



# **Driving Global Change: SACRU Contribution to a Sustainable Future**

Reflections on the United Nations  
Sustainable Development Goals



## **Zlatko Skrbis**

### **SACRU President**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a bold and urgent call to action for humanity – a call that resonates profoundly with the mission and values of Catholic universities. As President of the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU), I reaffirm our network's steadfast commitment to advancing these goals through the lens of our shared ethical vision, deeply rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition and powerfully articulated in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. This seminal document reminds us that caring for our common home is not merely a scientific or political necessity, but a moral imperative that demands our collective conscience and creativity.

Catholic universities have a distinctive responsibility to respond to the SDGs with both intellectual rigor and spiritual depth. Our institutions are communities of inquiry and formation, where the pursuit of truth is inseparable from the pursuit of justice. We believe that sustainable development must be grounded in the dignity of the human person and the flourishing of all creation. This belief compels us to foster research and education that are not only excellent but also oriented toward the Common Good.

The challenges before us—ranging from climate change and public health to education and inequality—are global in scope, yet they demand responses that are locally grounded and contextually relevant. Our solutions must reflect the diversity of the communities we serve while remaining united by a shared global ambition. For this reason, SACRU champions an approach that is international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational. We recognize that the wisdom of experienced scholars must be complemented by the creativity and insight of young researchers and students.


This publication embodies that vision. It brings together voices from across our alliance—faculty and students alike—who are engaging with the SDGs in ways that are both intellectually robust and ethically grounded. Their contributions exemplify the kind of scholarship Catholic universities are called to cultivate: one that not only advances knowledge but also serves humanity and safeguards our planet.

Let this publication be both a testament to our commitment and an invitation to deepen our shared efforts. At SACRU, we face the future with faith, determination and confidence that our collective mission can help shape a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world.



**Pier Sandro Cocconcelli**  
**SACRU Secretary General**


The pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals represents one of the most profound challenges of our time. Universities, as centers of knowledge and innovation, play a critical role in shaping a sustainable future by fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, global partnerships, and innovative research. At SACRU, we understand that addressing these global challenges requires not only the expertise of established scholars but also the fresh perspectives of young researchers and students. Our collective commitment to the SDGs is rooted in our shared belief that sustainable development is not merely an academic concept but a call to action for all. Central to the mission of Catholic universities is the ethical vision that guides us to use our scientific and technical expertise for the Common Good, ensuring that our work fosters a more just, equitable, and resilient world for future generations.



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, with the goal of providing a path for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, both now and in the future. At the core of the Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent an urgent call for action by all countries –developed and developing– through a global partnership aimed at ending poverty and other deprivations, improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth.

In line with its mission to foster higher education and research for the Common Good, the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities has collected insights on the SDGs, reflecting the diverse expertise of its network. These contributions come from the work of 15 faculty members and students from seven partner universities within the Alliance. They embody a unique international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational approach, capturing the diverse perspectives of those at the forefront of research and academia, all working together to address the global challenges outlined in the SDGs.

The selection of SDGs addressed in this report mirrors the choices of SACRU partner universities, made in light of their academic strengths and leading initiatives connected to specific goals. The contributions represent the personal views of individual academics and students and are not intended as the official positions of SACRU and its partner universities.



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SDG 17 - Partnerships to Achieve the Goals

Australian Catholic University



UNIVERSIDADE  
CATOLICA  
PORTUGUESA

**Lurdes Veríssimo**

*Coordinator of the University Psychology Clinic (CUP)*

### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH?**

In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #3 was set to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages by 2030. However, the latest WHO Mental Health Report (2022) indicates that one billion people (more than 1 in 8 adults and adolescents) worldwide still suffer from a mental disorder, such as depression or anxiety. Moreover, the 2024 SDG Report highlighted that global progress is “alarmingly insufficient”, falling significantly short of the targets set. Specifically, concerning mental health, a reduction by a third of the mortality rate from intentional self-harm/suicide is expected by 2030 (SDG 3.4.2 indicator).

How can this be achieved? It is essential to assume an integrated, developmental, and systemic approach. In this context, Universities play a paramount role in SDG3, through Teaching (e.g., psychologists’ training), Research (e.g., identification of predictors of mental health), and University Social Responsibility activities (e.g., services in the community).

At Universidade Católica Portuguesa we have worked to enhance the psychological well-being of the community, through the University Psychology Clinic, a service provided by the Faculty of Education and Psychology, since 2007.

