for action i.e. SDG4 which is equal to Education 2030; and education policies of member states that have mainstreamed key messages of SDG4, with emphasis on inclusion, equity and learning outcomes. Mr. Yoshida noted that education as a key enabler of the entire 2030 Agenda has been widely accepted by the global community. He also elaborated on how universities can operate as think-tanks in providing good advice to governments. For instance, universities can connect policies and practices by providing evidence-based research results, upon which governments and practitioners rely.

Ms. Yi Zheng, *Head of Office, Institute for Sustainable Development Goals, Tsinghua University*, addressed how Tsinghua University worked both in China and regionally to localize the SDGs, as well as how the University incorporated SDGs into higher education. She highlighted three ways of operating: government cooperation, public-private cooperation, and global cooperation. Tsinghua worked closely with scientific institutions and the central government in China to seek higher policy impact, for instance collaborating with local governments to establish policies to promote the SDGs, support social transformation and public awareness. On the topic of talent training and continued learning, Ms. Zheng mentioned the importance of providing remote access. Ms. Zheng further underlined that the goal of education was not just to equip students with skills, but also the mindset to be more inclusive and willing to go beyond their comfort zone.

Ms. Ann Rosenberg, *Senior Vice President, Global Head of SAP Next-Gen*, addressed the question of how the tech sector is partnering with higher education to deliver on the SDGs. Technology is technology – the question was what it was used for. With universities being fertile ground to cultivate the naturally playful and imaginative mindsets of young people (often stifled by their seniors), their credibility and connections, as well as potential access to bleeding edge technology that some

companies may not even have, the private sector asked higher education to take an "SDG first" approach to leverage the ethos of playfulness and imagination to work in partnership with the private sector to innovate for solutions to meeting the 2030 Agenda/ 1,5C target to combat climate change. In this regard, higher education institutions are not only responsible for education but for creating the new SDG generation – SDGs in all education as well as reaching out to those without access to education to bring all ideas around the world together in a unified way. [Ms. Rosenberg later suggested this could take the form of the world's biggest academic innovation network as a concrete initiative.]

Mr. Sanjay Tiwari, *CEO of 21CC Education,* elaborated on how youth could acquire skills for future jobs using gaming for sustained learning. Today, people want education just like any other service, yet the demand of employers is no longer monolithic: due to the fragmented needs of different sectors, extremely specialized training is required for their employees. Moreover, employers and the private sector are not fully aware of the role they need to play in shaping the education for new emerging jobs; employees must also be trained to recognize the potential impending obsolescence of their existing jobs to adequately prepare for emerging jobs. Mr. Tiwari questioned whether higher education institutions sufficiently train people for the jobs of the future given that an estimated 20% of these do not yet exist. He demonstrated how 21CC Education provided skills development through online training modules for specific sectors to directly address market needs. While there was a wealth of training material available in the industrialized world, much of it is inaccessible due to language, and most importantly the media through which it is traditionally shared. Shifting content to mobile platforms and gamifying it allowed for making content compelling, while bringing it to a global audience of millions, irrespective of where they may be.

Dr. Willard Gingerich, *Provost, Montclair State University*, took the floor during the ensuing discussion to announce how Montclair State University had mapped all their academic programs including PhD and Masters to the SDGs. There was a campaign underway so that all faculties who delivered these programs understand the impact of the SDGs, and promote engagement and the core values of the 2030 Agenda.

Game around SDGs - Sulitest quiz

Ms. Jaclyn Rosebrook Collignon, *Board member, Sulitest*, described how the Sustainability Literacy Test (Sulitest) was a tangible implementation of HESI, recognized in 2016 as one of the first featured initiatives of the UN Partnerships for SDGs and contributor to the review of the 2030 Agenda through the HLPF in 2017. Supported by a community of volunteers and the engagement of 40 UN partners and academic networks, the Sulitest offers tools for raising awareness and mapping the SDGs. The best-known tool – the Test - is available free of charge in 10 languages to all organizations and fully customizable for a fee. Ms. Collignon led audience members through a series of multiple choice Suliquiz questions as a demonstration, a fun activity that was well appreciated by all those present.

