7th ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)

Students' Forum: 11–15 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019

Bucharest, Romania

Higher Education Taking Action towards Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives from Asia and Europe

STUDENTS' FORUM BACKGROUND PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEM MEs). Since 2010, ARC has been contributing through Policy Recommendations to the deliberations of the Ministers and the ASEM Education Process.

The 7th ASEF Rectors' Conference was hosted by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), in Bucharest, Romania, on 12-14 May 2019. It brought together over 150 leaders of higher education institutions, experts, government officials and 51 student leaders from 51 Asian and European ASEM partner countries to discuss how can higher education take action towards the sustainable development goals.

At the 7th ASEF Rectors' Conference, higher education institution and student leaders from Asia and Europe discussed the role of higher education in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with attention to three areas:

1. Taking Action at Home: SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance,
2. Taking Action at Community Level: SDGs as Drivers of University Societal Impact,
3. Taking Action at International Level: SDGs as Catalysts to Reorient Internationalisation.

The Students' Forum resulted in Policy Recommendations for the deliberation of the 7th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7). The policy recommendations were discussed, drafted and finalised by the ARC7 Students' Forum participants.

This background paper aims to reveal some of the discussions and good practices presented by participants during the conference, supporting the policy recommendations or reflecting at their content.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the rapporteurs who have joined the conference in Bucharest and contributed their time and expertise to summarise the working group discussions featured in this background paper.

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The ARC7 Secretariat

10 July 2019, Singapore

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely based on the conference participants' contribution, and they do not represent the opinion of the authors or the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

**ARC7 Students' Forum Policy Recommendations for the
7th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)**
15-16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania

The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEM MEs). Since 2010, ARC has been contributing through Policy Recommendations to the deliberations of the Ministers and the ASEM Education Process.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. The SDGs are transformative and rights-based, and explicitly refer to higher education and research.

At the 7th ASEF Students' Forum, 51 student leaders from Asia and Europe discussed the role of higher education in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with attention to three core areas of institutional activity: 1) institutional governance; 2) societal impact; and 3) international partnerships.

1. Taking Action at Home: SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should ensure a sustainable future by creating an inclusive and diverse society, for which HEI governance is key to providing transparent communication, access for everyone, and empowering students to enhance knowledge and obtain their full potential.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by creating a specific office permeating every decision-making level that works towards implementing and achieving SDGs;
2. Establish an institution-wide digital centralised system ensuring transparent and inclusive communication by gathering and disseminating information from and to students, academic, and non-academic staff and other stakeholders;
3. Invest in teachers' trainings which support student centred learning and equip educators with tangible skills in addressing different learning needs;
4. Ensure student representation at all levels of higher education governance, including representation on internal and external auditing committees;

5. Take responsibility to educate and promote positive health behaviours by students and employees by:
   - Promoting health as equal pillars between mental, sexual, physical health, and social well-being;
   - Forming a confidential, accessible, and innovative mental health support system;
   - Easing access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

2 Taking Action at Community Level – SDGs as Drivers of University Social Impact

Higher Education serves as a driving catalyst for civil engagement, social diversity and sustainable advancement on a local, regional, national, and international level. HEIs shall respond to community needs and promote diversity, practical education, and locally relevant research. It is crucial for HEIs to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. Governments should

support HEIs by allocating appropriate funding.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs and student organizations represent the diversity of their communities, at both access and completion levels, among students, staff, and faculty. Aspects including race, religion, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, gender, socio-economic background, and access needs shall be considered;
2. Encourage HEIs to promote experiential and practical education in order to prepare students for their careers and social life, i.e. field studies, applied problems during courses, professional skills, paid internships, volunteering, community engagement, summer schools, short courses, and entrepreneurship. These should include a strong focus on SDGs;
3. Ensure that all HEIs have sufficient research capacity by allocating funds and encouraging institutional partnerships;
4. Incentivise and facilitate meetings between community members, and HEI researchers to gather research ideas and to disseminate research findings to non-academic stakeholders;
5. Funding bodies shall involve community group representatives in research funding allocation processes;
6. Ensure that degree requirements in HEIs should include completing a minimum of 3 ECTS credits or equivalent of tailor-made, societal impacting SDG activities. Appropriate training in SDG awareness and implementation should be provided.

