



# 2024 University Presidents Meeting Summary

## Europe, Middle East, Central and South Asia

Monday, 13 May 2024

### Welcome Remarks

#### Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN

Jeffrey Sachs, President of SDSN, welcomed the participants and thanked them for their leadership, for their central role in their respective universities and for their role in society. He also thanked them for being part of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). Founded back in 2012 under the auspices of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, SDSN is now a worldwide network of almost 2,000 universities, research centers, leading thinking NGOs, all committed to sustainable development. Sachs recalled that SDSN is mainly a resource for its members, including: helping make connections with other universities around the world, deepening your curriculum, helping your students find engagement in global projects in sustainable development, mobilizing resources for projects together, for research activities, giving support in convening government and companies in your region and globally. He explained this meeting aimed to hear directly from the universities' leadership what is needed, to brainstorm together, and to explore how SDSN can help.

Sachs argued that universities have a unique central role in societies and can be key actors at times of change, especially now, when we are facing very complex times. He highlighted their ability to create communities that are truly global and go beyond the geographical tensions. Universities can help with their main mission, education, but also with their research capacity and their availability to work across borders and as agents of peace. He stressed 3 priorities: (1) In education our aim should be to provide excellence, especially in the teaching of sustainable development, ensuring an interdisciplinary approach (one of the hallmarks of [SDSN educational initiatives](#)). (2) In research our aim should be to find solutions to fight inequalities, climate change, or how to make peace, all of these core to the SDGs agenda. (3) Universities must bring together governments, academics and civil society, and also convene across national borders (this is why SDSN encourages [regional networks](#)).

To conclude, he reminded us that ahead of the [UN's Summit of the Future](#) (21-22 September 2024), SDSN has produced a set of [Recommendations](#) for the Summit of the Future which looks at what kinds of changes, innovations and reforms the world should adopt in order to achieve sustainable development, peace and cooperation. Sachs asked for feedback on this document. The summit is a key event since the UN 193 member states will meet to rethink multilateralism and how we are working together, and to reaffirm existing commitments including to the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Keynote Address

#### Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

Stefania Giannini highlighted the critical role of UNESCO to coordinate the SDG 4 community, mainly around the Summit of the Future, but regretted that the [Zero Draft](#) of the "Pact of the Future" does not reflect the key role of education as an enabler to achieve the SDGs. She acknowledged the difficult times

universities are going through and how important it is that they keep their independence and autonomy to do their job and to be places of free expression, critical inquiry and debate.

Stefania Giannini described several transitions that are under way. The first transition is from exclusion to inclusion, as education is a fundamental right and a public good, not a privilege. However, gaps between rich and poor countries remain at alarming levels. Education has to be made accessible and affordable through measures such as cost sharing, innovative financing and public-private partnerships, especially looking at the Global South but not exclusively. The second transition is from competition to cooperation, and universities should put the learning of care at the core of their programs. Some values traditionally emphasized in the last century like individualistic success, national competition, limitless economic growth, and should transition to the values of solidarity, interconnection and caring for each other and caring for the planet. Also, a collaborative approach should be adopted especially when it comes to technology, serving the humanistic goals of education and guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, quality and accessibility. Last, the third transition is from elitism to equality, as education is meant to serve as an equalizer, and for high-education this is still a big challenge.

Giannini mentioned some existing tools that have facilitated a big progress like the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications on Higher Education](#), adopted in 2019, and the [UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development](#), originally from 1974 but reviewed and updated recently. She also recalled that the upcoming G20 meeting in Brazil will host a Global Education meeting where all Ministers of Education -but not only- will convene.

#### **Address**

##### **Bernard Mazijn, Chief of Staff & Director of Cabinet, on behalf of Zakia Khattabi, Minister of Climate, the Environment, Sustainable Development, Belgium**

Bernard Mazijn emphasized that science must be the foundation of all policy-making, advocating for the integration of science-based solutions into political discourse. He underscored the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches to address spillover factors effectively. Acknowledging the common organizational structure of universities, which are frequently divided into specialized departments, he expressed a keen interest in understanding how other institutions navigate this challenge. Furthermore, he noted the fluctuating prioritization of sustainable development since the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro, highlighting the importance of maintaining a consistent focus on this critical issue. He concluded by calling for university presidents to speak up and assemble *inter-*, *multi-*, and *trans-*disciplinary research teams arguing that comprehensive, inclusive, and green efforts are essential for all current and future generations.

##### **Leire Pajín, Candidate to the European Parliament, Spain**

Leire Pajín argued that despite the current lack of progress as a consequence of the systemic crisis in recent years, she acknowledges the commitment of the academic sector to demonstrate its impact, alliances, values, and ability to provide skills to create a better world. Universities are like micro-cities that can be used as laboratories and can be catalysts for change. The current students are the ones who will be making the important decisions in 2030. Training and research geared towards the SDGs have a direct role in university contributions towards local and global agendas. The contribution of the universities to the SDGs impacts all objectives: (1) Promoting transformative teaching as well as specific and transversal competencies, and empowering and mobilizing young people; (2) Providing the necessary knowledge, pathways and innovations to support and implement the SDGs; (3) Strengthening

alliances and new ways of collaboration between all stakeholders, and helping to connect with public policies; (4) Aligning the institutional governance with the SDGs, and lastly, as disseminators of science to society.

Leire Pajín emphasized that providing scientific knowledge, evidence, and solutions to support and implement the SDGs requires collaboration. Strengthening alliances, disseminating information, and finding new ways of connecting the SDGs with public policies at all levels is the vision of SDSN Spain. For years, we have been promoting effective collaboration through our focal points, implementing collaborations between universities and local actors, and providing students with practical experience. Finally, she shared many examples of projects targeting topics like circular economy, waste management, or science with political decision-making. Our mission must be to create the ecosystems that facilitate these connections in favor of sustainable development.

### **University Presidents Speeches**

#### **João Sàágua, Rector, Nova University Lisbon, Republic of Portugal**

Rector Sàágua articulated the strategic vision of the Nova University of Lisbon, aiming to embody a dual ethos of civic engagement and global outreach. Emphasizing the utilization of collaborative knowledge to effect meaningful societal contributions, he underscored the institution's steadfast commitment to the SDGs. This commitment is manifest in their comprehensive development plan, notably exemplified by the establishment of a multidisciplinary platform in 2021, uniting all faculties and hosting diverse projects. Noteworthy among these endeavors is a sustainability course, inaugurated in January, offering complimentary access to undergraduate and master's students, providing exposure to cutting-edge scientific knowledge and challenges. A flagship research undertaking, involving approximately 200 contributors, seeks to quantify the university's carbon footprint and devise innovative funding mechanisms, with anticipated findings expected for 2025. Sàágua accentuated the pivotal role of SDSN Portugal (hosted at NOVA University) in effective societal transformation. Concluding, he drew attention to the forthcoming pre-Summit of the Future high-level conference [“Paving the Way to the Pact of the Future”](#) in Lisbon on June 17 and 18.

#### **Ilesami Adesida, Acting President and Provost, Nazarbayev University, Republic of Kazakhstan**

[SDSN Kazakhstan](#), inaugurated in 2022 and hosted by Nazarbayev University, now includes 24 members from 20 universities, focusing on promoting practical solutions for sustainable development through research and policy. The network emphasizes SDGs related to land, water, communities (SDGs 9 and 12), and education (SDGs 4, 10, 17). Despite its recent establishment, SDSN Kazakhstan is highly active, currently hosting its second conference on monitoring implementation and challenges in sustainable development, with a focus on Central Asia, covering topics such as sustainable energy and critical raw materials. Ilesami Adesida introduced a new research strategy featuring a cross-campus Center of Research Excellence to assess SDSN's impact and SDG barometer projects. Additionally, the university is launching specialized programs in sustainable development and integrating SDG topics into the curriculum starting at the freshman and sophomore levels, concluding with a call for collaboration.

At the time of this meeting, SDSN Kazakhstan was hosting its second conference on monitoring implementation and challenges in sustainable development, where Central Asia is the spectrum of their focus. The conference topics include sustainable energy and critical raw materials.

Ilesami Adesida introduced a new research strategy involving a cross-campus Center of Research Excellence to assess the impact of SDSN in the country and region, along with SDG barometer projects.

The university is launching specialized programs in sustainable development and integrating SDG topics into the curriculum starting at the freshmen and sophomore levels. He concluded by calling for collaboration.

