

09 JANUARY 2026

SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER & PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION COURSES

How to craft an interdisciplinary, relevant, and holistic sustainability education programme for colleges and universities of higher and professional education, seeking to embed sustainability principles into practice'

A Report



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 09 Jan 2026, Bengaluru Sustainability Forum and Azim Premji University convened a session on Embedding Sustainability in Higher and Professional Education Courses, for an invited group of college and university educators practicing and interested in sustainability education in Bengaluru.

The day-long deliberation saw 19 educators and the APU and BSF team deep dive into the challenge of 'How to craft an interdisciplinary, relevant, and holistic sustainability education programme for colleges and universities of higher and professional education, which will embed sustainability meaningfully and durably – not as an elective add-on, but as a lens that reshapes how every discipline thinks and acts.

Through a sharing of existing stories of practice, group sessions and collective reflection on expected core outcomes, the participants worked to distill specific opportunities and constraints which can impact this process.

They identified a range of practical entry points that institutions can build on. These opportunities looked at working with existing systems, strengthening capacities, and creating more meaningful connections between learning and practice.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leveraging campus as a living laboratory for sustainability - this includes encouraging attention to natural history and environmental phenomena on a day-to-day basis, linking routine campus activities of both faculty and students to broader sustainability goals, and using simple tools such as checklists, audits, and data to keep track of progress and make impacts visible and measurable. Student-led audits and cross-disciplinary eco-clubs were seen as particularly valuable in this regard.

Building on existing knowledge and lived experiences - recognising and drawing from traditional and local knowledge that students already bring, and using these as entry points for deeper engagement with sustainability concepts.

Building faculty capacity, particularly through adult learning - creating opportunities for continuous learning and exposure for faculty to engage with sustainability in interdisciplinary and practice-oriented ways.

Embedding sustainability within outcome-based education - aligning sustainability know-how with broader educational outcomes to ensure they can integrate smoothly into curriculum.

Introducing sustainability early and to everyone - beginning at foundational or undergraduate levels (or even earlier), while also offering electives that allow non-specialist students to engage meaningfully with sustainability.

Inculcating critical thinking not just technical skills - building student capacity to engage with political, ethical, and social dimensions of sustainability, not just technical solutions.

Strengthening real world research and collaborations - enabling partnerships between universities, research institutions, civil society, and other urban learning spaces to create context-based and practical learning opportunities. Also encouraging faculty-led projects that connect research and teaching with real-world applications, including industry and community engagement.

Using mediums that will appeal to students - drawing on pop culture and media that resonate with students to make sustainability more relatable and engaging.

Collaboratively documenting and defining sustainability in practice - working across institutions to build shared understandings of what constitutes “sustainable” practices in different sectors and cultural contexts.

Leveraging alumni - building alumni networks to support mentorship and explore pathways into sustainability-oriented careers.

Exposure to future options - exposing students to emerging opportunities in green jobs and ESG sectors.

Taken together, these opportunities suggest that there is great potential to build on or reorient existing practices, networks, and institutional capacities to support meaningful integration of sustainability.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the same time participants were cognizant about the challenges to these ambitions. **Key constraints** identified included:

- The **high financial cost** of maintaining sustainable campus practices and retrofitting infrastructure, which creates pressure to deprioritise sustainability investment.
- The disconnect between what is taught in classes and practiced on campus, and theory versus real world scenarios.
- **Faculty scarcity** compounded by the unavailability of adult learning spaces on sustainability and difficulty in attracting and retaining faculty willing to engage with these complexities.
- Difficulty in bringing in a **truly interdisciplinary approach** to teaching and research in sustainability.
- The risk that **making sustainability a compulsory subject** at the undergraduate level could lead to attendance for credits instead of sincere engagement, becoming an add-on that is counter-productive.
- The challenge of bringing scientific concepts to humanities students - and conversely, of helping science students understand political and social dimensions - in ways that are genuinely understandable rather than superficial.
- Dealing with **newer and upcoming challenges like AI** and its impact on water, pollution but also - and more importantly - on original thinking.
- **Rescuing sustainability from being a fad** or fashion and to teach the value of common good – beyond its use as a career tool, a marketing category, or an accreditation requirement.