3. Taking Action at an International Level - SDGs as a catalyst to reorient internationalisation

For internationalisation in higher education to be sustainable and to furthermore play its key role in reaching the SDGs, we believe it must be based on the principles of quality education, cohesion, equal opportunities, solidarity, and mobilising a global knowledge community.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Call upon higher education institutions to be involved in international exchange programs interconnected amongst students, researchers, and staff and implement best environmental practices and more inclusive and streamlined processes;
2. Introduce a standardised and internationally recognised *Academic Credit System* and the issuing and recognition of transcripts in agreed upon languages;
3. Encourage leaders in higher education to promote virtual collaboration through an international online platform in order to facilitate cooperation between higher education institutions and the online application process for international mobility;
4. Provide multilateral support for mobilising students, including financial, administrative or technological and e-learning resources in order to guarantee equal access to international higher education, especially for students in need;
5. Ensure quality and diversity in higher education by providing language courses for students, researchers and staff to enhance knowledge and mobility;
6. Encourage and support a launch of an International Students at Risk Network of higher education institutions that gives students, who face difficulties at their higher education institution due to their advocacy for human rights, as well as stateless persons, a chance for an education abroad;

7. Encourage respective governmental actors to support national strategies for internationalisation of higher education institutions.

Conclusion

Our discussions have been comprehensive and inclusive, and the recommendations that we propose in this document represent all perspectives of SDGs, from nationalities across Asia and Europe. The recommendations of our working groups emerged from deliberate and thoughtful student conversations. This exercise has exemplified that universities are change-engines and students are at its forefront. It is critical that university governance adopts a lens of efficiency and action. It is of the utmost importance that SDGs are embedded into each tier of university structure, that they are present in governance conversations, lecture halls, and student gatherings.

15 May 2019, Bucharest

Summary of the discussions on
Theme 3 │ Taking Action at an International Level: SDGs as a Catalyst to Reorient
Internationalisation

Rapporteur: Ms Dhruti CHAKRAVARTHI, student at the University of Edinburgh

Introduction

Since the conception of the Sustainable Development Goals, universities have had an interesting and pioneering role to play as a nexus in tackling complex societal challenges of the 21st century, reflected in these goals. The 7th ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7), aimed to provide a creative space for exchanges ideas on solutions to create a more sustainable world by using universities as a touchstone. As the only bi-regional multi-stakeholder dialogue platform for university and student leaders, policy makers, and business representatives to carry out an intergenerational dialogue discussing sustainable development within higher education, the outcomes of the conference are pivotal. The Students' Forum, hosted by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest, Romania between 11th to 15th May 2019 brought together 51 student leaders from 51 Asian and European countries. ARC7 facilitated discussions on taking action towards achieving sustainable development goals on three different levels in an experiential learning space to foster cross-sectoral conversations.

Working Group #3: SDGs as Catalysts to Reorient Internationalisation

The Working Group 3 (WG3) was moderated by Ms Jungyoon HAN, from the Organisation for the Cooperation, Exchange And Networking Among Students and Alumni (OCEANS Network) and Ms Patrícia GONÇALVES, from the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). Broadly, WG3 aimed to explore how internationalisation related activities could be reoriented to help address the sustainable development goals. There were 17 students in the group representing Brunei, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Thailand, as well as two mentors, a senior university leader from Singapore and a senior government official from Vietnam. These students had engaged in online preparations six weeks leading up to ARC7 conference and developed the published policy recommendations during the ARC7 Students' Forum.

Outcomes of the Online Preparatory Phase

In the online preparatory phase, the participants of this working group brought in a panoramic range of perspectives on the topic of internationalisation within higher education. One of the key issues discussed was student mobility through internationalisation, and the following sub-topics were covered:

- Issues of student mobility
- Contributions of student mobility towards higher education
- Equitable student mobility
- Effects student mobility has on the sustainable development goals (SDGs) across Europe and Asia

Some of the other key topics that were deliberated in this phase included building global knowledge communities, the concept of 'brain drain', the challenges faced in creating equitable curricula within education, contributing to SDG4 on quality education through internationalisation, designing policies to ensure that financial and bureaucratic barriers would not be a constraint.

While analysing the various opinion articles written by participants, it is interesting to observe that these cross-disciplinary topics were discussed within specific cultural contexts and using global borders as a crucial framework. By discussing specific local challenges faced under 1) Knowledge and willingness to work with the SDGs 2) Diversity and cross cultural communication within internationalisation 3) Transcending financial difficulties to create equitable global societies 4) Mobility and its environmental repercussions, the participants were able to mutate grassroot level issues faced by their country, synergising their local knowledge and thereby formulating their conclusions towards sustainable global change.

