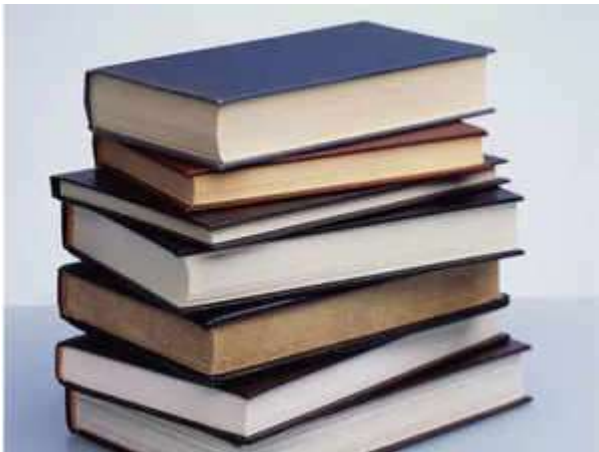


Can institutions of higher learning help in creating a sustainable future?

International collaborations between academics, researchers, global institutions and non-profit foundations engaged in study and practice on related areas, can increase the potential to study previously unexplored approaches, and potential funding sources for research and initiatives related to sustainability.

ET CONTRIBUTORS|

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Representative Image

By C Raj Kumar

Institutions can be developed and nurtured as world-class educational centres only when all the stakeholders of a university — students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni — in addition to relevant government agencies and departments, institutional partners and collaborators, potential donors and partners, local communities and other stakeholders become active participants in its evolution. We need to contemplate how education and [institutions of higher learning](#) can create a [sustainable future](#).

[Universities](#) are the hub of knowledge-creation and awareness, and provide community-driven, multi-disciplinary approach to problem-solving. Higher education institutions, in particular, have a central role to play in achieving a new sense of individual consciousness and intellectual orientation towards creating sustainable futures. Universities can be crucial partners in the initiation of dialogue between regional scholars, academics, policymakers, [researchers](#) and relevant State-level agencies.

International collaborations between academics, researchers, global institutions and non-profit foundations engaged in study and practice on related areas, can increase the potential to study previously unexplored approaches, and potential funding sources for research and initiatives related to sustainability. Specific initiatives could take the form of investing in research that is valuable to local communities, and developing research networks with (in) local communities. Relevant disciplinary areas that could lead, and contribute, to such networks include public policy, law, architecture, journalism, management, environmental studies and the liberal arts. Working in collaboration with local governments is another area for greater exploration by universities and institutional leaders.

Interdisciplinary global networks to include institutional, research and [collaborative partnerships](#) on exchanging institutional and pedagogical best practices, along with transnational dialogues and forums to deliberate and explore new approaches should also be encouraged.

For universities to play an effective role in advancing sustainable local, national, regional and global development, students must be made active stakeholders in existing and future approaches to sustainability. A primary mode of cultivating sustainability consciousness is by grounding relevant themes, issues, challenges and concerns within the curricula. A secondary focus area is to orient teachers to design and teach courses more closely aligned with institutional, national and global sustainability agendas.

Providing institutional incentives for researchers working on long-term sustainability research is another way forward. Educational leaders can prioritise research that may contribute directly to sustainable local and national developmental concerns. This can imply incentivising researchers who choose to work on these areas through greater research support, more institutional funding, adjusting institutional teaching and research responsibilities.

Universities have a greater obligation to accomplish such representation, given the public character of their mission and purpose, and the broad societal goals they commit to achieve. These aims take on greater significance in developing economies like India, given the value that a robust higher education system can add to achieving national developmental goals.

While 21st-century universities must serve as bastions for academic and scholarly work, they must also serve as models of organisational innovation, agility in a complex world, creative negotiation with change, and representative in demographic, identity and design with local and national communities. These are key elements that will determine the preparedness of universities to contribute to building more sustainable futures.

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