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BACKGROUND

Often, sustainability related learning is assumed to be relevant only to certain disciplines. However, it is becoming increasingly evident that a climate and sustainability lens needs to inform everyone's work and worldview, beyond the confines of only those working in specific sectors.

Sustainable development and climate change are no longer challenges of the distant future—they are harsh realities shaping our world today. And it is imperative that students working towards undergraduate and graduate degrees - soon to become working professionals stepping into future leadership roles - enter the workforce equipped to take informed actions and make decisions that positively impact their surroundings.

In Aug–Sep 2024, the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum(BSF), in collaboration with CMR University School of Architecture and Arathi Hanumanthappa, had conducted a six-part lecture series to help final-year students understand the interlinkages between urban systems and sustainability in practice. Through expert-led sessions and field mapping, students were encouraged to apply a climate and sustainability lens to how they observe, think about, and engage with their surroundings. This experience validated the need for such interventions and the student's receptiveness to this knowledge.



BACKGROUND



For young people, sustainability is not an abstract issue but represents strong and central lived concerns. A recent survey found that climate change takes precedence for Indian Millennials, with 26 percent emphasising its significance. It also reveals that climate concern is deemed important by 79 percent of Indian Gen Zs and 81 percent of Indian Millennials. Integrating sustainability and climate consciousness in the ongoing learning process for the younger generation is one way of supporting them to understand these issues and how they can apply it to their chosen professions.

For the youth of today, grappling with the complex interconnectedness of the various aspects of sustainability entails going beyond a theoretical /academic knowledge to understanding its application in their everyday lives and in their surroundings. As they consume information and build their worldview primarily through the digital world, it is essential that their college education equips them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to interpret, analyse, and discern the information they encounter.

Ultimately, meaningful change will come only when individuals begin to apply a sustainability perspective to every decision and action—understanding the trade-offs, evaluating impacts, and distinguishing between superficial “green” solutions and those with true transformative potential. Education must therefore empower learners with the tools to think critically, act responsibly, and make informed choices that contribute to a more sustainable and just future.

BACKGROUND

Educators today play a key role in helping students connect to the real world and make sense of it; while also building their capacity to make a difference. At the same time, educators themselves need to reflect on how to internalise a climate and sustainability perspective and bring it into their own work. Their inputs will be critical to help students navigate their understanding beyond their respective disciplines - in an integrated and constructive manner, helping them avoid being overwhelmed by the magnitude of issues, and to identify how they can contribute to solutions that address issues of environmental and social justice related to sustainability.

We also believe that the responsibility for sustainability education lies not just with the individual teacher/institution but with a larger network of stakeholders, coming together to collaborate and support one another in this endeavour.

The daylong collective deliberation on January 9th 2026 facilitated by the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum and Azim Premji University was one step in this direction. It was attended by an invited group of college and university educators practicing and interested in sustainability education in Bengaluru.

Some of the questions the group collectively reflected on included:

- **What does embedding sustainability education in your teaching mean for you?**
- **What is at the core of the imaginations that students must take away?**
- **What resources and approaches have been most useful for you in terms of producing transformative learning etc.**
- **What have your experiences been with developing interdisciplinary curricula and integrating it in your teaching?**
- **What are the main challenges you face?**
- **What are some of the innovative pedagogical approaches you have developed and experimented with?**
- **How can you develop a sense of agency and optimism for young students on grim issues around sustainability?**

INTRODUCTIONS

Following a welcome and context setting by Harini, Manasi & Vinita, the day began with the participants introducing themselves in the context of the deliberation, specifically responding to the question, ***‘what embedding sustainability principles in higher education and professional courses means to me?’***

Teaching the normative side of environmental science has been an experiment at work, for me personally. One realisation about how to embed sustainability has begun with trying to show students where science as an enterprise begins from. Eg where does science draw its power?

