



Sustaining education

The SDG Academy: A global initiative offering education to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Florenzia Librizzi reports



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Business school education and sustainable development

Sustainable development is without a doubt, the greatest challenge of our time. In 1987 the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* introduced the concept of sustainable development as “... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

This call for a sustainable world is not only still relevant but also constitutes the foundation of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by 193 United Nations member states in September 2015.

The SDGs provide a shared global blueprint to achieve peace and prosperity for people and the planet, aiming to eradicate poverty and hunger, tackle inequalities, stir economic growth and ensure environmental protection while promoting peace and good governance universally.

This ambitious and holistic agenda implies deep and complex interactions across all 17 SDG topics. In that sense, the SDGs are integrated, complementary and require to be jointly addressed. Each SDG has a specific set of targets to be achieved by 2030. The goals and targets are universal, applying to all countries around the world. Achieving the goals require deliberate actions from all sectors —government, private sector, civil society, academia— significant investment and strong partnerships since no single actor or country can tackle these challenging issues by itself.

While UN member states play a crucial role in advancing the goals, the private sector is instrumental in ensuring successful implementation

of the SDGs. By integrating sustainability into their strategy and operations and developing new business models and innovation, business can contribute to make the SDGs a reality everywhere.

Sustainability is no longer considered a “nice thing to have” but rather a “must have” that allows businesses to ensure a social licence to operate and results in better risk management and positive impact in business and financial performance, while fostering innovation. Achieving the SDGs will also nurture an enabling environment for business and societies to thrive in while bringing more business and innovation opportunities for those that align to the changing needs of our world.

Just as businesses have an important role when it comes to sustainability and the achievement of SDGs, business schools are key enablers of sustainability as educators of current and future leaders. In that sense, business schools should also align their curricula, research, organisational practices, as well as partnerships with the SDGs.

By doing so, business schools become better suited to providing their students with the knowledge, skills and mindset needed to address today's unique challenges and opportunities, while contributing to creating more sustainable, inclusive and prosperous societies.

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The SDG Academy – the flagship education initiative of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) – is a global initiative for the United Nations. SDSN was set up in 2012 under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General and directed by Professor Jeffrey Sachs to mobilise global scientific and technological expertise to promote practical solutions for sustainable development, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement.

SDSN works closely with UN agencies, multilateral financing institutions, the private sector and civil society to promote integrated approaches to implement the SDGs through education, research, policy analysis, and global cooperation.

In addition, SDSN's National, Regional and Thematic Networks mobilise over 1,200 members in more than 100 countries, to develop long-term transformation pathways for sustainable development and to promote SDG implementation.

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The SDG Academy engages a community of education institutions – including business schools and higher-education institutions – as well as individual learners, offering educational content and peer exchange and learning to advance sustainable development. So far the initiative has garnered roughly 300,000 enrolments across its platforms, from more than 180 countries. The SDG Academy aims to reach millions of learners around the world.



Sustainable development and the SDGs, core to our vision and mission

While the SDG Academy's work seemed in principle captured by SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda, focused on ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, in reality, this initiative touches virtually on all SDGs, since every single goal in the 2030 Agenda depends upon education as the vehicle that can ultimately empower people to obtain the skills, knowledge and mindset to flourish as individuals and together as societies.

For that reason, our materials are global in nature, based on science, taught by experts in their fields, accessible online, created in partnership with SDSN members and other organisations from around the world and built to scale, having reached hundreds of thousands of learners around the world.

By focusing on a wider range of topics related to the field of sustainable development and covering all SDGs, the SDG Academy's free, high-quality online educational resources play a unique role in empowering individuals (students, practitioners, policymakers and so on), as well as educators, to contribute to sustainable development.



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The SDG Academy Library is a searchable repository of all SDG Academy course videos. Over 1,000 video lectures and case studies can be searched by MOOC, SDG, faculty, academic subject or keyword



High-quality learning on the SDGs available to everyone, everywhere

Content

The SDG Academy convenes the world's experts to create and deliver educational content on key issues for the future of people and planet, including education, health, climate change, agriculture and food systems, human rights and sustainable investment. As a premier source of creation and curation of content, the SDG Academy provides a variety of free resources, available for the public good:

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

In collaboration with leading experts around the world, the SDG Academy has produced over 30 MOOCs on the SDGs and related topics, hosted on edX, the world's largest non-profit online learning platform. Our most recent course, "Conversations with Global Leaders: Leading on Sustainable Development," featured engaging and personal conversations with former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Paul Polman, former President of Colombia Jose Manuel Santos, and former Prime Minister of Norway, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, among other global leaders. Our course "Work and Employment for Sustainable Development" was launched on 1 May. The course was developed with renowned experts in the field and in partnership with the International Labor Organization (ILO).