**Esra Hatipoğlu, Rector, Bahçeşehir University, Republic of Türkiye**

Esra Hatipoğlu highlighted that her university, with sustainability at the core of its strategy, supports and integrates the 17 SDGs across all educational levels to foster a sustainable mindset through both theoretical and practical approaches, aiming to embed SDG awareness into the university culture and promote related campus projects. Rector Hatipoğlu presented the university's five integration strategies: (1) mandatory sustainability courses for all students, included in the general elective system, providing essential knowledge on sustainability concepts and SDGs, equipping students with problem-solving skills and scholarly literature utilization; (2) a refined education model offering a certificate program through research and application centers, with over 100 compulsory and elective courses covering various disciplines directly focused on SDGs, and each diploma including a certificate specifying sustainability training; (3) sustainability-focused training through CIFAL Istanbul, a specialized center advancing SDG capacity among leaders in public and private sectors, NGOs, academics, local authorities, and students; (4) the CIFAL Istanbul Youth Platform, established in 2021, raising SDG awareness among bachelor-level students in Turkey, conducting activities with university staff and external partners on topics like equal opportunities in technology, agriculture, and women empowerment; and (5) the Social Impact and Research Centre, hosting over 300 events related to sustainability from 2022 to 2023, producing numerous theses on SDG topics, and developing training videos on sustainable development principles and practices.

**Open Discussion with University Presidents**

**Zhansaya Issayeva, Ban Ki-moon Institute for Sustainable Development, Republic of Kazakhstan**

The institute, established in 2018 by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, focuses on research and training for sustainable societal development. The university is a notable member of global organizations, including the World University Consortium. A highlighted program is the Model UN Debate Club, which develops and trains youth by having students represent various countries. Exceptional participants are rewarded with internship opportunities.

**Rajeev Sood, Vice-Chancellor, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences (BFUHS), Republic of India**

Rajeev Sood shared that sixteen health-focused universities have formed two commissions, integrating non-traditional courses, including medicinal plants. A national conference is being organized, and it is part of a network with over 1,000 members. It is pursuing the integration of technology into education and has initiated 14 non-traditional courses. It invites input, advice, and collaboration.

**Aleksandar Skeparovski, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia**

A very recent member of SDSN, the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje recently adopted a university strategy incorporating a plan to achieve the SDGs, including teaching, finance, arts, digital transformation, and administrative staff development.

**Mohan Kumar, Former Ambassador of India to France & Monaco & Dean of Strategic and International Initiatives, Office of the Vice Chancellor, O.P. Jindal Global University, Republic of India**

He discussed three main points: the existential crisis posed by the SDGs, emphasizing the need for global awareness and action due to the likelihood of missing 50% of the 2030 targets. He highlighted the crucial role of universities in addressing this issue, citing his university's achievements and youth involvement in

SDG efforts. Lastly, he urged other countries to adopt local solutions, following India's example, to effect substantial change.

#### **Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN**

He defined universities and organizations like SDSN as key holders of the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing effective communication with governments and students as essential. He supported Professor Mohan Kumar's points on the SDGs, citing reasons for the lack of progress: additional time needed, complexity due to interconnection, governmental misunderstanding, global financial system failures for low and middle-income countries, and geopolitical barriers. Sachs urged highlighting the SDGs at the upcoming Summit for the Future as a vital framework beyond 2030. He emphasized building sustainability around education and the digital economy, noting the latter's advantages when used correctly. Sachs concluded that the commitment of regional organizations, such as the European Union, combined with these pillars, offers a unique opportunity for a prosperous and sustainable future.

#### **Shaleen Singhal, TERI School of Advanced Studies, Republic of India**

Shaleen Singhal reiterated the importance of financing as the only way to pave the way forward for sustainable development. He reaffirmed the necessity to go beyond the theory to start taking effective action by practicing sustainable development through partnerships, professional development, the establishment of a dedicated center for research, and other initiatives that highlight their incredible efforts. He concluded with a call to action for more hands-on advocacy.

#### **Dr. A S M Maskud Kamal, Vice-Chancellor, Academic University of Dhaka, People's Republic of Bangladesh *on behalf of* Dr. Sitesh Bachar, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic University of Dhaka**

A S M Maskud Kamal highlighted the university's commitment to promoting the SDGs with several on the ground activities they are implementing through the campus. From research centers to international collaboration and partnerships with students, the efforts of the University of Dhaka demonstrate a strong institutional commitment that aims to position itself as a significant stakeholder in the global efforts for the 2030 Agenda.

#### **Imrana Tiwana, Head of Initiative for Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, Beaconhouse National University, Islamic Republic of Pakistan**

In representation of the first liberal arts university in Pakistan, Imrana Tiwana reflected on the importance of empowering people in societies by promoting integration with an interdisciplinary approach they already are establishing in their university, which signifies a forward-thinking strategy that fosters innovation and holistic problem-solving. By welcoming collaborations from universities worldwide to create a green experience center on the campus and promoting collaboration with the different faculties, Imrana Tiwana highlighted the importance of moving to an interdisciplinary framework.

#### **Phoebe Koundouri, Chair of SDSN Europe/SDSN Greece and Climate Hub, (Hellenic Republic) Greece**

Phoebe Koundouri presented the [SDSN Global Climate Hub](#) which aims to provide science-based recommendations, as a collaborative platform for all, taking a holistic approach encompassing energy, health, maritime, and socioeconomic systems, among others, which perfectly encapsulates the importance of partnerships for sustainable development. By engaging all relevant stakeholders and interested participants through the Climate Hub, the members can implement relevant pathways to the local communities and lead to effective, sustainable outcomes.

**Parveen Bansal, Joint Director, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences (BFUHS), Republic of India**

Parveen Bansal emphasized the critical link between health and sustainable development, highlighting education as a vital tool for achieving sustainability. In his region, efforts are being made to leverage local capacity to promote sustainable development through specific programs such as sustainable medicine and gerontology. These initiatives perfectly represent the relationship between health and sustainability and showcase the necessity of equipping people with the necessary knowledge and skills to contribute to sustainable practices.

**Stavros Malas, President of The Cyprus Institute, Republic of Cyprus**

Stavros Malas presented the Eastern Med Climate Initiative, a climate change initiative specific to his region. He brought attention to the term “Net Zero Emissions,” saying that the problem will stay with us even after we hit that target. The damage already caused will remain. Other than mitigation, he mainly called for adaptation. The biggest challenge for his region is as it is set to face very negative consequences of climate change. He proposes to set up a regional alliance for climate change and is keen to proactively develop this alliance in order to facilitate political processes.

**Natasha Frederickou, President of Frederick University Council, Republic of Cyprus**

Natasha Frederickou, President of Frederick University Council in Cyprus, mentioned key areas, including research, teaching, and operations with society. She stated that universities can have a profound impact on shaping a student’s path towards a sustainable future. It is not just about providing knowledge, but putting efforts into nurturing sustainable competencies and making them care. That is the opportunity that all universities have to help the new generations forward. She shared an example of an initiative that has helped students see the real impact that they can have on society, Frederick University Living Lab (FULL), and modifying existing courses to integrate significant collaborations.

**Naci Inci, Rector of Boğaziçi University, Republic of Türkiye**

Naci Inci emphasized the importance of SDG 16 for promoting peaceful societies in a world marked by divisions and conflicts and stressed the need for peace to reach sustainable development. Türkiye’s unique strategic geopolitical position acts as the bridge between the Middle East and Europe, bringing nations together by relating region-specific challenges to other countries in this proximal, yet tense area. He shared that Turkish universities are emerging as players in the fields of energy, finance, and digital transformation, and as the host institution of SDSN Türkiye, they have a critical role in research and development that impacts and promotes regional stability.

**John Barimo, Manager, SDSN Ireland on behalf of John O’Halloran, President of University College Cork, Republic of Ireland**

John Barimo challenged perceptions by viewing Living Labs in a multistakeholder format and called for uplifting student voices and giving them a platform. He introduced a transdisciplinary resource to bring SDG education into any curriculum, which may be able to transmit ideas that STEM programs have not been able to do and announced that UCC is the first university in the world to be awarded a green flag.