Amit Kurien, RV University

A Masters in Public Health still has scope to integrate sustainability. But for MBBS - Where does one even start. where do we embed the sustainability? Coming from a medical background, I've been asking that question since this session started. The MBBS and MD curriculum, are very rigid and defined. I see little scope for bringing this environmental concept.

BA Aravind, NIMHANS

I teach environmental law at NLS and my specialisation is water law and policy. So, I work more on how to bring an interdisciplinary approach to understanding water conservation and management; otherwise water law becomes primarily about the pollution control laws- environmental law. I am constantly thinking about how we can rethink our understanding of water law and policy in a sustainable manner. For instance the concept of access rather than only anthropocentric but from ecological and human rights perspectives too.

Gayathri L Naik, National Law School

Harini - *My main focus is collective action and trying to see how we can flip the narrative that humans are not only negative agents of sustainability. It's relatively easier to impart frameworks on sustainability, skills on sustainability to students. Imparting a disposition of stewardship, of collective action, of wanting to do something or spending that time and energy... it's an ethos, set of moral framework, if you will, or set of norms and values. How does one impart that in a classroom?*

Harini Nagendra, Azim Premji University

What I'm really looking at is to create passion in students at the undergraduate level. I feel as an academician, we have to be an exemplary, and we have to try to bring that to the students, in how we walk the talk and deliver.

Helen Roselene, Mount Carmel College

When you have to actually think about conservation, ecology, and sustainability in your backyard, or in the places where you are living or studying, it's very different from talking about those issues in other places, like we do in research projects and so on. At IIHS, We had to work with the staff, the students, and the campus team in order to work towards campus sustainability as evidence for faculty and students.

Jagdish Krishnaswamy, Indian Institute for Human Settlements

INTRODUCTIONS



Speaking from being a student to also working with young adults, what I can say is that when we are looking at how we embed sustainability, we usually try to bring in the aspect of sustainability in everything that we do. And how we bring together all the disciplines to have a discussion is something that we constantly think about.
Malavika Sudhir, Science Gallery Bengaluru

At Christ University, we are growing a small Miyawaki forest, pollinator garden, pond ecosystem, vertical garden with a hydroponic system. And this is all part of the internal assessment and the students enjoy it too.
Dr Maxmillan Martin, CHRIST University

The challenge is to make a syllabus, which is engaging to all the students. For eg, how do we build in sustainability to students who are already science students, and come for our English classes? Or, how do we interest B.Com students to think outside of profit and liability ; and about sustainability, and human life.
Dr Mini Mark, St Joseph's University

At CMR University School of Architecture, I try and think of it as how do we embed sustainability and not as an after thought. It is not about offering a course on sustainability. how do you bring into the mainstream? It's about changing the mindset of every individual.
Prof Muralidhar K, CMR University

It starts in the classroom. And our classroom is really rich, so how do we do our best to inspire our students. If you are able to do that in our classrooms, we will definitely do better, especially managing cities like Bangalore.
Prof Nataraja Karaba, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK

We need to open up and make students connect with what's happening in them, around them, and all other connected contexts. That's the way in which we made the shift at Christ University, Dept of Media Studies. So very deliberately called it as Ecological Discourses and Practices. We also introduced that there was a practice component where they go to the field and talk to the people, observe, learn, and ask questions of justice, fairness, and all that.
Prof Padma Kumar M, CHRIST University



INTRODUCTIONS



The younger generation is far more active than we are. There is willingness to work honestly. And as teachers we need to see the connections between my subject and sustainability, so that we can share with students. It is possible to bring about a change. I should not remain as a teacher of chemistry or economics. I must become a student of sociology, student of art, student of music too.

Dr BS Prabhakar, St Joseph's University

I work at ATREE. The challenge is, how do we incorporate sustainability practice, ethic, conservation thinking, etc in students from other disciplines? For eg, take, what about medical students or music students? And how do we inculcate sustainability practice and thinking without overwhelming students, right? How do you overcome resistance among students? What routes do we take?