30+

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Our vision is a world in which the SDGs are achieved through the efforts of the next generation of educators, practitioners and citizens that have access to relevant educational content and partnerships to advance sustainable development everywhere.

Our mission is to create and curate relevant content on the SDGs made available globally to prepare this generation and the next to achieving sustainable development.

To meet the SDG Academy's mandate and mission, we strive to ensure that our content is high quality and brings together global leading expertise on sustainable development —while ensuring diversity of views and an evolving conversation—that reaches an increasingly large global audience; and that our impact can be adequately measured, seeking for better ways to monitor and evaluate our programmes.

SDG Academy Library

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Webinars and online conferences

The SDG Academy organises webinars and online conferences with global experts covering sustainable development topics, online pedagogy and current topics such as our recent webinar on “The Epidemiology and Economics of COVID-19”.

In addition, the SDG Academy plans to develop additional resources with strategic partners, such as an Online Encyclopaedia of SDG Solutions, a Global Online Master’s Program on Sustainable Development, and a high-level global task force on Education for Sustainable Development.



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Community

The SDG Academy is nurturing a community around its content to ensure peer exchange and learning, leveraging the SDSN network that counts over 1200 members, and other relevant actors. Our community includes:

- **Global Association of Master's in Development Practice (MDP) Programs:** This community comprises 34 universities that share a global interdisciplinary curriculum on teaching development practice. The Global MDP Secretariat serves as the umbrella organisation overseeing all MDP programmes and activities worldwide.

• **University Partnership Program (UPP):** Since 2017, the SDG Academy's University Partnership Program has worked with global universities, academic institutions and education programmes, including business schools, to integrate SDG Academy course material into existing and new programs on sustainable development and related subjects. Institutions that are part of the UPP receive privileged access to SDG Academy materials in a format suitable to the needs of the institution, as well as pedagogical and technical support from the SDG Academy team in the implementation of the material in a blended learning programme. Resources such as teaching guides, tool kits and best practice manuals are made available to participants.

• **Community of Practice:** The next phase of our UPP is a dynamic network through which partners can engage with each other and the SDG Academy to access resources to support the sustainable development needs of their organisation. Stay tuned for our updates!

• **Alumni Network:** With roughly 300,000 enrolments, and an active Alumni Network of 4,000+, hosted on Facebook, students from our courses are encouraged to engage around the SDGs, collaborate with peers, and share what they have learned to make positive contributions to sustainable development in their lives and work.

• **Partnerships:** An important focus of the SDG Academy is to develop strategic partnerships

to scale up the efforts to deliver impact on the SDGs. Some of our strategic partners are edX, regional platforms such as Edraak and XuetangX; academic and education-focused partners such as United Nations University and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning; policy partners such as the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens, and business school accreditation associations like EFMD.

Online learning during COVID-19 crisis

In response to the COVID-19 crisis and as schools and universities around the world are moving lessons online, the SDG Academy made a concerted effort to reach out to educators at this time to make them aware of our resources. We hosted a webinar to introduce people to these resources and support many of whom were previously unfamiliar with our work or who were struggling to adapt to remote teaching. A summary of the webinar and recording is available here. <https://sdgacademy.org/amid-covid-concerns-sdg-academy-highlights-resources-for-online-teaching/>

It is our hope that these resources ease the transition to online teaching and will continue to be useful to educators and their colleagues across many disciplines and areas of education and training. Our goal is to engage as many academic institutions as possible to ensure we empower the current and next generation to become the leaders needed to create a sustainable, inclusive and just world for all.



About the Author

Florencia Librizzi is a sustainability and education professional as well as an international attorney, licensed to practice law in Argentina and New York State. As Head of Program and Partnerships, she leads the SDG Academy, flagship education initiative of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN). Previously, she devoted over 6 years to building the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), an initiative of the United Nations Global Compact. Previously, Florencia served as a consultant for the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) advising on issues of human rights. From 2006-2011, Florencia practiced law advising business and non-business clients on a wide range of legal and sustainability issues. She has prior research and teaching experience at several universities. She holds a Juris Doctor (J.D.) magna cum laude from Universidad Nacional de Córdoba and Masters of Laws (LL.M.) from NYU School of Law.

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