Mr. Satya Tripathi, *Assistant Secretary-General and Head of UN Environment's New York Office,* moderated this panel and spoke about the urgent need for increased ambitions and transformative changes to solve the crisis of climate change and environmental degradation. He cautioned against a sense of complacency with regard to multilateral agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, because much more must be done if we are to avoid the catastrophic impacts of climate change and achieve a sustainable future. He then highlighted the importance of lifelong learning - how crucial it was to continuing seeking knowledge and wisdom, treating every day as a learning experience and to reflect on how one can do better if there was not enough learned in the day.

Mr. Matthieu Cognac, *Senior Multilateral Cooperation Specialist, International Labor Organization*, reflected on the definition of 'green jobs', which is subject to interpretation. To the ILO, this means that the jobs are decent, providing social protections, worker protection, health and safety, and opportunities for social dialogue and free discussion between employees and employers. Green jobs not only inherently protect the environment but are also good for business and people. To ensure green jobs for future generations, partnerships are crucial, such as those facilitated by HESI with public and private sectors. One major challenge to creating green jobs is a skills shortage among young people entering the workforce. In this regard, training and capacity building are crucial and must be adequately supported in commitments by member states.

Ms. Brandie Conforti, *Global Chief of Development, Junior Achievement,* discussed the work of Junior Achievement (JA) and their contribution to building capacities for green entrepreneurship. They bridge the gap between business and education by fostering self-efficacy, self-belief and building soft skills through experiential learning. This allows young professionals to be more adaptive to the uncertainty of the future of employment. She highlighted the JA Company Program, which reaches over half a million students annually and enables them to build a company from scratch. She also pointed to the JA Innovation Challenge, where students work collaboratively with a corporate partner over the course of two days to address a social problem. The students in both of these programs tend to create environment-related, sustainable projects and are continuing to influence their communities and world to live and work more sustainably.

Dr. Henning Jensen, *President UDUAL, President Rector's Conference, Costa Rica*, presented a university perspective to sustainability education. He discussed practices from the University of Costa Rica and the impacts they have had on both students and their communities. For example, all students at the university must complete 300 hours of community work to graduate, amounting to roughly 1 million hours per year. Within this program there is the sub-program called "Social and Environmental Kiosks" where students work with communities to co-create projects in subjects ranging from water management to pollution to disease and more. This program helps to build a university culture that is open to learning from the knowledge of the people and their communities, working entirely based on the spirit of reciprocity, acknowledging the dignity of diversity by collaboration to find shared solutions to local problems. It is through these types of projects that students become aware and engaged with sustainability.

Sheila Jagannathan, *Head of the Open Learning Campus, World Bank,* discussed competencies are sought by employers when hiring young professionals and presented some best practices for teaching those skills. She emphasized that soft skills, such as leadership and learning agility, are more transferable than technical skills. Professionals must have the capacity to upskill, reskill, and continuously learn. In this regard, the World Bank facilitates client learning, which teaches policy makers, practitioners, NGOs, academia, youth, and the general public, to help them co-create cross-sectorial solutions to development challenges. They adapted innovative learning styles for the modern, digital age, where students/clients can curate their own learning schedules and styles, from 'bite-sized learning' that can lead to more formal education of skills and knowledge, storytelling, best practice exchange, on-the-job informal learning (mentoring, job shadowing, etc.) and only 5% which remains face-to-face learning. The Open Learning Campus specializes in teaching problem solving, critical thinking skills, collaboration, and data analytics so that people can adapt to the dynamic and unpredictable industries of the future. With the uncertainty of climate change, the past is no longer a predictor for the future, and jobs are no longer stable due to disruptive technology: enabled by technology, a digital and blended approach can reach millions, enabling the transition to green jobs.