Dr Siddhartha Krishnan, Ashoka Trust for Ecology and Environment

I'm an environmental economist at the National Law School with interest in natural resource management and policy in general, but conservation in specific. My approach would boil down to two ways. Bread and butter courses like microeconomics where it's interesting to weave examples of use and non-use values when you're introducing students to a discipline that is important for them. The second which I find more useful, is introducing them to the problems that are omnipresent, but they probably haven't contextualized it, and then giving them the option to pick the stream to understand sustainability. So, the courses are actually tiered.

Dr Sneha Thapliyal, National Law School

Sonia - *Instead of starting a complete course, we conceptualized something called Wriddhi at Welingkar, with two primary objectives. One was if we can bring about behavioural change. And the second was to embed sustainability as a concept across different roles and disciplines. And this involved not only about students, but also about involving faculty, teaching and non-teaching. We do this across 5 pillars - Campus, Structured learning pathways (projects), Experiential learning, Activities and games.*

Dr Sonia Mehrotra, SP Mandali's Prin. LN Welingkar Institute of Management Development and Research



INTRODUCTIONS



At Mount Carmel College, I belong to a department that many environmentalists may not be very fond of. I am from the biotech department. But I believe that biotechnologists should be a part of this conversation and should as much as everyone else, because like many of you already mentioned, everyone is an equal stakeholder, and this will only work when it's a collective effort.

Thejaswi Bhandary, Mount Carmel College

We are not doing much as of now, but there are frameworks. Some of the public health courses do include environmental health, sometimes even sustainable development. I really want to learn more so that we can push in public health a lot more about sustainability thinking. So far, people are only worried about how climate is impacting health, not how heavily commercialized health systems are really terribly damaging environment.

Dr Upendra Bhojani, Institute of Public Health

I'm with the Azim Premji University School for Climate Change and Sustainability. And I'm part of the group team that works on bringing the festivals. For the past four years, we have been bringing the rivers of life, forests of life, mountains of life, and last year we had the coasts and oceans of life. And during the whole process, we have also been moving towards how we convert our materials and how we make this whole festival more sustainable.

Vidya Ramesh, Azim Premji University

I'm part of a public art lab at Srishti-MAHE and have been using creative ways of meeting, sharing participatory activities at public platforms, such as metro stations. It is a struggle when your alignment and values have to match aspirations of a larger industry. And yet, we constantly come up with ways to emerge in making insights valuable through interdisciplinary acts of sharing, making, collecting, and so on.

Yash Bhandari, Srishti Manipal Institute of Art Design and Technology



WHAT EXISTS TODAY? | STORIES FROM PRACTICE

For this session, the participants were divided into smaller groups. They responded to a prompt that sought to facilitate a shared understanding among the participants on their existing work towards integrating sustainability in their everyday teaching. Discussions in smaller groups enabled a more nuanced conversation that flowed from interesting classroom examples, to individual and institutional efforts, as well as various challenges faced. The multidisciplinary nature of the small groups served to highlight not only discipline-specific details, but also common patterns that cut across disciplines.

Session Prompts

- **One attempt to integrate sustainability (successful or not)**
- **One key insight or tension/challenge you continue to grapple with**

WHAT EXISTS TODAY? | STORIES FROM PRACTICE

Attempts to integrate sustainability



Practices on campus : Many participants shared the different practices that their campus engaged in. This, they believed, served as evidence for both students and faculty on the need and importance of sustainability in our everyday lives. Practices ranged from use of solar energy, Miyawaki method of afforestation, water conservation, minimising single use plastic and food wastage, converting organic waste to compost at-source, etc.

Scholarship of faculty : An interesting point that emerged in some of the groups was the scholarship of faculty and how that is playing a role in helping students understand and learn. It was shared that this is currently happening through application-oriented research projects undertaken by some faculty, or sometimes through co-authored research papers.