The participants also carried out interviews with leaders of their home universities. The perspectives gained from these interviews provided a kaleidoscopic angle into administration and implementation of internationalisation in higher education and the role universities play in using SDGs as catalysts.

The overarching focus points were on the following select themes:

1. Cooperation, National Policies/Strategies, Sustainable Mobility

Through the process of internationlisation of higher education, the participants concluded that national policies and strategies play a crucial role in fostering mobility across Asia and Europe. Through the first two discussions, the participants analysed the following points:

- Supporting universities in internationalization and connecting institutions to develop knowledge and skills of the student-peer groups to make them better trainers and employable both in their native countries and abroad;

- Building up university networks for sustainable strategies and policy recommendations was unanimously felt possible only after the creation of a shareable knowledge bank accessible to all partner institutions through IT portals so that further inputs through R&D and learning experiences could be supplemented, shared and used to strengthen the vision;

- Encouraging multi-stakeholder cooperation by institutionalising available skills to fetch commercial advantages by showcasing project activities in tranches of 'time and task activities' that could be replicated with or without modifications convenient to partner countries;

- Implementing SDG metrics and indicators for sustainable mobility was agreed to be done by showcasing demonstrable and implementable projects so that ways and means of further improving the same could begin.

Within the context of international bodies, the participants deliberated the necessity of establishing an international body to handle Asia-Europe Higher Education Quality Assessment consisting of mixed members and equal representation of Asia and Europe to provide a spectrum of policies. Some of the key recommendations that the participants formulated regarding this international body included:

- Developing Independent, Objective, International Indicators to Measure Quality Education: with so many cross-cultural perspectives, the participants deemed it relevant to analyse and incorporate a standard set of quality indicators;

- Introducing Standardized, Internationally recognized Credit System: Credit systems can varyingly differ across borders within Asia and Europe. The participants pointed out that introducing a standardised credit system would ideally abolish any inequalities within the system;

- Strongly recommending a universal increase of Financial and Administrative Support for underprivileged students to guarantee equal access to International Higher Education in line with SDG4: The students recognised that major inequalities within the financial and administrative system restrict students to even consider the prospects of mobility and internationalisation;

- Usage and recognition of English transcripts: The participants realised that to a large-extent, English has turned into one of the widely spoken languages that foster cross-cultural communication.

Beyond this, the working group channelled their discussion towards finding ways to encourage Higher Education Institutions to establish a collaborative digital infrastructure to optimize access, mobility and collaboration of students and staff in Higher Education, particularly on:

- Establishing a universal online learning platform to bring digitally interactive and e-learning closer to the students and work towards abolishing online access restrictions to academic sources such as journals and research papers;

- Introduce a transparent, consolidated, standardized online application and admission process for all Higher Education institutions within the ASEM framework;

- Include the access to the standardized, internationally recognized credit system (as established by the international body) for course matching, credit recognition and improved student mobility;

- Actively support the development, implementation and establishment of the respective digital infrastructure at all Higher Education Institutions among Asia & Europe to support the paramount objective of promoting sustainable internationalisation and knowledge mobility in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

In order to encourage and provide universities with incentives to create and further develop high quality and sustainable regional, multilateral and bilateral agreements with universities globally, (e.g. scholar and student mobility and further academic collaborations), the students realised that diplomacy and a sense of cooperation is essential within the system.
On a broad scale, the students enlisted the following points as the key factors:

- Transparency, information, and less breach
- Cohesion
- People to people + knowledge mobility
- The pre-existing committees based on the international bodies
- Steering technology, innovation, and online platforms as key tools

By the end of the first two discussions, the students deliberated on essential recommendations that would make student mobility easier, more inclusive and accessible for both students, rectors, and administrators. In order to achieve the aim of making student mobility universalized to eliminate any formal and informal obstacles that may prevent students to access and participate in the global knowledge community, the following recommendations came up during the first two discussions:

- Make the process of student visa application easier
- Provide language courses as a part of student mobility
- Facilitate for students with disabilities
- Scholarships
- Recognition of credits
- Launch an international programme that gives students, who have experienced persecution, threats or expulsion from their higher education institution because of

their peaceful activism and fight for human rights and democratic change, a chance to finish their education abroad (ref. Student at Risk (StAR) in Norway, the student version of Scholars at Risk). Furthermore, this programme will also work to provide stateless people with the opportunity to study.