**Closing Remarks**

**Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN**

In the closing remarks, Sachs congratulated participants for sharing their experiences and inspiring others to learn from each other and encouraged everybody to keep the momentum of the brainstorming session going. Reaffirming the importance of the upcoming Summit of the Future, he assured that we are at a pivotal moment to reaffirm the commitment to the SDGs and called upon a combined statement

of universities worldwide that will cover the importance of education as the core of peace and sustainable development by creating all kinds of new programs, institutions, and initiatives. The [Statement](#) by University Leaders in Support of The Summit of the Future, which will be circulated among national governments, should also serve to help universities execute their commitment through new approaches, such as incorporating arts and culture into their outreach and leveraging humanities and fine arts to facilitate any actions. Lastly, the president of SDSN recalled the commitment of our network in supporting universities in all these new initiatives.



# 2024 University Presidents Meeting Summary

## East Asia and the Pacific

Wednesday, 15 May 2024

### Welcome Remarks

#### Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN

Sachs shared that SDSN's mission to mobilize the world's universities and scientists to advance the goals since the SDGs were envisioned in 2012. He shared that in SDSN's discussions and with university leaders thus far, there's a common understanding among the students that the 17 SDGs are the future.

After highlighting that cross-cultural understanding is important and East Asia and the Pacific is seen as the most dynamic and fastest growing part of the world, he emphasized that the region has great capacity instead of overcapacity to advance the goals.

He proceeded to mention how the Summit of the Future will be an important meeting to discuss the way forward in the 21st century, discussing issues of sustainable development, global finance, youth development, peace and justice and more. SDSN is finalizing its work for the Summit of the Future and comments on this are welcomed from everyone. He concluded his remarks by expressing hope to seek statements from universities to world leaders about the role of universities in social justice, innovation, world justice and more, in shaping the right future.

### Keynote Address

#### Ban Ki-moon, 8th Secretary General of the United Nations, Co-Chair of the Ban Ki-moon Center for Global Citizens

Ban Ki-moon began by sharing that he is most proud of the SDGs since 2015 and the Paris Climate Agreement in 2012. He stressed to ensure we leave our succeeding generation a sustainable and peaceful world. He will continue to work to advance the goals and thanked SDSN for its continuous leadership and stated that this meeting is important for universities to come together and carry out their roles in unlocking solutions for sustainable development challenges. It's time to guide students who are the future leaders through research, degree programs and public education. Universities, while not holding political responsibilities, should still influence and advise leaders in the right way.

Ban Ki-moon concluded his speech by sharing what he heard from JFK in the Rose Garden at the White House - that there are no national boundaries and while political leaders do not talk to each other, the youth should, as global citizens.

#### Karima El Korri, UN Resident Coordinator, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam

Karima El Korri shared 3 key messages:

1. Higher education plays at the heart of the fundamental principles of the SDGs and institutions are able to leverage on tangible SDG impacts. Higher educational institutions support SDG 4 by



equipping leaders and educators with the knowledge and tools to address sustainable development challenges but are also able to shape public discourse through influential engagement with various stakeholders.

2. The SDGs in East Asia and Asia Pacific are not where they should be at this point. Country level performances vary and face performance challenges. Knowledge-based and technological solutions are needed to bring the SDGs back from the brink.
3. There is a need to capitalize partnerships in universities, stakeholders and the UN. Emergence of global and regional university networks like SDSN networks are promising in addressing these challenges.

Karima shared that there is a noticeable increase in efforts in mainstreaming SDGs in undergraduate and graduate programs, including community-level activities which are becoming a good trend in this region. She emphasized the importance of universities to engage with the UN and SDSN. She's pleased to see contributions of universities and their inputs and believes they must continue to be heard.

### **University President Speeches**

#### **Woo Kyun Lee, Chair, SDSN Korea, on behalf of Dong-one Kim, President, Korea University, Republic of Korea**

In his pre-recorded video, Dong-one shared Korea University's role in the nation with a focus on sustainable development and climate crisis: a global issue and shared dire statistics on the impact of climate change and the country's SDG progress. In the video, Kim expressed how collective mobilization is needed for climate action and sustainable development. Kim shared recent initiatives, establishment of SDSN Korea, SDG Youth and its recognition by the Ministry of Environment with aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045.

#### **Pipop Udorn, Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Thammasat University, Kingdom of Thailand**

Pipop Udorn shared Thammasat University's responsibility to be an education platform for all generations. While there is research and policy and recommendations for the government, Thammasat University also has practitioners, workers of practical knowledge that lead by example. The University's model consists of three parties working together (university, community and corporate partners) for rural communities to improve the quality of life. There is also a focus not only on experiential learning but also strengthening the SDG DNA in students. This Thammasat University model was adopted by local banks - to support community-enterprise businesses - reaching 64 universities nationwide and over 4,000 communities have benefited. The University adopts the philosophy of having students immerse in real-world problems (also embedded into the curriculum) so it becomes an intrinsic motivation to see a better society in everything that they do everyday.

#### **Emma Kruse Va'ai, Pro Chancellor, National University of Samoa (NUS), Independent State of Samoa**

Emma Kruse Va'ai expressed that SDG 4 is one goal but the work of the university is far-reaching and the establishment of a national university has allowed for access to tertiary education. She emphasized the importance for universities to stay with the SDGs. When they hosted the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) conference, that was when Samoa became very familiar with the SDGs, and have very much been part of the development. It is vital for the university to have close partnerships with the UN and UN agencies. Samoa's concern of climate change from the south pacific - most affected by rising sea levels - and more so on other pacific islands such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, the goal to keep below 1.5 degrees celsius to survive is very real. Emma concluded with the reminder that Samoa is part of the global community despite being far away, and that they are very much affected by the West especially as it pertains to global warming.

**Xue Lan, Director, Institute for Sustainable Development Goals, Tsinghua University, People's Republic of China**

Xue Lan stated the critical juncture for achieving the SDGs, emphasizing that significant challenges still lie ahead that require collective action and universities are uniquely positioned to accelerate the SDGs to bridge academia and industry offering a pathway for research to inform action. Xue Lan continued by stating that universities are steadfast champions for multilateralism and to rely on networks, like SDSN, to expand and deepen collaboration - uniting universities, policies and experts. He shared the importance of partnerships developed by SDSN, to magnify collective impact and ensure a sustainable future. Tsinghua University's initiatives includes a dual-master's degree program comprising academic work and project-based learning, cultivating next generation of leaders; course on global affairs; center for global competence development; research institutes organizing SDG related events, and policy impact through participation in policy studies.

**Damon Salesa, Vice-Chancellor, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand**

Damon Salesa began by stating that the university sector in New Zealand has been working well to progress the SDGs, including reporting and dedicated sustainability programs to support the nations commitments to the SDGs. Salesa reflected on New Zealand progress and that exact measures and actions have not been made to reach the targets. He continued to emphasize that universities have an important role to play in advancing society: the statutory role of being critics. Given New Zealand's geographical location, it is at the forefront of climate change and action. Salesa shared the initiatives that AUT has taken and expressed the need to now shift to taking on the bigger challenges. Salesa shared that this is no longer an issue of science, but one of social science, culture and communities. The problem no longer exists on its own and Salesa reflected on inequalities in New Zealand especially socioeconomic inequalities - communities such as indigenous and migrants. There is a call to integrate indigenous knowledge and wisdom in the philosophy of the universities' approaches and a need for a shift on ontology, our ancestral connections and knowledge. He concluded with the statement that universities have a special responsibility to support students in this mindset and the key thing is what we can do together with partnerships that amplify impact.

**Open Discussion with University Presidents**

**Taikan Oki, Special Advisor to the President, University of Tokyo, Japan**

Taikan Oki first shared that the University of Tokyo focuses on economic, social, and environmental aspects when it comes to university policies. The university is in the race to achieve zero GHG emissions by 2025. They promote green transformation through carbon neutrality and renewable energy, and advocates for deploying human resources to transform communities. Taikan also shared that the Centre for Climate facilitates transformations through collaboration and action and that there is a strong emphasis on DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) among students and institutions. Taikan Oki also asserted that Biotech and AI are key tools in addressing environmental and social challenges.

**Sibrandes Poppema, President, Sunway University, Malaysia**

Sibrandes Poppema shared that SDSN Asia and the Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development hosted at Sunway University exhibits how the SDGs are etched into its DNA. Emphasizing training future leaders, in Sunway University, second-year students must complete courses on integrity and sustainable development, community service for planetary health, and sustainable entrepreneurship. Through the courses, students interact with the local populations and develop projects focused on internet access,

poverty, bullying and other issues. The goal is to teach compassion and document these efforts as examples for other universities.

