EDITORIAL

Accelerate the Implementation of the United Nations Agenda 2030

Prof. Allam Ahmed
Founding President
World Association for Sustainable Development (WASD)
Queen Mary University of London
QMB Innovation Centre, 5 Walden St London E1 2EF
United Kingdom
Email: allam@wasd.org.uk
ORCID: 0000-0002-1494-354X

ABSTRACT

This introductory paper of the special double issue of World Journal of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development (WJSTSD) aims to discuss the key question (practical and theoretical) of how to accelerate the pace of the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SD) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at half-way to the finishing line and achieve SD across the world.

This special double issue entitled *Implementing the United Nations Agenda 2030: progress, challenges and the role of universities,* consists of a selection of the best papers presented during the World Association for Sustainable Development's (WASD) 22nd Annual International Sustainability Conference , held for the second time at the United Nations (UN), Palais des Nations in Geneva, 22-25 July 2024.

In doing so, the paper will provide a summary of the key recommendations from the conference, including the official launch of WASD's major Sustainable Development Goals Universities Initiative (SDGsUNi) and Sustainable Development Goals Experts Directory Initiative (SDGsWho'sWho) interactive and smart digital platforms.

Finally, this paper concludes with a discussion of the public strategic and policy implications of these findings and provides practical recommendations to accelerate the pace of Agenda 2030 and the implementation of its 17 SDGs across the world.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the special double issue of the *World Journal of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development (WJSTSD)* entitled *Implementing the United Nations Agenda 2030: progress, challenges and the role of universities.*

This special double issue consists of a selection of the best papers presented during the World Association for Sustainable Development's (WASD) 22nd Annual International Sustainability Conference , held for the second time at the United Nations (UN), Palais des Nations in Geneva, 22-25 July 2024.

WASD is delighted to have been working very closely with various UN Agencies, such as UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP, WHO, and most specifically with the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) . Both JIU and WASD are inspired by the conviction that the **UN Agenda 2030** for Sustainable Development (SD) and its **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** provide the momentum for renewed UN engagement with the public and private sectors.

Following WASD's successful conference co-organised with the JIU in 2018, and as an expression of a participatory, open and multi-stakeholder approach that underlies Agenda 2030, WASD aimed to pull together a conference that focused on some of the key policies and challenges facing the entire world; it is certainly an exciting, if uncertain, time to hold a conference. In doing so, WASD invited all stakeholders, including universities, to join this global conference to explore innovative strategies, collaborative initiatives, and transformative approaches that empower educational leaders, policy-makers, and stakeholders to accelerate progress towards a sustainable future.

Similar to previous Annual Conferences organised by WASD at the UN, the conference brought together many top experts in the field of SD; these included UN officials, Ministers, company CEOs and directors, university leaders, high government officials and policy-makers, academics, researchers, NGOs, women, youth, etc., and leading individuals and institutions from around the world. The conference therefore acted as a forum that allowed all participants to share experiences, develop innovative approaches, and create partnerships to enhance knowledge sharing and international scientific co-operation.

THEME

The theme of the special double issue was carefully chosen to discuss the theoretical and practical aspects of how to accelerate the pace of the implementation of Agenda 2030 at half-way to its finishing line in the new Digital Transformation (DT) era towards achieving the UN Agenda 2030 for SD and its 17 SDGs. Moreover, DT is a key driver of knowledge creation and economic growth. It empowers individuals, groups and organisations to find solutions to social and economic challenges.

The conference also discussed the vital role of universities in driving forward the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs to achieve SD across the world. The conference was therefore a golden opportunity for all Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (universities, colleges and research institutions) that have played, and continue to play, a key role in transforming their teaching and research for the implementation of the UN Agenda 2023 and its 17 SDGs.

In addition, during the conference, WASD formally launched its major Sustainable Development Goals Universities Initiative (SDGsUNi) and Sustainable Development Goals Who's Who Initiative (SDGsWho'sWho) interactive and smart digital platforms.