2. Accessibility, Equality and Diversity

Through the third and fourth set of discussions, issues of accessibility, equality, and diversity were elaborately analysed. It was clear that culture, traditions and the environment had a very strong relation to the availability of raw material and economic resources. Accessibility to skills and markets was notably not uniform in structure. To optimally realise the vision of SDGs, it was agreed that networking the demand and supply factors related to the accessibility of man, material and money components could, in turn, enable overall development.

2.1. Accessibility

Ensuring equal and non-discriminatory access to Higher Education was of prime importance to assure that skills emerging from education could be channelised to everybody at affordable costs.

2.2. Lack of Diversity

Remove formal and informal obstacles that prevent people from accessing opportunities.

2.3. Language Support

Academic mobility agreement that involves language courses and/or education offered in a foreign language or dominant/leading language will help students from all countries to connect to linguistic contexts of the region addressed.
It is essential to provide language opportunity at the earliest stage to ensure that students are able to optimally hone resources and opportunities within the region without having to face strong communicative barriers. Ensuring that pre-course language classes would help foster internationalisation.

2.4. Inequality

The participants discussed that it was essential to provide support to those in need (e.g. psychological, monetary, accessibility). Examples through which inequalities can be addressed:

- Offering pre-course language courses for exchange students (possibly online)
- Making sure that all universities have the right physical learning environment for students with disabilities
- Providing scholarships
- Provide psychological support to ensure that students are able to adapt to the foreign environment comfortably

Furthermore, the following points were also deliberated upon while considering ways to abolish any inequalities that permeate within the system such as:

- Considering the prospects of taking initiative to launch an international programme that gives students, who have experienced persecution, threats or expulsion from their higher education institution because of their peaceful activism and fight for human rights and democratic change, a chance to finish their education abroad (ref. Student at Risk (StAR) in Norway, the student version of Scholars at Risk). Furthermore, a

programme such as this would also work to provide stateless people with the opportunity to study.

- Build an international official network to create agreements across borders on the area of Higher Education through multi-stakeholder involvement. Agreements should include:
  o International online platform for networking and sharing academic resources
  o International recognized credit system
  o Regional, multilateral and bilateral exchange agreements
  o Sustainability measurements and sharing of best practices

- Promote Internationalisation under the principle of Quality over Quantity

3. The International Body
(Establishing an International Body for Asia-Europe Higher Education Quality Assessment consisting of mixed members of Asia and Europe)

The main objectives of this international body include:
- Developing Independent, International Indicators to ensure Quality Education
- Introduce Standardized, Internationally recognized Credit System
- Strongly Recommend universal increase of Financial and Administrative support
- Support for underprivileged students to enable equal access to International Higher Education in line with SDG4 using and recognition of English transcripts.
- Ensure common curricula and teaching methodologies across universities

Encourage Higher Education Leaders to promote virtual collaboration
- Bring interactive and e-learning closer to the students
- Accessible, Consolidated, Standardized Online Application Process.
- Online access to academic journals and research globally
- Access to online credit system (created by the international body) to identify skilling areas and to standardise curricula

The participants concluded that the actors included would be Higher Education Institutions, Governmental & Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society, Private For-and Non-Profit Partners.

The students felt that the main beneficiaries would be Current and Prospective Students, Universities, Civil Society, Economies and the Global Community as a whole.

The main impact generated from this would be the increase in Sustainable Knowledge Mobility that would support the implementation of the SDGs

3.1 Recognition/Credit Scheme

In order to suitably recognise credit schemes, the participants concluded that the following points needed to be achieved:

- Developing Independent, Objective, International Indicators to Measure Quality Education
- Introducing Standardized, Internationally recognized Credit System
- Establishing International Body for Asia-Europe Higher Education Quality Assessment consisting of mixed members of Asia and Europe.
- Strongly Recommend universal issuing and recognition of English transcripts.
- Transparent, Consolidated, Standardized Application Process.
- Improving international accessibility to national education (international websites)

3.2 Budgeting/Finance

In order to achieve financial accessibility, the students observed the need to demand the increase of Financial and Administrative Support for underprivileged students to guarantee equal access to International Higher Education in line with SDG4.