#### **Mike Ryan, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Monash University, Commonwealth of Australia**

Mike Ryan presented that a key challenge pertains to how best to address the SDGs. Large-scale projects like the World Mosquito Program, revitalizing informal settlements, and monitoring sanitation cycles and to mitigate climatic changes in Antarctica involve numerous partners and significant funding. Monash University, through their 2030 Impact Framework, looks at these projects and codifies the experience of Monash.

#### **Yasutomo Nasu, President, Okayama University, Japan**

Yasutomo Nasu shared that Okayama University, the first Asian chair of UNESCO on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), has been promoting SDGs in Japan for eight years, collaborating with local regions. Initiatives include a young female scientist program with UNCTAD, inviting participants from South Africa and ASEAN to discuss harnessing science for sustainable development. Expansion to South America is planned.

#### **João Soares Martins, Rector, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste**

João Soares Martins began by sharing that with 20 universities serving around one million people, Timor Leste is updating its 2030 plan to incorporate SDGs, despite limitations in human resources and financial resources. Albeit being a petroleum intensive country, the Centre for Biodiversity researches and promotes green energy, although the sector is still developing. The government supports these initiatives. As a young university, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e aims to learn from more established universities on how to integrate SDG principles.

#### **Hor Peng, Rector, National University of Management (NUM), Kingdom of Cambodia**

National University of Management is committed to extending sustainability within its social and education systems through waste reduction, energy efficiency, and renewable energy projects. The university aims to create a future-oriented society of students with a clear understanding of sustainability and supports SDSN initiatives.

#### **Eun Mee Kim, President, Ewha Women University, Republic of Korea**

Eun Mee Kim shared that Ewha University, founded to empower women, consistently ranks high in gender equity and SDG achievements. Initiatives include a department on renewable energy, the first engineering school for women, and grant partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on reproductive health. The Ewha Global Partnerships Programme brings students from the Global South to Ewha with a mission to facilitate equal opportunities for all. Acknowledging the political nature of MDGs and SDGs, Eun Mee Kim expressed joy to have worked on the science-policy interface as part of the 2019 UN impact report. Higher education, particularly in the Global South, is crucial for addressing digital gaps and future challenges. Propose extending beyond the SDG framework to establish that higher education in the Global South is an undeniable key need for the future.

#### **Ngakan Suardana, Rector, Udayana University, Republic of Indonesia**

Ngakan Suardana shared that the SDGs Centre in Bali, established in 2020, focuses on five goals including SDG 7- renewable energy center on campus, SDG 8 and 10 with healthy campus policy and SDG 9 with

green and blue finance initiative. Supported by the government office, JICA, and the Bali government, the SDGs Centre publishes extensively on financial sustainability and environment. Upcoming events include an international conference with Curtin University in February 2025.

**Lok Boon Thian, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Taylors University, Malaysia**

Lok Boon shared that Taylor's University emphasizes purpose-led learning through its Impact Labs, part of the 2030 agenda, focusing on clean technology, digital transformation, the environment and many more. The Lab's integrated approach involves experts from various disciplines, with the assistance of numerous companies, NGOs, and individuals. The research produced has been integrated into most of the bachelors programmes in the university.

**Pornchai Mongkhonvanit, President, Siam University**

Pornchai Mongkhonvanit shared that Siam University aims to transform higher education by encouraging students to think freely on all topics and engage with communities on SDG-related projects. The holistic approach to education emphasizes the use of SDGs as a tool for transformation and seeks collaborations to use the community as a living lab and to facilitate this educational transformation.

**Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN**

Jeffrey Sachs reacted by stating that we will not achieve the SDGs in 2030. But we are urging for seeing the framework as incredibly valuable and maintain the SDG framework until the mid century. He proceeded to state that governments do not operate the same as how universities do. Universities study problems, test solutions and be transparent about results. Governments operate to maintain power or manage programs, not the same kind of systematic problem solving institutions. Universities thus present great opportunities for problem solving however need to connect with the private sector and government to scale such initiatives.

**Elisabeth Rukmini, Vice Rector, Universitas Pembangunan Jaya (UPJ), Republic of Indonesia**

Elisabeth Rukmini shared that UPJ plans to establish a master's program in urban transformation with a focus on sustainability. Such a meeting is elemental and is key in creating such a new era of education. Collaboration among universities is crucial, especially for small and medium-sized institutions requiring cooperation and exposure.

**Kevin Dunn, Provost, Western Sydney University, Commonwealth of Australia**

Kevin Dunn shared that the University has reached carbon neutrality and wants to reach nature positivity in 2030. Universities have the capacity to look beyond 2030. No new goals but judicial supplementation to the goals- neglect of gender diversity, disability and importance of rise of AI and free access of data and knowledge.

**Pongruk Sribanditmongkol, President, Chiang Mai University, Kingdom of Thailand**

Pongruk Sribanditmongkol shared that Chiang Mai University mobilizes students to work with local governments on SDG projects. Thai universities focus on specific goals that align with their strengths. Sribanditmongkol proposed a social lab for universities to work together and facilitate journeys to reach carbon neutrality. This would facilitate collaboration and help scale sustainable projects to government levels.



# 2024 University Presidents Meeting Summary

## Africa

Thursday, 16 May 2024

### Welcome Remarks

#### Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN

Jeffrey Sachs remarked how university leaders and policy leaders across the African continent are engaging in discussions organized by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a UN-based organization established in 2012 to support the Sustainable Development Goals. The network now includes almost 1,900 universities worldwide. Universities play a crucial role in achieving sustainability through cross-disciplinary initiatives. The series of calls, which includes meetings with Eurasia, East Asia and Pacific, Africa, and the Americas, highlights how universities are creating and transforming programs with focuses on sustainability.

Sachs called attention to the importance of African universities in achieving economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Education, particularly higher education, is essential for training scientists, engineers, political leaders, and teachers. The future of Africa's economic development depends on strong universities and universal secondary education, with many advancing to tertiary education.

He described SDSN's aim to support African universities by fostering partnerships with institutions globally, enhancing online connectivity, and providing access to courses and degrees to accelerate economic development. The goal is to present a unified statement from university leaders at the upcoming United Nations Summit of the Future in September, emphasizing the critical role of universities in economic prosperity, social justice, and innovation. He reminded that these meetings of distinguished speakers and leaders from various sectors and regions, will help produce a draft statement that will be prepared based on the week's discussions for further consideration by the university leaders.

### Keynote Address

#### Vera Songwe, Former Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commissions for Africa

Vera Songwe, the former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, addressed the current tensions on university campuses globally and reflected on the role of universities in discussions about development. She noted the historical context of university involvement in economic and development issues and emphasized the impact of technology in enhancing global awareness.

Songwe expressed her vision for universities to develop advanced climate and mineral resource models, leveraging AI to map resources effectively. She highlighted the need for adequate funding for universities

to achieve these goals and stressed the importance of retaining talented individuals within African universities. To ensure that the best and the brightest stay within African universities, she proposed the creation of partnerships between African institutions and the diaspora, citing the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) as a successful example of international collaboration.

She mentioned the SDSN's upcoming Summit for the Future, which will address debt constraints and financial structures, and called for creating associations that include universities in these discussions. Songwe acknowledged the strong interest in cross-collaboration and thanked the participants for their engagement.

#### **Address**

#### **Beatrice Inyangala, Principal Secretary, State Department for Higher Education and Research, Ministry of Education, Kenya on behalf of Ezekiel Machogu, Minister, Ministry of Education, Republic of Kenya**

Beatrice Inyangala, representing Ezekiel Machogu, Minister of Education for Kenya, remarked on the progress of universities in achieving Sustainable Development Goals through research and innovation. She celebrated the significant milestones in economic development, climate adaptation, and sustainability that Kenyan universities have prioritized, particularly the green agenda, exemplified by Kenya's initiative to plant 50 million trees. Universities are setting targets for the next decade, working with schools and communities to achieve these goals.

She mentioned the transformative role of technology in communication and research, enabling universities to explore emerging technologies. Inyangala noted Africa's projected population boom and highlighted the importance of supporting youth in their efforts to harness natural resources sustainably. Universities are adapting their curricula to include SDGs, fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Inyangala concluded with a quote about leadership: "Before you are a leader, success is about yourself. When you become a leader, success is about growing others." Inyangala stressed the difficult task ahead and called for collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as the international community. She shared the importance of empowering youth to unlock their potential and rise to the challenges of sustainable development.