CONTENTS

The response to our call-for-papers was very high with more than 156 abstracts and papers submitted covering a wide range of focus and scope of the theme of the conference. The papers selected had tremendous scope in both focus and source, covering a broad geographical spectrum including Africa, America, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East.

The main topics of the papers in the special double issue are: Knowledge and Learning; Higher Education; Artificial Intelligence; Innovation Management and Sustainability; Health and Well-being; and Leadership.

The structure of the conference's myriad knowledge and learning events were designed to foster maximum peer-learning and experience sharing. The format allowed for panellists to present their views on specific topical issues followed by a question and answer session. This provided opportunities for delegates to effectively engage in dialogue and share their individual experiences and perspectives on the given issue or topic. Therefore, in addition to the papers presented during the conference, we also include in the special double issue, summaries of the different presentations from the four days and eleven sessions of the conference.

Ahmed

DAY ONE

Session 1: Official opening and keynote statements
- Official opening remarks
- UN perspectives on the progress so far
- Country-specific perspectives on the progress so far
- The importance of Youth and our responsibility towards change

Session 2: Accelerate the pace of the Agenda 2030 implementation
- SDGsUNi Initiatives (Live Demo)
- SDGs Experts Directory – explanation and collaboration (Live Demo)
- AI vs a Human Touch – what are the biggest challenges that face us?
- Issues such as the informal market, growing national/global debt and global conflict were consistent themes

Session 3: Reconnecting universities with the discourse of the UN SDGs
- Reconnecting universities
- Themes of integration, collaboration and expansion were consistent
- A Multi-Helix System

DAY TWO

Session 4: Higher education: new models and frameworks for the future
- Online and traditional education and the path towards new models and frameworks
- The need for online education to be taken seriously as it is the only feasible and sustainable way to expand quality education across the globe
- AI as a beneficial tool to advance a framework of expansive and improved quality of education
- AI data collection as a means of bridging the vivid gap in many nation's VNRs as many nations have evident gaps in their data

Session 5: Universities' global ranking – reality or myth?
- Roundtable discussion regarding universities rankings:
  - Rankings determine university strategies – forced in a framework
  - Universities should prioritise their students and not their finances
  - Rankings require regulations – misinformation, bias, etc.
  - One singular, standardised and universal system for rankings
  - Rankings should also consider the number of exported students as DCs' students go abroad to maximise employment opportunities

Session 6: Business, entrepreneurship and leadership for sustainability
- Business, entrepreneurship and leadership
- The importance of the private sector in driving SDGs implementation
  - Red Sea Global example
- Sustainability and leadership go hand-in-hand – business leaders to lead by example in order for their employees to follow
- The significance of digitalisation across DCs and SMEs
  - A shift to circular economics – prioritising the world over currency
    - » Long-term thinking > short-term thinking

DAY THREE

Session 7: Empowering women to accelerate implementation of Agenda 2030
- Empowering women (SDG 5)
- The history of women's fight for equality and their growing influence in modern society
- No Women No SDGs – 51%
  - Female representation in influential roles has increased, with 41% of MPs in the British House of Commons being women as of the 2024 General Election (GE) – a 6% increase from the 2019 GE
- The Triple Shift and the growing violence towards women across the globe

Session 8: Engaging youth to accelerate implementation of Agenda 2030
- Engaging youth to accelerate implementation of the SDGs
- The role of sports in strengthening youth and acting as a long-term investment
  - This is current especially with the ongoing Olympics
- A study that focused on children with unique learning needs – STAMP & STOMP
- Pakistan's youth programme and schemes

Session 9: Challenges, success and lessons learned to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2030
- Challenges, successes and lessons learned to accelerate progress
- The need to reform the timing and criteria of the SDGs due to global setbacks as a result of the geo-political climate, with conflicts such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine hindering global development
  - Innovative sustainable development cities – Markaz Knowledge City
  - The necessity of challenging counterfeit medicines in West Africa

