

Universities pledge global cooperation on sustainability

Partnerships are vital in addressing global problems, sector leaders say

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Fifty-six universities have signed a joint statement promising cooperation on the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the world faces unprecedented post-Covid challenges.

"With their unique advantages in generating knowledge, uniting stakeholders and enabling transformation, leading universities around the world should play an active and essential role in forging a sustainable future through dialogue, solidarity and collaboration," said [the statement](#), announced at a [Zhejiang University \(ZJU\) forum](#) on 24 March.

An institution's civic responsibility was "a matter of fundamental morality", Rocky Tuan, vice-chancellor of the [Chinese University of Hong Kong \(CUHK\)](#), told *Times Higher Education* on the sidelines of the forum. He called the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs) "practical and intellectual channels to focus academic activities".

Professor Tuan told the forum that international collaboration was vital to reaching the UN's varied goals.

"It's like a multiple-choice test where the last option is 'all of the above'. Partnerships are needed to achieve 'all of the above'," he said. "Research excellence must include global partnerships if we are going to achieve SDGs."

CUHK, which opened a social responsibility and sustainability office in January, has set a goal of being carbon neutral by 2038.

"Universities need to go beyond teaching, learning and research," he said. "They should voluntarily go beyond what the legal requirements are."

Wu Zhaohui, ZJU's president, said that the world was facing a "critical moment" and was "more conflicted than it was before", a situation exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. Therefore, it was important for universities to link "the global to the local".

"If we want to change the world, we have to change ourselves first through our daily operations," he said.

For example, ZJU's International Campus is surrounded by wetlands and designed as a "sponge campus", where rainwater is collected and reused for irrigation.

"Sustainability is as important as teaching and learning," said ZJU vice-president He Lianzhen.

Tan Eng Chye, president of the [National University of Singapore](#), said that "the complexity of the SDGs requires integrated solutions and coordinated actions". Two examples he offered were NUS' U Town campus and a retrofit of their School of Design and Environment.

"The campus should work as a 'living lab' and be a constant reminder to students and staff," Professor Tan said. "It will be a sandbox for sustainability practices."

NUS, located in a tropical climate, has goals to reduce campus temperatures by four degrees Celsius, plant 10,000 trees a year, and be carbon neutral by 2030.

Pam Fredman, president of the International Association of Universities, emphasised the need for governments and societies to recognise and support their higher education institutions.

The key roles that universities play in sustainability have to be "promoted to policy- and decision-makers", especially given how much institutions suffered this year due to Covid-related travel bans and funding cuts, she said.

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Source: Zhejiang University
ZJU's 'green' International Campus