In addition to a psychotherapeutic framework, an early approach to promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders is crucial. Thus, at our university, we have designed and implemented numerous initiatives, such as the recently launched UCP2 Mental Health project, which aims to create an integrated system for promoting mental health. We have also developed initiatives aimed at promoting mental health skills in children and parents. For instance, the project “Sou Capaz” aims to develop skills such as self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making in children. The programme “Aprender a Educar” develops positive parenting practices in order to promote mental health. By implementing supportive policies, providing psychological services, creating and fostering awareness among students and the community, Universities play a crucial role in achieving SDG#3.



#### **Breaking the Stigma on Mental Health**

Sofia Torneiro, undergraduate student of Psychology



**Elisabet Golobardes Ribé***Vice-Rector for Academic Organization and Quality | Digital University*

### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, EDUCATION AND HUMANISM**

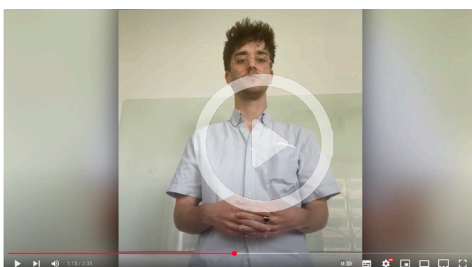
The irruption of ChatGPT in November 2022 entered with great force into the heart of society, in homes, in companies, in schools and at the university. Suddenly, there is news about Artificial Intelligence (AI) every day and in any media. It is worth noting that the concept of AI was born around 1956 and aimed to group algorithms that performed tasks that would be considered intelligent if performed by a human. And, of course, a piece of software, ChatGPT, that “converses better” than many humans confuses us – both for the use and for the abuse we can make of it.

Then comes a new shock: the results of the latest PISA 2022 report which indicate that reading comprehension and mathematical knowledge are declining. Is AI responsible? Will AI displace education? Or could it be the path to follow? Let’s stop for a moment. Remember that AI and ChatGPT are just tools. What we have to offer the members of university campuses are spaces to think, to discuss, to exchange points of view, to learn from each other, to respect each other. It is up to us to train responsible, ethical, and critical people and professionals.

They must be able to listen, understand what they read and know how to write and communicate properly. What is needed is more humanism. That AI is a well-used tool that can also help enhance these more digital and, at the same time, more human skills. In fact, we, on our campus, have prepared and made available to everyone recommendations for the proper use of Artificial Intelligence-based tools, which have been developed by the Working Group on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence Tools Applied to Teaching-URL. We must continue to educate, educate, and educate.

For reference:

[https://bit.ly/Recommendations\\_proper\\_use\\_of\\_AI\\_based\\_tools](https://bit.ly/Recommendations_proper_use_of_AI_based_tools)

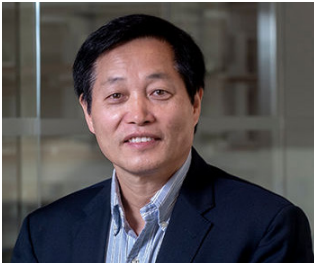


#### **An Education of Quality in the Digital Age**

Carlos Vazquez Parra, double-degree student in Law and Global Governance





**Hanqin Tian***Director and Professor of the Center for Earth System Science & Global Sustainability*

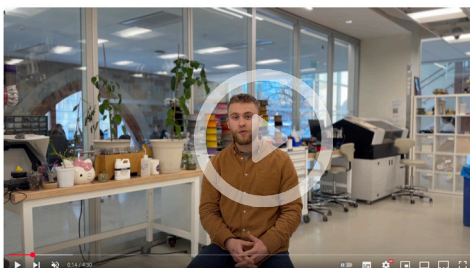
### **ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT AND GLOBAL SANITATION**

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. Boston College has undertaken notable initiatives to advance this goal through extensive water conservation measures, sustainability practices, research endeavors, and community engagement. The university has implemented campus-wide initiatives such as upgrading toilets, showerheads, and faucets with low-flow fixtures, utilizing weather-responsive sprinkler systems, harvesting rainwater, and reusing gray water to mitigate stormwater runoff. These measures have earned Boston College a Silver Rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), reflecting its integration of water conservation into daily operations.