#### **Claudette Irere, Minister of State for Education, Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda**

Claudette Irere emphasized that achieving and contributing to the global 2030 Agenda is a collective goal, with universities playing a pivotal role in both national and international development. For Claudette, the significance and responsibility of universities extend beyond education, as they align academic, economic, research, and other stakeholders to address local challenges effectively and contribute to the advancement of sustainable development and economic advancement.

Drawing from examples in her home country, Rwanda, she explained how international investments, research projects, student exchanges, and innovative educational methodologies have substantially enhanced the national workforce, driving significant economic and social progress. She also highlighted the importance of partnerships between universities through an example of a collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University to establish the African branch. This collaboration has produced remarkable outcomes, including graduates entering green jobs, an increase in entrepreneurial ventures, and advancement in social responsibility, examples that highlight the importance of SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals, to achieve the rest of the Agenda. She also called on universities not to underestimate their relevance and contributions to the human capital, knowledge economy, and internationalization of local

universities. For this, Claudette reminded university presidents that universities need to be agile in their response to the requirements of the 21st century to ensure they are up to date and offer the necessary steps for economic transition. Lastly, to finalize, the minister reaffirmed the need for funding and international cooperation for this transition, declaring the power of universities despite the challenges.

### **University President Speeches**

#### **Flavia Senkubuge, Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Pretoria, Republic of South Africa**

Flavia Senkubuge, Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria in the Republic of South Africa, commenced her speech by recalling the importance of universities and SDSN in catalyzing action for a sustainable future and, specifically, by providing a multi-stakeholder approach where businesses, civil society, governments and more are working together to achieve our common agenda.

Senkubuge presented four goals universities should keep in mind to advance sustainable Development. Firstly, she reminded participants of the importance of ensuring that youth are at the forefront of addressing sustainability challenges, as they are essential in shaping the future and acting as catalysts for creativity and innovation. Additionally, she recalled the need to embed sustainability into higher education by leveraging universities as centers of innovation and research to play a crucial role in this effort. Then, she affirmed the relevance of mobilizing collaboration and partnerships, which are vital for achieving sustainability goals. Lastly, she highlighted the need to equip individuals, specifically students, with the necessary skills and abilities to tackle today's challenges and drive action.

She provided examples of how her university achieves these goals by directly collaborating with SDSN in the [Universities x Goal 13 initiative](#) or through the [Global Master's in Development](#). She also mentioned other examples of multidisciplinary approaches where they incorporated leadership and development modules in their curricula and reporting mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of specific actions. To conclude her intervention, Senkubuge called upon participants to establish collective action for a sustainable world. In her words, "Together, we should rise to the challenges of sustainability and promote a prosperous and sustainable world."

#### **Rhoda Wanyenze on behalf of Barnabas Nawangwe, Vice-Chancellor, Makerere University, Republic of Uganda**

Rhoda Wanyenze highlighted the ongoing challenges and opportunities as society recovers from the lasting effects of COVID-19. She emphasized Makerere University's commitment to contributing to societal improvement through various initiatives aimed at integrating sustainability and commitment to the Paris Agreement. Since hosting the SDSN network in 2019, the university has mobilized other institutions to focus on critical areas such as food systems, health, natural resources, renewable energy, and sustainable cities.

She discussed the university's efforts to localize governance and involve local actors, reorient teaching methodologies, and modify curriculum to include content related to sustainability. The Center for Sustainable Health at Makerere University, which examines health within planetary boundaries, has established partnerships with other African universities as well.

Wanyenze stressed the importance of leadership and innovative outlooks in developing and activating solutions, which is addressed through the university's courses. Makerere University has developed tools for action in areas facing challenges and focuses on data visualization and communication. She called for more equitable partnerships and interdisciplinary collaboration, as they are key areas of focus despite cultural and methodological differences in research.

After sharing that the university's living laboratories provide students with opportunities to engage with communities and create relevant solutions, she went on to highlight the challenges of mobilizing large institutions with diverse disciplines and engaging young people. The university is also participating in global conversations about the role of academic institutions in health, later this month on May 29th. The aim is to drive change through technology and innovative systems, addressing these issues as part of their ongoing efforts to achieve their goals.

**Labode Popoola, Former Vice-Chancellor of Osun State University; Executive Secretary-CEO of African Forest Forum and Professor, University of Ibadan, Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Labode Popoola recalled the progress of the SDGs in recent years, explaining that it looked promising and even though we've reached a point where it seems hopeless due to the examples of climate devastation, political challenges, and more, we shouldn't lose hope. He admitted the difficulties in controlling these aspects but encouraged participants not to give up. In this regard, he reminded everyone how universities hold the ace and must work together to address these challenges by being "solutions creators," going beyond the criticism and focusing on creating effective policies. Popoola emphasized the acceptance of the realities of universities, such as the lack of funding. As a solution, he proposed the necessity of building partnerships that adapt to each country's national realities and involve the governments, civil society, philanthropy, students, and more, as with a government-only approach, it won't be possible to fund education. As an example, he presented the center of sustainable development they created in his university, where they help youth develop the necessary skills to advance the 2030 Agenda. He concluded with a plea for universities to encourage them to form multi-stakeholder partnerships and work on SDG 17, as this is the only solution to achieve sustainable development.

**Open Discussion with University Presidents**

**Philip Cotton, Vice Chancellor, University of Global Health Equity (UGHE), Republic of Rwanda**

Philip Cotton stressed the importance of multidisciplinary approaches and the great potential of strong relationships and partnerships in successfully achieving goals. He highlighted UGHE's aim to quadruple the number of healthcare professionals and discussed the university's efforts in scaling its impact. Some of his key points included that 70% of UGHE's students are female and that the staff is predominantly local, therefore the university supports local enterprises, which have thrived and expanded beyond the university. Additionally, UGHE has established Centers for Surgery and is about to open a center for immersive technology, reflecting a growing interest in AI.

Cotton stressed the importance of fair assessment, noting that a recent injustice has been the lack of credibility in assessments. He quoted Nelson Mandela, saying, "Education is the greatest weapon," but cautioned that this weapon should not be placed in the wrong hands. He shared the university's commitment to fair and credible assessments as their current focus.

**Ahmed Djabélession Toure, President, Université Gemini Mali, Republic of Mali**

Ahmed Djabélession Toure shared Africa's exposure and vulnerability to the consequences of climate change and the measures taken by international groups to address these issues and share them across the continent. He emphasized the university's contributions to the 2030 Agenda through initiatives that have been distributed across several university centers in Mali. These initiatives focus on the transformation of raw materials into products, such as food stocks, to combat malnutrition using local resources. The university also offers programs in solar power, dust energies, logistics transformation, and



soil studies to improve agricultural practices and soil fertility, promoting sustainable development. Practical applications, such as seed production, biosphere reservoir actions, and more specific innovations, showed the university's commitment to real, hands-on change.

Université Gemini Mali is using and applying real actions, not just discussing in meetings or saying the right words. According to Toure, they pride themselves on being onsite with their students, and seeing firsthand how they are transforming soil, knowledge, and actions with the chance to create real change in west Africa. Toure highlighted the importance of partnerships and collaborations with other universities, which have allowed students to learn about and apply advanced irrigation systems and local product transformation techniques to achieve food security and avoid malnourishment. He proposed regular bi-monthly meetings among university presidents, similar to this one, in order to share opportunities and experiences and to foster collaboration to drive Africa's development forward.

#### **Félicien Avlessi, Rector, Université D'Abomey-Calavi, Republic of Benin**

Félicien Avlessi shared initiatives aimed at innovating and accelerating the accomplishment of the SDGs. He mentioned ongoing collaborations with governments and international partners, including Indonesia and Senegal, which have extended beyond initial expectations. Despite facing numerous challenges, significant progress has been made in reinforcing these objectives. The university has focused on cooperation and research in SDG innovation, believing that universities play a crucial role in societal transition and leadership development with justice in mind. This work aligns with the interests of investors in sustainability, and the network supports local, national, and international organizations in advancing sustainable development. Avlessi emphasized the importance of evaluating different impacts to improve these initiatives. He expressed confidence that through these efforts, Benin can achieve a better future, outlining his plans and ongoing efforts to promote sustainability in 2024.