Eco Clubs : The presence of eco clubs in different institutions was acknowledged as a way to bring in interdisciplinarity to discussions on sustainability on campus.

Pedagogy: Initiatives in pedagogy to integrate sustainability across disciplines was another interesting aspect of the group discussions. While it was agreed that external factors also play a role in how these practices pan out, the initiatives shared included: studios | core courses | foundation programmes | electives | case studies | stories of practice | classroom activities | paid internships | campus sustainability cells | curriculum co-creation | special research groups focused on academic work and organising talks.



WHAT EXISTS TODAY? | STORIES FROM PRACTICE

Enablers & Opportunities

The following is a synthesis of the opportunities and constraints towards integrating sustainability in everyday teaching. This is an outcome of the presentations made by each of the groups.

Lens of interdisciplinarity

The principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were regarded as a useful framework for learning. Developing outcomes based on the SDGS was discussed as a possible way to facilitate a wider understanding of sustainability.

Embeddedness in non sustainability oriented core courses

For core courses that are not inherently sustainability or environment oriented, a good place to start is with embeddedness. Introducing students to think in a particular way in relation to their discipline could help them understand aspects of sustainability in a more organic manner. It was felt that this approach would nudge students into adopting such an approach, using their interests/subjects as a starting point; rather than force fitting or imposing it on them.

Electives

Introducing electives that are specific to sustainability are a useful way to ensure that students of various disciplines are able to opt for the course. Using a tiered approach further enables students' normative and emotive responses to sustainability at the level of individual, organisation or group and then at the society level.

Alumni networks

Identifying individuals in the alumni network already working on various aspects of sustainability was thought to be a good place to ensure an exchange of ideas and to keep the sustainability discourse alive. Through talks, workshops, field visits and other events they could share their experience working with the Government, private sector, industry or as self-employed individuals. This would be useful for current students to get an insight into 'green' career choices in the real world.

WHAT EXISTS TODAY? | STORIES FROM PRACTICE

Enablers & Opportunities

Job Market & Investor community

The job market was recognised as a significant determinant of what students want to study or pursue. And in this regard, the investor community (for business and commercial enterprises) was also identified as an important player. With a growing demand from this community for adherence to sustainability practices and principles, there was an opportunity to educate and work with investors, employers and students to understand long-term benefits and returns of such an approach.

Regulation

Sustainability related regulations as an exogenous shock present an interesting opportunity for educational institutions to determine their approach to sustainability. In conjunction with accreditations sought by individual institutions, this could determine if an institution chose to introduce a core course or have separate cells focusing on it or other interventions.

New and emerging disciplines

New and emerging disciplines offer a good opportunity to embed sustainability principles and practice. Public Health was discussed as one such example where, while the current focus was more on environment and health, the emerging nature of the academic programmes offered enough flexibility to also recognise and integrate social and commercial determinants of health in the pedagogy and practice.

City level collaboration

Collaborations at a city level between academic institutions and non-academic learning spaces could lend to creating more creative, less intimidating and more practical/field-based formats for students and faculty to learn and share about sustainability.

WHAT EXISTS TODAY? | STORIES FROM PRACTICE

Key challenges

Nature of disciplines

The nature of certain disciplines (for instance, agriculture) seem to lend better than others, to embedding sustainability in pedagogy and practice. However in some others, like a commerce or management programme, the discipline and the manner in which it is currently set up seems to be in opposition to the idea of sustainability. And in some like the MBBS programme, sustainability is currently not even a part of the course.

Mandatory add-on

The current National Education Policy has made environmental science a compulsory (often self-paced) course for undergraduate students of all disciplines. However, this does not change the orientation or understanding of students and is often treated merely as a necessity to complete their programme. To internalise sustainability there is a need to have a more sustained and long-term approach; and this requires a mentor and a cohort.

A 'conservation-heavy' approach to sustainability

Courses on sustainability are often very heavy and conservation-focused; not covering other dimensions of sustainability and their relevance to the students. This is a limitation that affects students' uptake of the course.