Faculty and students actively participate in research and educational programs that promote sustainable water practices. Projects like the "Social Justice Through Hydroponics" initiative demonstrate innovative approaches to reducing water usage while educating participants about sustainability. The newly established Center for Earth System Science and Global Sustainability focuses on interdisciplinary research addressing critical issues such as the food-energy-water nexus and sustainable nitrogen management. The Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society supports local and global research on water sustainability, particularly in underserved communities.

Boston College also extends its efforts beyond campus through community and global engagement. Service-learning projects improve water quality in urban areas, while public workshops raise awareness of conservation practices. Participation in UN Climate Change Conferences enables the university to contribute to international discussions on climate resilience and water security. Through global partnerships, such as the Global Ethics and Social Trust Program, the university addresses the impacts of climate change on water and food security and their implications for migration.

Boston College's initiatives reflect a deep commitment to environmental sustainability and social justice. By integrating innovative water conservation practices, fostering interdisciplinary research, and engaging with communities globally, the university plays a vital role in ensuring clean water and sanitation for all while addressing long-term sustainability challenges.



#### **Water Recycling Practices in Ecuador: An Innovative Agriculture Initiative**

Cyrus Rosen, undergraduate student in Engineering







UC | Chile

**Maryon Urbina***Director of the Sustainability Office*

### **A STRATEGY FOR CLIMATE ACTION**

Universities, in their mission to form well-rounded individuals, have an ethical responsibility to address contemporary global challenges such as climate change. SDG 13, "Climate Action," recognizes climate change as a global threat affecting all countries, with consequences including rising temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, and rising sea levels. Pope Francis, through *Laudato Si'*, has issued an urgent call to care for our common home, emphasizing the need for an ecological conversion that leads us to respect and protect the environment. Catholic universities, in their mission to form holistic individuals, have the ethical responsibility to address contemporary global challenges by promoting climate action in their teaching and research activities, community engagement, and setting an example for society through their own daily practices.

In this context, in 2019, UC Chile became the first Chilean university to declare a climate emergency, join the Race to Zero, and commit to carbon neutrality by 2038, the year the institution will celebrate its 150th anniversary. Since 2020, UC Chile has developed an organizational structure and participatory process, forming a climate action council that includes representatives from operational, educational, and research areas, as well as students. The council has guided the development of baselines, plans, and new objectives related to mitigation and adaptation on its campuses. In 2023, the university published its Climate Action Strategy, and to date, there have been notable advances. Catholic universities' consideration of SDG 13, Climate Action, is a natural extension of their foundational principles, educational mission, and commitment to society. Adopting this goal to form agents of positive change is fundamental for a world that desperately needs sustainable and just solutions.



#### **How to Have an Eco-Friendly Lifestyle**

Catalina Miranda, student in Engineering





上智大学  
SOPHIA UNIVERSITY

**Mikiko Sugiura**

*Professor in the Graduate School of Global Studies*

### **SATOYAMA: SHOWCASE OF RECONCILIATION ECOLOGY**

It is important to remember that the 17 goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are all interconnected. Human activity is the nexus that links these goals together. Living on this planet, we produce food, manufacture products, transport them as commodities, consume them, and dispose of them when they are no longer in use. For example, our water use extends beyond drinking to showering, watering our gardens, using it for cooking, or flushing our toilets. As a result, the supply of water can become insufficient, contaminated, or may not reach the people in need. The various challenges of the SDGs result from human activity, and we see a reflection of ourselves in a mirror called the environment.

Assuming human activity is the nexus of each goal, what can we do for a sustainable future? Besides scrutinizing historical behavioral patterns and undertaking meaningful transformations, learning from our predecessors' wisdom while respecting local diversity can also provide great insights. An exemplary embodiment of this ethos is found in Satoyama, a traditional Japanese human-induced production landscape. It represents cohesive ecological mosaics of biodiversity that emerged as a result of long-term human-nature interactions. It includes forests, grasslands, farmlands, rice paddies, irrigation, reservoirs, streams, and human settlements. The traditional farming practices employed in Satoyama, particularly in wet rice cultivation, serve to preserve rich biodiversity through water level control, conducive to the reproductive cycles of amphibians and insects.

For the past few years, students at Sophia University have regularly participated in conservation activities with the support of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and local groups, learning how Satoyama contributes to sustainability, which implies human involvement is essential for a sustainable future. Contributing to biodiversity conservation (SDG 15) is also a vital response to climate change, and an example of a nature-based solution (SDG 13). In the modern context where multi-purpose solutions are required, why not join us on a journey to explore human involvement with the wisdom of our predecessors, respecting local diversity?