#### **Bedilu Teka, Acting President, Mattu University, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

Bedilu Teka shared that many Ethiopian universities are already integrating sustainability and community agendas into their curricula, directly contributing to SDGs. Despite this, he admitted that Africa still lags behind, partly because the continent must leverage its universities, which are hubs of knowledge, to back up the SDGs and address issues like equality and education. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of mitigating global warming and moving away from traditional farming methods to achieve sustainable development, as in his university, where they completed efforts in agricultural advancement. Teka also shared that the university collaborates with international institutions to digitalize the educational system, aiming to address the large uneducated secondary school population through hybrid learning models. Teka concluded that partnerships between African and Northern universities, specifically facilitated through academic mobility, are crucial for advancing the global agenda and achieving more effective collaborations.

#### **Robert Ridley, Vice Chancellor of Unicaf University in Malawi, Republic of Malawi**

Robert Ridley emphasized the importance of online teaching as it can significantly upgrade the qualifications of existing teachers from the scientific level to diploma or degree levels, aligning with Malawi's Ministry of Education goals. In this regard, Unicaf University is actively seeking scholarships and financing to support this initiative and applying similar approaches across other educational levels. Secondly, Ridley stressed the importance of scaling up higher education, research, and innovation. In his view, to have a substantial impact, African universities need to develop their own doctoral programs, increasing the number of doctoral graduates. This growth is essential for advancing innovation and fostering collaborations that bring diverse benefits, including financial support.

**Amadou K. dit Amobo, Institut Universitaire de Formation Professionnelle (IUFP) / Université de Ségou, Republic of Mali**

Amadou drew attention to his university's commitment to bringing education closer to the population. Specifically, Amadou explained how they have initiated new actions and are seeking collaboration with SDSN to bring innovation to the Sahel region. One such initiative involves engaging students to specialize in solar panel manufacturing and installation, aiming to facilitate their integration into the business sector. He also stressed the importance of supporting this sector to enhance its resilience, advocating for the development of local production capabilities through acquiring new inputs and lands and gaining ownership. He also expressed that his university is part of a new logic to embrace a new approach focused on green entrepreneurship, which includes establishing incubators supported by workshops, teachers, and professors. In his view, adapting training models is crucial to achieving their goals, and partnerships with local NGOs are seen as instrumental in this endeavor as they will lead to advancing initiatives and achieving sustainable development goals.

**Mbengu David Nyiawung, Dean, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Republic of Cameroon**

Mbengu David Nyiawung addressed the issue of African universities being highly criticized compared to other regions and expressed his frustration over training students without insufficient job opportunities. To address the challenges, his university is leveraging innovation by implementing solutions in various aspects of the SDGs, such as agricultural development and domestic violence issues. Nyiawung also emphasized the need for centralized networks in every region. He suggested that universities would function more effectively as part of such networks, which could help address systemic challenges within individual institutions. This approach could help bridge the gap between training and employment opportunities for students while enhancing the effectiveness of universities in driving innovation and addressing societal challenges.

**François Kamano, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, former focal point of SDSN in Guinea**

François Kamano highlighted Guinea's efforts to engage students in the SDGs through a dedicated platform. Recognizing a lack of awareness among students about the SDGs, they launched a survey to assess their understanding, revealing that many had never heard of them. As he explained, this served as justification for maximizing actions such as workshops and conferences to expose students to the SDGs and empower them to take action at the country level.

**Waceke Wanjohi, acting Vice Chancellor at Kenyatta University, Republic of Kenya**

Waceke Wanjohi, Acting Vice Chancellor at Kenyatta University, highlighted numerous initiatives by the School of Environmental Studies to mitigate climate change, including hosting the [UNESCO chair on higher education development for green economies and sustainability](#). Additionally, conversations have been initiated with UNESCO to establish a center that coordinates matters related to sustainability education. As Waceke explained, these efforts underscore the university's commitment to addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainability both locally and globally.

**Mbengu Nyiawung, Dean, Protestant University of Central Africa, Republic of Cameroon**

Mbengu Nyiawung began by emphasizing the contributions of the Protestant University of Central Africa to gender equality and equity. He advocated for universities to focus on SDGs where they can make tangible impacts, rather than merely discussing without action. He urged universities to identify SDGs

most relevant to their region or context and to conduct research that produces actionable results. He highlighted the effectiveness of developing skills and finding talent in order to achieve these objectives.

**Peninah Aloo-Obudho, Vice-Chancellor, Maasai Mara University, Republic of Kenya**

Peninah Aloo-Obudho shared about initiatives such as water recycling to utilize wastewater for plant irrigation. She also described how Maasai Mara University is reducing its dependence on charcoal on campus with the aim of halting the use of charcoal completely in the near future. The university collaborates with the county government on various climate mitigation and conservation activities. Aloo-Obudho concluded by emphasizing the importance of incorporating global citizenship into the university's curriculum in order to make sustainability education more mainstream.

**Paul Mapfumo, Vice-chancellor, University of Zimbabwe, Republic of Zimbabwe**

Paul Mapfumo shared that as a founding university in Zimbabwe, the University of Zimbabwe introduced new programs aligned with the SDGs and commitment to address the challenges of the 21st century. The university's response goes beyond acknowledging the importance of the SDGs; it also assesses their relevance and hosts various UN agendas. Collaborations with faculties and partners focus on addressing the SDGs, making them central to teaching, learning, innovation, and industrialization. There's a new emphasis on science and technology to provide innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs.

**Jouhaina Gherib, President, University of Manouba, Republic of Tunisia**

Jouhaina Gherib began his intervention by emphasizing the importance of African directors coming together to learn and address common challenges related to sustainable development. She highlighted the University of Manouba role in a working group on sustainable development and noted significant progress observed since 2022. Jouhaina expressed openness to partnerships and recognized the significance of the 2030 Agenda. While acknowledging the unique contexts of each university, she emphasized the collective potential for faster progress through collaboration. A new program focusing on higher knowledge and sustainable development in Africa is set to launch, aiming to address common problems such as unemployment and harness the talent in the region. She concluded by stressing the importance of Africa's voice being heard on the global stage, which would benefit not only the continent but also other continents.

**Hazem Saleh, Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, Menoufia University, Arab Republic of Egypt**

Hazem Saleh referred to the interconnectedness of African universities as part of a larger family. He highlighted the diverse roles that universities can play at local, regional, national, and international levels. Saleh stressed the importance of utilizing the limited time with students to instill internal models for sustainability and promote knowledge dissemination through appropriate curriculum. Menoufia University has contributed to the SDGs through initiatives like the development of the largest solar production hub in the world and the implementation of water reclamation plans to address water stress. In addition to aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals, these efforts feed the economy as students become young working people. Finally, he believes in adopting the correct curriculum to prepare individuals capable of engaging in local and international partnerships, emphasizing the role of education in fostering collaboration and utilizing available resources such as water.

**Adenike Akinsemolu, Director, The Green Institute, Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Adenike Akinsemolu introduced initiatives in sustainability education at the Green Institute. The institute has created an undergraduate degree course focused on sustainability. Believing that sustainable

practices should start from early childhood, they train both students and primary educators, using comic books with local superheroes to promote youth engagement in community activities. The institute has received funding from National Geographic for secondary school programs, such as the Trash Education Program, which incentivizes students with points for bringing in trash. Accumulated points can be used for additional courses and learning materials. Successful alumni have moved on to careers in politics and with the UN. He expressed openness to collaboration with other universities across Africa.

**Nico Elema, Director of Centre for Collaboration in Africa, Stellenbosch University, *on behalf of the Rector, Republic of South Africa***

Nico Elema contemplated on the role of Stellenbosch University in advancing the SDGs. He emphasized the need to consider Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, alongside the SDGs and Agenda 2030. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of aligning objectives with both agendas to address continental specifics not captured within the SDGs, particularly those relevant to Africa. He stressed that it is not a matter of focusing on one agenda over the other, but rather pursuing both simultaneously.

**Florence Obi, First Vice-Chancellor, University of Calabar, Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Florence Obi shared several key initiatives at the second-generation university in southern Nigeria. The university has established a climate innovation center in partnership with Plymouth University in the UK, aiming to bridge the gap between the university, government, and local communities. They are actively addressing gender issues, particularly sexual abuse, through a gender center on campus and a gender-friendly policy supported by the UN Women entity. Additionally, the university is exploring plastic recycling initiatives to tackle plastic waste, seeking partnerships with even more NGOs and the French embassy as well. He expressed pride in their accomplishments and mentioned plans to circulate a report detailing their initiatives.