Electives

Teaching for electives that are specifically designed for sustainability while an opportunity also comes with the risk of some students taking the course only to complete their credit requirements. Additionally, in multidisciplinary courses, it brings up the difficult question of what depth to go to - when introducing a concept; as well as the balance between theory and real-world application.



WHAT EXISTS TODAY? | STORIES FROM PRACTICE

Key challenges

Lack of faculty diversity for sustainability

The lack of diversity among faculty who typically teach sustainability in academic institutions is also a constraint. For sustainability to be taught and understood as truly interdisciplinary, there is a critical need for diversity of faculty - not just in terms of the subjects they teach but also their life experiences and background. This is currently missing in most institutions.

Disconnect between sustainability education and institutional practice

When students see a disconnect between what is taught in the classroom as sustainability and practices that are adopted on their campus, they do not view it as something to be internalised. They see it merely as a subject required to clear their examinations. And this is a hindrance to them internalising their understanding of sustainability.

Cost of maintenance of sustainable buildings

The cost of maintaining sustainable campuses is high and this becomes a constraint for many institutions to adopt such practices, particularly those with a large number of older buildings.

Increasing consumerism

Quick commerce, expendable incomes, and a growing consumerist culture creates problems as the impact of such choices on the environment and society are largely invisible. For students, this creates a sense of entitlement to such choices and a discussion on sustainability becomes more about consuming 'clean' rather than thinking about consuming 'less'.

Pervasive and indiscriminate use of AI

The widespread use of AI by students can be a barrier to their understanding and learning. While AI is useful in certain applications and for analytics, metrics, summaries, translations etc its use cannot be at the cost of students' understanding.



WHAT SHOULD SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION ENABLE?

This session moved the conversation from how sustainability is currently integrated into higher education to the deeper question of what it should catalyse – in students, in institutions, and in society.

Despite participants coming from diverse disciplines, several common threads emerged across all the group discussions. Foremost among these was the recognition that sustainability challenges are inherently interdisciplinary.

Participants emphasised the importance of building the capacity of students to understand connections between ecological, social, economic, and governance systems. Equally significant was the need to foreground the human dimension – moving away from viewing sustainability purely as a techno-managerial problem and instead situating it within questions of equity, lived experience, historical context and societal impact.




Session Prompts


- **What capacities should students carry into professional life if sustainability were embedded? And how can institutions measure the impact of sustainability education on student behaviour and career choices?**
- **How can universities and schools integrate sustainability into curriculum across disciplines, beyond environmental science?**
- **End with a list of core outcomes for sustainability education in professional courses.**

WHAT SHOULD SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION ENABLE?

So what capacities should students carry into professional life?



Multiple groups placed **systems thinking** at the centre of what sustainability education should build. Students need to be able to trace how one thing connects to another – how materials flow, how ecosystems are affected by supply chains, how local decisions aggregate into global consequences. One group described this as the capacity to "rank the sustainability effects of materials, food, transport, and ecosystem services as a matrix" which gives a practical framework for professional decision-making rather than an abstract competency. Alongside this, participants stressed biophysical literacy: an understanding of planetary limits, not as abstract science but as the foundational constraint within which all professional activity must be situated.



Another recurring theme was the importance of students being able to **think critically and question** things – from structures of power, corporate greenwashing and sustainability claims, to the political economy of environmental degradation. This goes beyond technical knowledge; it requires students to develop what one group called "calculation skills and a political lens." Students should be equipped to ask not just what is happening to the environment, but who benefits from particular framings of the problem, who is paying the cost and why certain solutions are promoted while others are suppressed.

One of the groups identified the need for students to be **aware of the "key concerns of our times and spaces"** – an awareness understood as dynamic and constantly updated, rather than a fixed syllabus absorbed at graduation. This asks education to build the habit of noticing and staying curious, rather than the possession of a finite set of skills.

WHAT SHOULD SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION ENABLE?

So what capacities should students carry into professional life?