3.3. Digital accessibility and E-Learning

E-learning resources should come closer to the students was the overarching theme weaved by the participants. They opined the following:

- Whenever possible, the participants strongly recommend recognition of attained qualification without the requirement of the certified translation. They stated that they would welcome the practice of issuance of multilingual diplomas which are promoting regional and international mobility
- Recommend exchanges beyond local institutes and country partnerships. The participants recognise that cultural differences can be a significant barrier for long-distance exchanges, and encourage psychological support tailored to the foreign students.
- The participants recommend directly measuring international partnerships on their sustainable development goal impact (either positive or negative). These measurements will highlight the areas that need to be worked on, such as accessibility.
- Ensure that universities provide clear information on all required costs charged at higher education institutions, which are not a part of a formal tuition fee in order to give transparency to the international student body.

Conclusion

After an intense interdisciplinary discussion on how internationalisation in higher education can be sustainable and its key role in achieving the SDGs, the participants concluded that it should be based on the principles of quality education, cohesion, equal opportunities, solidarity, and mobilising a global knowledge community. Working group 3 of the Students' Forum urged ASEM governments to implement the following recommendations:

- Call upon higher education institutions to be involved in international exchange programs interconnected amongst students, researchers, and staff and implement best environmental practices and more inclusive and streamlined processes.

- Introduce a standardised and internationally recognised *Academic Credit System* and the issuing and recognition of transcripts in agreed upon languages.

- Encourage leaders in higher education to promote virtual collaboration through an international online platform in order to facilitate cooperation between higher education institutions and the online application process for international mobility.

- Provide multilateral support for mobilising students, including financial, administrative or technological and e-learning resources in order to guarantee equal access to international higher education, especially for students in need.

- Ensure quality and diversity in higher education by providing language courses for students, researchers and staff to enhance knowledge and mobility.

- Encourage and support launch of an International Students at Risk Network of higher education institutions that give students, who face difficulties at their higher education

institution due to their advocacy for human rights, as well as stateless persons, a chance for an education abroad.

- Encourage respective governmental actors to support national strategies for internationalisation of higher education institutions.

These recommendations are to be found in their final form in the published paper of the ARC7 Students' Forum.

Summary of the discussions on
Theme 2 │ Taking Action at Community Level: SDGs as Drivers of University Societal Impact

Rapporteur: Ms Alexandra STEPHANOVA, Member of Students Council for Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria

Introduction

The members of the Working Group introducing themselves. The group was moderated by Ms Georgiana Mihut, Board Member of the Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association (EMA), and Mr Teo Jian Rong, Co-Chairman of the ASEAN Youth Organisation (AYO). Student representatives from Sweden, Philippines, Spain, Belgium, Malaysia, Greece, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Bangladesh, Italy, Estonia, Pakistan, Vietnam, Finland, Mongolia, Czech Republic and South Korea were present at the working group to discuss the sub-theme on Taking Action at the Community Level – the SDGs as drivers of University Social Impact.

The first discussion aimed to analyse the different ways in which universities connect with the outside world and the outreach they have on society. The student representatives selected key stakeholders that would bridge the connection. This included students, non-governmental organisations, Ministry of Education, researchers and the careers services/job markets. The participants aimed at understanding the relationship of these stakeholders with local communities. This was further analysed from the point of privilege and minority rights. The student representatives agreed that universities should hold a strong sense of responsibility towards local communities.

Intersections of gender were also analysed in the discussion. The student representatives collectively agreed how more opportunities should be provided while also instilling a sense of empowerment to provide women and trans-persons with an equal platform. Affirmative action must be taken. The representative of the Philippines provided an example of how there is a certain quota and scholarships provided to indigenous people, thereby creating an equitable platform.

The following main topics emerged during the subsequent working group discussions.

Diversity of communities and their representation

The Working group has discussed the different factors of diversity of local communities. Geographic location defines a community to some extent, but there are other factors that bond or divide the local community. There are political, ideological and religious imperatives. In some ASEM countries Christians are in the majority, whereas in other Muslims. Religious systems affect education systems, for example Viet Nam has a socialist government which eliminates religion from teaching, whereas in Malaysia religion is interwoven with education.

Students felt that gender inequality is an especially important topic as it is quite complex and often leads to exclusion of minorities. They were advocating for university policies that focus on this issue. University should provide the means to conduct projects that focus on these minority groups and empower students to implement such projects themselves. The tools are up to the universities because not all universities have funds to give.

Students suggest to ASEM governments to implement country specific policies too. Each country has a specific minority group that varies from one to another so each country should implement policies that fits best for their society. Example could be different needs-based scholarships, language courses and etc.