**Femi Oyenini, Network Manager SDSN Nigeria and Ngozi Odiaka, Co-Chair SDSN Nigeria, Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Recalling the importance of taking local action in the respective countries of the participants, both Femi Oyenini and Ngozi Odiaka from [SDSN Nigeria](#) discussed their work and encouraged participants to [reach out to them](#) to collaborate for common goals of sustainable development. Specifically, Ms. Odiaka also referred to the Conference on Sustainable Development which is being celebrated in August 2024 and they are preparing where participants will be able to share their thoughts and ideas on the best ways to address the SDGs with common solutions.



# 2024 University Presidents Meeting Summary

## Americas

Tuesday, 21 May 2024

### Welcome Remarks

#### Jeffrey Sachs, President, SDSN

Jeffrey Sachs shared that SDSN has already held several UPM discussions worldwide, organized according to time zones, in Africa, Asia, Oceania and Europe. Universities are engaged with the SDGs all around the world, but the challenges to achieve the SDGs are huge. Universities have an indispensable role because our governments will not be able to reach all the goals unless universities do their part in a highly creative and innovative way. Building on science and technology, training young people, and empowering young people so they address these challenges. A special mention was made to universities in the United States where it's been a hard year and to the U.S. government that has shown no interest in the SDGs, nor has even presented a VNR yet. There is urgency but the federal government is not reacting.

Sachs shared his realization from the previous three UPMs was that universities have a major responsibility and a unique role when it comes to bringing systematic knowledge that can view the SDGs in a holistic way. Universities can think in the long-term and are fundamentally intergenerational institutions and can empower the rising generations.

The purpose of the University Presidents Meeting, according to Sachs, is first to convene university colleagues, and second to hear what universities are doing in terms of sustainable development. Lastly, the objective is also to brainstorm together about the central challenge facing the 8 billion people on the planet: how to live sustainably.

Sachs invited university presidents to issue a Statement of University Presidents for the Summit of the Future. The [Summit of the Future](#) will be hosted by the United Nations on 21 and 22 September 2024, to discuss the future of multilateralism in the 21st century. Universities are natural leaders in the quest for a truly multilateral world based on peace, cooperation, international law, sustainable development, and global learning and ethics. SDSN has already produced a set of [Recommendations](#) for the Summit of the Future that is included in this year's Sustainable Development Report (SDR), as well as a [Statement](#) by University Leaders in Support of The Summit of the Future.

### Keynote Address

#### Mia Mottley, Prime Minister, Barbados

Mia Mottley began by highlighting her regional and global leadership and her work guaranteeing free higher education in Barbados. The Prime Minister worked to maintain a free tertiary education at the University of West Indies, post-secondary institutions, community colleges, and other institutions, approaching education as an investment and guaranteeing that people can fight poverty and be global citizens.

Mottley thanked Sachs for creating a platform to share a different perspective, informing that the global financial architecture has been one of the most rigid and inflexible frameworks to deal with while Barbados was becoming an independent nation. When the Bretton Woods institutions were formed, Caribbean and African countries were not independent states except Ethiopia. She went on to express that if there is no special and differential treatment for African and Caribbean countries, they have no capacity to distort global trade in goods and services.

Mottley shared that together with the Secretary General of UNCTAD (United Nations Trade and Development), Rebecca Grynspan, and the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, she opened the first Global Supply Chains Conference Forum in Barbados, being the smallest country to host the event. The Caribbean is one of the most expensive regions in the world for transport and insurance, remaining a region affected on both sides by the movements of goods from the Suez Canal to the Panama Canal. Thus, considering all these aspects, the Prime Minister affirmed that the ability to develop a resilient economy, people, and system is imperative. Reflecting on achieving 1.5° Celsius on global average surface warming and how 1.48°C was already achieved, the Prime Minister asked to ponder on who will suffer the consequences of climate change and how come we are not seeing the liberation of funds to work on it yet. Beyond funds, it is necessary to deal with feasibility studies, project preparation, procurement, project execution, and risk along the way. Prime Minister Mottley pointed out that the flow of financial and human capital skills is necessary to achieve growth and development.

She went on to share about Barbados' natural disaster clauses accepted by the World Bank, development banks, the United Kingdom, and others, which proposed that if a country is hit by a natural disaster, they can stop their loan payments for two years, freeing 20% of their liquidity while keeping the lender whole, simply extending the loan. Barbados was successful in its advocacy, leading the way to establishing resilience and the Sustainability Trust of the IMF, helping climate-vulnerable countries. The North Atlantic countries have said that there is not enough public money, but the truth is that the deficit is in a number of countries, and this is accepted. In this case, we have all of the reasons to create new organizing principles for how the World Bank is structured regarding its mission. Reconstructing it in a way that eliminates poverty and builds prosperity on a livable planet.

Reflecting on the difficulty in mobilizing funds, Prime Minister Mottley asked how we can develop an organizing principle for the collection of revenue that is not dependent on the individual nation-state. Co-chairing a group with French and Kenyan heads of state, they have been exploring the options. Also, reflecting on the International Maritime Organization, which shares 1% of its USD \$7 trillion in value, she asks how we can protect our climate and biodiversity. Also, how do we prepare for the next pandemic? How do we ensure the victims of fragility and war conflict are appropriately given a new start? How do we ensure food and water security? And lastly, how do we prevent the digital divide? If there were funding on a recurring basis, we would be able to meet these global challenges and have different results in the world today. Barbados' Prime Minister finished by reflecting on the protection of global goods, the creation of a community, and the capacity to identify what is necessary financially and human-wise.

#### **Address**

**María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, Former President UNGA & Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Republic of Ecuador**

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés reflected on how throughout history, universities have always upheld the pursuit of knowledge and the free exercise of reason, and this has been fundamental to build human society. However, universities are not only producers of information, but are also called to shape well

rounded citizens who act for the good of all. Universities are called to generate knowledge that reads, explains and provides alternatives for the challenges faced by humanity. The challenge is adapting to a volatile and changing world, explaining the present and forecasting the future, with rigor and imagination at the same time. She mentioned that there is also a profound disenchantment with democracies and institutions, including the UN.

Universities have had a critical role in every meaningful international governance decision – the SDGs are an example – and have helped policy makers take informed decisions. Beyond education, universities shape public discourse, influence decisions, and empower the next generations of agents of societal transformation. The role of the SDSN networks has been remarkable in this front.

The current [draft of the Pact of the Future](#) emphasizes that access to education opportunities is key for young people to reach their potential. She concluded with 4 key words that can help us rethink how we do research, produce evidence, propose regulation and policy shifts: (1) We should embrace Complexity – and universities, with their cross-disciplinary capacity, are well positioned to connect science with policy, to connect communities of knowledge with communities of practice; (2) Subsidiarity, as decision-making should happen at all levels – and here, universities can engage with communities, local governments, civil society and other key actors to promote solidarity-based cooperation; (3) Prevention, as we need to move beyond reactive and damage-control mode regarding the crises we face, and develop better analysis and foresight to prevent them – and universities can invest more in forecast and future scenarios; (4) Human security and self-preservation, as our capacity to destroy seems stronger than the one to prevent or restore – and here universities can refocus their research and educational initiatives to ensure all humans live peacefully and free from fear.

She ended by stating that the people-centered approach is key to address the structural causes of global challenges. With the spread of AI and amidst misinformation and fake news, we should double down on human intelligence and truth telling. The place where this happens is at universities.

#### **Elkin Velásquez, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, UN-Habitat**

Elkin Velásquez conveyed how this regional gathering is relevant at this critical moment as it brings leaders together to discuss how our global agendas are defined by multilateralism. Human rights and climate change are interconnected, and this is being recognized on the global stage. In tackling these challenges, there are many possibilities to work together, not just through multilateralism of member states, but through “polar-lateralism”: joining together based on shared challenges, and bringing together all sectors to find solutions and regional public goods. This can be transformative regionally, if cities come together to generate new public goods and take action on them. This will only be possible through adapting the SDG framework to the realities and contexts of local settings - not just working between member states, but between local authorities and municipalities. Using the example of the Amazon region, he shared that solutions that are presented for some cities do not apply equally to others. Solutions need to be developed together, not just from a top down approach. Advancing localization depends on this kind of collaboration and buy-in.

