

The SDGs as challenge to Life Sciences Universities



Figure 1: The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030.

Executive summary

In 2018 the world is confronted with severe, multiple and interrelated challenges. The “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2015, addresses these challenges in a comprehensive way that should set the world on a path of transformation towards a fair and sustainable future that leaves no one behind.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda 2030 provide a novel policy and framework for research and higher education at life science universities around the globe. This position paper spells out what members of the Global Challenge University Alliance shall contribute in support of the 2030 targets.

Life science universities are called upon to address questions of poverty reduction and food security and their nexus to inequality as well as climate change, sustainable production and consumption, efficient use of water resources, and species and habitat losses. In addressing these challenges, universities are taking up their responsibilities towards society. Four fields of action are identified: (1) societal engagement; (2) education; (3) research; and (4) transformation of universities and the higher education system.

Acknowledging the challenges and the Agenda 2030 as a novel policy and framework for research and higher education, member universities in the GCUA will embark on a process of transformation and commit to the following:

1. GCUA acknowledges the severity and multitude of global challenges identified by the UN Agenda 2030 and the need for catalysing and driving fundamental transformations of societies in order to safeguard a sustainable global development, securing the survival of future generations.
2. GCUA recognizes that the multifaceted and integrated nature of the global challenges requires an approach as broad and encompassing as the SDGs and identifies the need for integrative and systemic approaches in implementing the Agenda 2030.

3. GCUA acknowledges that **all** goals and targets are to be reached and emphasizes the need for considering the entirety of goals and targets as well as their interaction when proposing action.
4. GCUA acknowledges that universities must conceptualize their role in society, their research proposals, their teaching activities and their evaluation criteria for contributing to the UN Agenda 2030.
5. GCUA and its member universities will provide leadership in implementing activities to fulfil the SDGs.
6. GCUA critically analyses existing development strategies, including the Agenda 2030, and their coherence.
7. GCUA commits to communicating the Agenda 2030 to the public and, where necessary develop the Agenda 2030 as a narrative which is tangible and useful for local communities.
8. GCUA member universities strive to be active at the science policy and science society interface.
9. GCUA will develop and integrate education for sustainable development curricula.
10. GCUA commits to build professional, personal, social, and systemic competencies for agency in the sustainability agenda.
11. GCUA identifies the crucial role of scientific research and discourse to reach the SDGs in their manifold dimensions.
12. GCUA will foster inter and transdisciplinary research.
13. GCUA and its member universities seek and foster new funding opportunities for research on the SDGs.
14. GCUA will encourage scientists to reflect on the impact of their own research on the SDGs.
15. GCUA will create an interdisciplinary culture of cooperation within and between member Universities.
16. GCUA will foster a culture of cooperation, systems thinking and societal responsibility at Universities.
17. GCUA will foster integration of teaching and education, science and research with the societal engagement to contribute to transformation of society towards sustainability.