Almost all groups emphasised the need to **close the gap between awareness and action**. One group noted the distinction between the impact of individual action and community action – and the importance of students being able to navigate both. The capacity to "engage and convince another person" was named explicitly as a professional skill that sustainability education should cultivate. Persuasion, advocacy, and coalition-building are as essential to systemic change as technical competency.

One of the groups also outlined a **set of discipline-specific professional capacities**, particularly for business, finance, and industry: life cycle assessments, circular economy principles, ESG frameworks, Environmental Impact Assessments, and sustainability report writing etc. These were regarded not as peripheral skills – but as the vocabulary through which sustainability is increasingly operationalised in corporate and regulatory settings. It was agreed that students entering these fields without them are effectively illiterate in a language their employers are beginning to require.

One of the biggest challenges articulated was **"How do the students own it?"** This raised a question about empathy, agency, investment, and internalisation – going beyond the curriculum. Suggested approaches included asking students to list their materialistic possessions and examine the distinction between needs and wants; extending that examination beyond human needs to consider non-human persons and ecological entitlements; field immersions, co-creating the syllabus with students, reconciling institutional culture with sustainability principles and the role of engaged teachers who can motivate, inspire and importantly walk the talk. These approaches treat the challenge not as a pedagogical technique but as an ethical commitment - the difference between teaching about sustainability and forming sustainable people.



If sustainability were meaningfully embedded, students would graduate with:

- **Systems thinking and interdisciplinary awareness** - the ability to understand interconnections between ecological, socio-cultural, economic, and governance systems, and to recognise unintended consequences of professional decisions.
- **Critical inquiry and scientific rigour** - the capacity to evaluate evidence, question assumptions and power centres, and distinguish credible solutions from 'greenwashing'
- **Sensitivity to social equity and inclusion** - develop empathy and an understanding of equity, justice, and the distributional impacts of policy, design, technology, and legal decisions; especially given how issues like water stress, heat, flooding, waste, and inequality intersect.
- **Sensitivity to local realities** - the ability to respond to local realities and competing motivations and priorities.
- **Collaborative skills** - the ability to engage and work with multiple disciplines and sectors, recognising that sustainability challenges rarely fall within a single domain.
- **Agency and problem-framing ability** - the confidence to question dominant development models and frameworks, articulate correct problems, and propose alternatives.

These are in addition to practical and technical competencies such as domain-specific knowledge (ecology, species, law), basic sustainability calculations (ex carbon and ecological footprints), and hands-on skills applicable to everyday life.

Overall, what emerged was that sustainability education should shape how professionals define and more importantly, action what is "good practice" in their fields, be it in law, architecture, public health, business, engineering, or academia.

WHAT SHOULD SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION ENABLE?

Measuring Impact on student behaviour and career choices

All the groups acknowledged the lack of robust tools for tracking whether sustainability education changes what students actually do - in their consumption, their civic choices, and their careers.

One group's suggestion was direct: assessment needs to go "beyond marks." Current grading systems are poorly designed to capture shifts in values, habits of mind, or long-term behavioural change. Across multiple groups, the campus itself was proposed as the primary site for measuring impact. Green audits at departmental and campus level and producing real data about real systems – be it through environmental and energy audits, biodiversity mapping, water audits, waste monitoring, and the tracking of day-to-day behaviours by faculty and students - were proposed as mechanisms that would make sustainability education legible and verifiable. This approach also closes the gap between what is taught in class and what the institution actually practises.

One of the groups proposed **alumni networks and knowledge-sharing** as a mechanism for constant interaction and feedback - a way of understanding what students carry into their professional lives and what they do not. This is a relatively low-cost but underused approach to impact measurement.

While directly measuring the impact of sustainability education on career choices difficult - professional trajectories being liable to be shaped by multiple forces apart from passion and commitment – some options like tracking entry into green jobs and careers; monitoring whether alumni are raising sustainability questions in their workplaces; and capturing whether students who studied sustainability are the ones pushing for change in organisations rather than acquiescing to business-as-usual could be considered.