#### **Living in Balance with the Natural World**

Otoha Kawada, undergraduate student in Global Studies





UNIVERSITÀ  
CATTOLICA  
del Sacro Cuore

## **Claudia Rotondi**

*Full Professor of History of Economic Thought and Development Economics;  
Coordinator of the Graduate Programme in International Cooperation Policies  
for Development*

### **OUR ANTIBODIES: KNOWLEDGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

We are often inclined to circumscribe the meaning of SDG 16 to opposing war. In doing so, however, we risk shutting ourselves off from active commitment to its achievement. For what can we personally, in our roles, do to stop a war, to stop ongoing wars? Let us then consider the targets into which the goal is divided. Those of SDG 16 refer, among others, to child trafficking, rule of law implementation, and illegal arms trafficking. Even these aspects could lead us to a further frequent error: that of considering these targets as mainly, if not exclusively, concerning developing countries. And thus, again, we would move away from a direct and personal engagement.

It must be remembered, then, that this objective has broader horizons: it aims to make peace and inclusiveness the basis of social coexistence; it links peace and inclusiveness to justice and the promotion of sound institutions, free from opaque and corrupt practices. So: what can it mean for a university to promote this objective? The university has the great opportunity to be able to create, through the dissemination of knowledge but also through the university community's behaviour, the most favourable environment for the development of the antibodies suitable for counteracting those attitudes that prevent the attainment of Goal 16 in everyday life.

On the one hand, academic knowledge, particularly knowledge of past and present history, teaches us how much of a part the lack of justice, inclusion, and cooperation has played—and still plays—in fuelling conflicts and reinforcing the vulnerability of peoples and states. On the other hand, living in an accountable university community can show us that the way to achieve these ends passes through personal behaviours on which attention can and must be maximised: non-violence, participation, non-discrimination, opposition to all forms of abuse of power, and the centrality of honesty in our interaction with people and institutions.

Thanks to these antibodies, we can legitimately and with great awareness ask governments never to derogate from these principles.



## **Building Positive Peace**

Gloria Mussetto, Ph.D. student in Sociology





**Jen Azordegan**  
*Manager of Community-Engaged Learning*

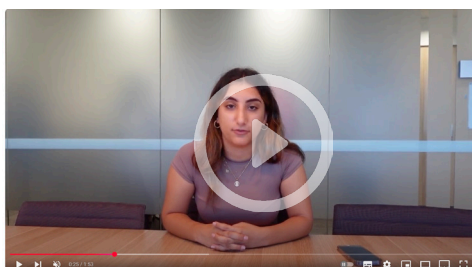
## **FOSTERING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GREATER GOOD**

Partnerships are an essential approach to SDG impact, as highlighted by Goal 17. They affirm the fundamental interconnectedness in our global and local communities and are key to understanding – and collaboratively addressing – the root causes of complex problems in society.

In this spirit of fraternity, partnership, and collaboration, Australian Catholic University (ACU) hosted the 2024 Conference of the Association of Southeast and East Asian Catholic Colleges and Universities (ASEACCU). The event brought together over 200 academic leaders, faculty, and students from more than 40 institutions throughout the region to foster international collaboration and discuss topics such as community engagement, sustainable development, and climate change.

Amongst the many meaningful cross-cultural and institutional exchanges of the event was a keynote panel focused on service-learning. Best-practice service-learning is grounded in reciprocal partnerships, honours subsidiarity, and results in transformation for both students and the community. The panel promoted exchange between leaders and students regarding these aims, with representatives from four universities outlining how they engage in community partnerships as part of their service-learning programs. Students shared their personal stories of service-learning impact, whilst leaders discussed the institutional structure needed to support community partnerships and community-embedded learning experiences. The session also highlighted the role of international networks (e.g., SACRU, ASEACCU, Uniservitate, etc.) in helping like-minded universities to systematically collaborate and exchange practices in relation to community engagement.

For ACU, the ASEACCU event combined our commitment to forming international collaborations to address global challenges with our dedication to embedding high-quality service-learning across our undergraduate curriculum. ACU partners with over eighty community and nonprofit organisations annually to work across multiple SDGs through its service-learning program; a program aimed at ultimately forming community-minded graduates able to engage critically with social issues and work with the community in ways that recognise the dignity of the human person and progress the Common Good.



### **Partnering Globally for a Sustainable Future**

Isabella Taffa, undergraduate student in Nursing  
Durga Sharma, undergraduate student in Biomedical Science