DAY FOUR

Session 10: Transformation of higher education: country-specific case studies
- The necessity of E-Learning in Sudan, a war-torn nation, to ensure no students are left behind
- The development of Rajuk in Bangaldesh, similar to Markaz Knowledge City
- The implementation of sustainability in curriculum and community engagement as per the case study of Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE

Session 11: What is next for the UN 2030 Agenda and SDGs – concluding remarks
- Enhancing the partnerships between the United Nations system organisations and the SDGs universities
- Mastering public policy for the implementation of the UN SDGs
- Concluding remarks from the Rapporteurs

CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

This special double issue provides an overview and a summary of the key recommendations of the various topics discussed during the conference. We hope that the selected papers for this special double issue will help to stimulate debate amongst scholars, researchers and policy-makers, and that you will find this volume interesting and thought-provoking.

We would like to congratulate the authors for their valuable contributions, and we are grateful to our track chairs and many reviewers for graciously offering their invaluable comments that have enriched the quality of the papers in this conference and its related publications, and for making available to us their valuable time and efforts.

We would like to acknowledge the fantastic research work by our volunteer researchers from across the world, particularly the team leader, You Li (Hainan University, China), and the editors of results' summaries, Mosaab Alabassi and Lina Suliman (Queen Mary University of London, UK) and Nahid Nouri (Imperial College London, UK).

We highly appreciate the generosity and full support of Her Excellency Dr Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and her teams in different departments and units from the UNOG including, but not limited to, the Meetings Management Section; Information and Communication Technology Service; Audio-visual Services; and the UN Restaurant.

We are also very grateful for the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar at UNOG for their full support in facilitating this conference with the different departments

at UNOG. We very much appreciate the full support provided to the conference by Her Excellency Dr Hend Abdalrahman Al-Muftah, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to UNOG and other international organisations in Geneva. We are very grateful for the endless support we received from Mr Elobaid Elamin, Ms Johara Abdulaziz Al-Suwaidi, Mr Abdulla Al-Sowaidi, Hajar and their colleagues form the Permanent Mission of Qatar to UNOG.

Finally, we would like also to thank all the members of the WASD organising committee, particularly Mrs Janet Snow (International Co-ordinator and Editor), Kumar Gaurav (Webmaster), Souheil Zaied (Lead Graphic Designer), Nada Yousry (Graphic Designer), Dr Samar Ahmed (WASD Executive), Lena Alam (Youth Champion), and all the volunteers from across the world for their continuous and endless assistance and support to the conference.

We hope that you will find this volume informative and engaging. Any feedback you can provide will be greatly appreciated as we are always looking at ways in which we can improve your experience.

BIOGRAPHY

Allam Ahmed is a Professor of Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development; Founding President World Association for Sustainable Development; Founding Director SDGs Universities Initiatives; and Honorary Professor Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and Senior Policy Fellow Global Policy Institute, Queen Mary University of London. He is a Fellow (FCIM) and Chartered Marketer of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), UK; Fellow (FFPH) Faculty of Public Health, UK; PhD in Economics in two years at Edinburgh Napier University, UK; awarded the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) Scholarship and Prestigious Book Prize for Best MSc/MBA Dissertation; Listed in the Who's Who in the World 2009-2021 and 2021 Who's Who in the World Lifetime Achievement Award, Who's Who in Finance and Business 2009/2010 and Who's Who in America 2012-2014 published by Marquis Who's Who, USA.

END NOTES
- www.wasd.org.uk/
- www.wasd.org.uk/listing/accelerate-sdgs-2030/
- www.wasd.org.uk/

Ahmed

- www.wasd.org.uk/listing/accelerate-sdgs-2030/
- www.sdgsuniversities.org/
- Director-General's remarks at the Opening Session of the 22nd World Association for Sustainable Development International Conference | The United Nations Office at Geneva (ungeneva.org)
- www.sdgsuniversities.org/
- www.sdgswhoswho.org/