#### **José Cruz-Osorio, Manager, Regional Hub for UNDP Latin America and the Caribbean**

José Cruz-Osorio stated that this is precisely the kind of partnership and collective commitment needed to meet the challenge of the current moment. Ambition is necessary to achieve the SDGs and build peaceful and equitable societies and the problem is keeping our word and making it happen. The SDGs are off track, and this does not speak well for humanity. Universities are the training ground for our decision makers globally and aggregate systematic knowledge, making them essential to collecting data,

creating public policy, finding solutions, and making investment solutions necessary for achieving the 2030 Agenda and curbing climate change. To stay below the 1.5 degrees celsius requires systematic knowledge that allows us to conceive technical solutions and knowledge and curb emissions. This may seem like an impossible task, but universities are the solution.

### **University President Speeches**

#### **Rector, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Federative Republic of Brazil**

This meeting is essential for discussing the role of universities in contributing to a more just and sustainable world. Currently, hundreds of people in the Southern Region of Brazil are experiencing flooding due to climate change. The region is also affected by a lack of water. These challenges are especially harmful to historically vulnerable and marginalized people in society. Researchers and civil society are essential in finding solutions to these problems. Universities are trying to give scholarships and allow for those who are historically marginalized to take part in the solutions process.

Pope Francis called for the Climate Conference to be a turning point in the climate crisis, and for action to be taken to assist the countries who contributed least to climate change but are being affected the most by it. Universities play a crucial role as centers of thought and innovation. They should be the leaders in promoting the interconnections between nature, social justice, and sustainability.

#### **Sophie D' Amours, Rector, Laval University, Canada**

Sophie D' Amours stated that this time is marked by change and challenges, including those around climate change, political unrest, and new technologies. Fortunately, universities have a pivotal role in developing solutions by championing the SDGs in teaching and research being key. This can move the agenda forward locally, regionally, and globally. Conditions must be created for community members and citizens to embrace these goals.

In the fight against climate change, universities need to promote learning, foster innovation, and promote interdisciplinary programs. Climate change can be tackled by bringing together policy, science, health and other fields. A commitment to democratizing education needs to be extended to lifelong learning opportunities. D' Amours also conveyed that there is a need to invest in students and research, and train citizens who can then propose solutions to complex challenges. A culture of combating climate change must be embedded throughout universities; not just in teaching and research, but also in administration and partnerships. It is crucial to engage in dialogue with communities, honor academic freedom, and allow for debate and freedom of expression. Community involvement is essential for transforming universities into living labs. University and NGO partnerships can be used for impactful solutions to SDG challenges.

#### **Ignacio Sánchez Díaz, Rector, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Republic of Chile**

Ignacio Sánchez Díaz stated that at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, a range of activities are taking place to promote sustainability across operations, academia, and research. The university has implemented waste reduction and recycling systems on campus. Additionally, a significant number of green offices promote zero waste habits. Diaz continued by stating it is essential that sustainability be incorporated into teaching and research. Science, academia, citizenship, and governance are all important themes for students to take away from their time at universities. Therefore, the entire community was brought in for climate planning. University leadership must work to lead the community by example, both minimizing emissions and creating a culture at the university that is more sustainable overall.



**Justin Handsford, Director, Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center, Howard University & Member of UN Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, United States of America**

Justin Handsford began by stating that Howard University, as a Historically Black College/University (HBCU), has a deep investment in the implementation of the SDG agenda, especially reducing inequalities worldwide. In a report released by [SDSN USA](#), “In The Red”, led by Dr. Helen Bond (Co-Chair of SDSN USA), the SDGs and inequality are explored in the US context. This was done using disaggregated data. Disaggregated data collection is also a core mission of the UN Forum, where it is being collected and used to inform public policy. When paired with the lens of the SDGs, this can create a holistic approach. Other efforts, like VLRs, are helpful but do not take the lens of historical inequity or racial disparity and this is therefore underreported. Through this work and the work of the Black Audit Project, results were used to help form partnerships with communities, local organizations, and civil society which adds life to the numbers. This can be used to have conversations about the root problems and lead to grassroots solutions under the banner of “Nothing About Us Without Us”. This is now extending beyond the US to local universities across the Americas.

**Open Discussion with University Presidents**

**Clive Landis, University of the West Indies, Vice Chancellor and Principal in Barbados on behalf of Vice-Chancellor Hilary Beckles, Jamaica**

Clive Landis expressed support of the Barbados' Prime Minister's speech, and highlighted the position the United States has taken on not reporting on the SDGs, especially considering that the United Nations headquarters is in New York. Landis continued by stating that almost all universities, institutions and countries are gearing themselves up to achieve the SDGs. To further lead on SDG 13 Climate Action, the University of West Indies is creating a new school, called the International School for Development Justice, aligning itself with the seventeen SDGs. Receiving funds from the Inter-American Development Bank, with online master's degree programs and short training courses of postgraduate nature for each of the development goals, the school is planned to be launched in September.

**Kevin Brown, President, University of Technology, Jamaica**

With the University of Technology in Jamaica already recognizing the importance of the SDGs, Kevin Brown posed the question of how to take practical steps to immerse institutions in all that the SDGs have to offer beyond just the academic programs. He also commented on the establishment of a center for sustainable energy and innovation to observe issues related to climate change and find alternatives to development and innovations. Brown spoke about the challenges of funding, specially for small island states, and how it causes several constraints to their possible initiatives. He observed that in developed countries, it is easier to move faster in activities related to the SDGs as they have funds for researchers and apply them, however, in Jamaica funding is an issue that needs to be solved as there is great desire to work on the issues around the SDGs.

**Raquel Bernal, President, University of the Andes, Republic of Colombia**

Raquel Bernal proposed a collaboration where universities would run a yearly survey to understand how communities are doing in terms of sustainability. In conjunction with the Tec de Monterrey and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, the idea is to create a survey to try to understand what their communities know and understand about the SDGs. The Andes University of the Andes has resources to develop the project and invites other universities that are interested to be included.

**Miguel Ruiz Cabañas Izquierdo, SDSN Mexico Co-Chair, on behalf of David Garza, Rector, Tecnológico de Monterrey**

Miguel Ruiz Cabañas Izquierdo shared that their institution focuses on teaching and research on sustainability. The university is also increasing its network and collaborating with the University of Andes and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. Ruiz reminded the participants of the Summit of the Future as an opportunity for all universities in our region to raise their voices and show their concerns for the state of the world.

**Taylor Ricketts, University of Vermont, United States of America**

Taylor Ricketts asked fellow participants about strong examples and their successful experiences to address the SDGs in their policy and administration arenas. Ricketts proposed the idea of compiling a set of examples and identifying solutions to serve as inspiration for universities' knowledge application.

**Juliano Manoel Braga on behalf of Gisélle (Maranhão) Lins, Rector, Nilton Lins University, Amazônia, Federative Republic of Brazil**

Juliano Manoel Braga highlighted the university's mission to educate Amazonian citizens since the late 80s and concluded by sharing that the university is open to developing new projects related to sustainability and is constantly working on mobility, a request from the Brazilian Ministry of Education.

**Virgilio Viana, Chair, SDSN Amazonia, Foundation for Amazon Sustainability, Federative Republic of Brazil**

Virgilio Viana shared that the Foundation for Amazon Sustainability has a new partnership with the Business School of Latin America to develop a high-level executive education program, including a visit to the Amazon Forest, bringing decision makers to the forest, a distant reality for them considering the distance between the Amazon forest and the major cities. Virgilio also highlighted the need to add sustainability in school curriculums from kindergarten to highschool, including the SDGs.

**Julián Esteban Rodríguez, President, Austral University, Republic of Argentina**

Julián Esteban Rodríguez reflected on how awareness of sustainability can contribute to the SDGs, adding the importance of youth in achieving the goals, believing that the best solutions will come from this group.

**Cláudia Costa, Universidade Estadual do Maranhão, Federative Republic of Brazil**

Claudia Costa shared how the State University of Maranhão has institutionalized the 2030 Agenda. The teaching, research, extension, and administration parts of the university are aligned with the SDGs. The UEMA has a social, political, and economic responsibility with the SDGs. In 2021, the special advisor for the articulation of the SDGs agenda was nominated to conduct the articulation of all sectors of the University, understanding UEMA's role on social, economic, and environmental impacts. In 2022, the Institutional Development Plan was aligned with the SDGs. The university is constantly working to increase partnerships.

**Oscar Molina-Tejerina, Pro-Rector, Bolivian Private University, Plurinational State of Bolivia**

Oscar Molina-Tejerina shared the work of SDSN Bolivia, particularly that it is currently working on a program of sustainable tourism. The network also has programs in waste management and resources. He suggested the need to work together with other countries and universities to achieve the SDGs.