Students drafted their corresponding policy recommendation deliberately vague, in order to address all possible forms of exclusion, which depends on the type of minority in the focus, and how the national policies work around it.

Corresponding Policy Recommendation:

1. Ensure that HEIs and student organizations represent the diversity of their communities, at both access and completion levels, among students, staff, and faculty. Aspects including race, religion, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, gender, socio-economic background, and access needs shall be considered;

Practical education on SDGs

Students felt that university does not help them to be aware of the real problems in the community which they are part of, to understand and act upon the environmental sustainability of the planet, and to become better prepared to find a job. In their opinion the content of the teaching and the methods that universities are using are not appropriate anymore, they need to be more experimental and practical. One way to reach this goal would be to incorporate field studies, tackling real problems during the courses, or volunteering as part of the curriculum. Professors should promote volunteering in their courses so that students realize why they need volunteering in their life.

Considering services students believed that cooperation between universities and organizations would be really useful for the students, like NGOs and businesses. There should be paid internships, summer schools and courses, debates clubs, where small groups of students would be able to discuss problems.

Changing teaching methods and services to students would be a win-win for the society and the individual as well. If students have more abilities, they will be more able to find a job and the government will have more money from the job. However, students were realistic, they believed that 10 to15 years are needed for these educational changes to be realized and tested whether they are taking the status quo into the right direction, for the sake of the society.

Corresponding Policy Recommendation:

2. Encourage HEIs to promote experiential and practical education in order to prepare students for their careers and social life, i.e. field studies, applied problems during courses, professional skills, paid internships, volunteering, community engagement, summer schools, short courses, and entrepreneurship. These should include a strong focus on SDGs;

Community-based research

Another focus area was the lack of community-based research. Students defined community-based research as a foundation for policy making which contributes to a wider range of SDGs.

They felt like there was a gap in communication and cooperation between universities and their immediate social surroundings, and they felt the need to create a medium to communicate research problems relevant to the community.

On way could be involving community group representatives in boards responsible for research funding. This would incentivize universities to focus on the needs of the local communities instead of research rankings and distinguished journals, and it would enable the local communities to communicate their preferences on research topics in a more efficient and direct way. The students felt that researchers are driven by funding or by academic credits, and it needs to be changed. They want universities to priorities the contribution to SDGs in their research, to prioritize research outputs that are more beneficial for the environment, for the world.

The students hoped that involving community members in decision-making could help to reach this goal. They have also highlighted, that the partnership between universities and communities should be promoted in a way where communities get a leadership role. Their representatives should be taken into the boards where they are given autonomy for decision making and room to speak for what they need, and universities would carry out research according their needs. The results of these researches will be the implementation of SDGs. This should be an inclusive process, where academic freedom is still untouched, but steered towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Corresponding Policy Recommendations:

3. Ensure that all HEIs have sufficient research capacity by allocating funds and encouraging institutional partnerships;

4. Incentivise and facilitate meetings between community members, and HEI researchers to gather research ideas and to disseminate research findings to non-academic stakeholders;

5. Funding bodies shall involve community group representatives in research funding allocation processes;

Institutionalizing local impact projects

Students discussed that SDGs should be embedded into the curriculum, at least by having a class on the topic each week. This is not happening at many universities yet, but the idea is very realistic. Beyond this simple measure, they felt that more action-oriented ideas are needed. They suggested that every student should be required to do a community-based project as a condition of earning a degree. In order to facilitate this process, they need the following criteria to be met:

- Increase knowledge among faculty members and university managers on how to run such projects;
- Nominate a person or a group of educators to spread and provide the knowledge for the rest of the faculty members on SDGs;
- Establish a mechanism to make sure that there is a continuous update of knowledge, provide annual training on SDGs to the target group;
- Consider exchanging ASEM (young) professionals to go to each country and train the faculty members on different practices on teaching towards the SDGs;
- Implement a project which serves the community, award credits to students;
- Evaluate student projects.

The group has discussed teacher training as a problem as well, and the importance of educating school leaders who have the biggest impact on young generations, however the policy

recommendation on this topic emerged from working group 1 after all.

Corresponding Policy Recommendation:

5. Ensure that degree requirements in HEIs should include completing a minimum of 3 ECTS credits or equivalent of tailor-made, societal impacting SDG activities. Appropriate training in SDG awareness and implementation should be provided.

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