Overall there was an agreement that impact measurement must account for attitudinal and cognitive shifts, not just technical knowledge acquisition.



WHAT SHOULD SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION ENABLE?

So how does one integrate sustainability across disciplines?

The consensus across all groups was unambiguous: sustainability cannot remain the property of environmental science departments. It must be woven through the fabric of every discipline — but with genuine intellectual rigour, not as a compliance exercise or a token module.

Each discipline offers its own natural entry point. For law and governance, this could mean environmental law, water justice, and natural resource management). For medicine and public health, it could mean the community determinants of health, the environmental drivers of disease, and the integration of planetary health frameworks into medical education - with participants noting significant opportunities at institutions running MBBS and MPH programmes. For commerce, management, and finance, it could look like ESG investing, circular economy principles, and sustainability reporting. For the humanities and social sciences, it could be the political economy of the environment, questions of justice, and indigenous and traditional knowledge systems.

One group highlighted the ‘consuming clean vs. consuming less’ distinction. Much current sustainability education teaches students to consume differently - to choose greener products, cleaner technologies, more responsible brands - without actually questioning the logic of consumption itself. The challenge is to build curricula that address the structural drivers of unsustainability, not merely its symptoms. This is harder, more political, and more likely to encounter resistance — which is precisely why it matters.

This group also recommended teaching through the lens of interdisciplinarity. Sustainability principles such as intergenerational equity, planetary boundaries, and justice should guide learning across disciplines while economics, ethics, policy, culture, technology, and traditional knowledge should be integrated rather than siloed. Learning by doing through field immersions, classroom practice, and real world engagements and collaborations were proposed as complementary pedagogical practices.



WHAT SHOULD SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION ENABLE?

So how does one integrate sustainability across disciplines?

A structural approach was suggested: for ex, CMRUSoA embedding sustainability across 1st, 3rd, and 5th semesters through 4-credit, 4-hour-per-week courses, with a maker-centred pedagogy that begins from materials, sources, and stories. This approach uses documentation, photography, and drawing to develop a "vocabulary of craftsmanship" — a deep, sensory understanding of the material world. Alongside this, the group proposed elective pathways structured through frameworks of transitions, stakeholder tweaking, policy, and justice, and viewed through lenses of the individual, the organisation, and society.

An important issue raised was the question of faculty readiness. Embedding sustainability across disciplines presupposes faculty who have the interdisciplinary knowledge, the pedagogical tools, and the institutional permission to teach it. Training for older and current faculty - adult education in sustainability - was identified as both an opportunity and a significant gap. Without this, even the best-designed curricula will be delivered by people who do not believe in them, or do not know enough to teach them well.

The role of institutions beyond the classroom - Campus initiatives like no-lift days, food waste reduction, biodiversity mapping, eco-clubs were seen not merely as co-curricular activities but as integral to sustainability education. When students see a gap between what is taught and how the institution operates, it communicates a more powerful lesson than any lecture: that sustainability is performative, not real. Closing this gap is therefore a pedagogical priority as much as an operational one.



IN CONCLUSION

The last session of the day had Prof. Muralidhar K of CMRUSoA and Prof. Jagdish Krishnaswamy of IIHS share their reflections and key takeaways from the day's deliberations.

Integrating Sustainability into Design Pedagogy through Practice and Exposure

Prof. Murali started by sharing his experience of a collaboration with BSF on the Climate Charche lecture series, for ninth-semester students from CMRUSoA. He highlighted a visible shift in students' outlook and vocabulary, noting how the sessions at the Lecture series drew attention to aspects that typically go unnoticed. For example, a session on urban wildlife introduced students to ecological indicators like lichen on trees and how their presence is indicative of good air quality.

A key reflection from this experience was that sustainability cannot be introduced as an add-on at later stages. Instead, it needs to be embedded from the first semester, so that it becomes integral to how students think, design, and apply their knowledge over the course of their education.



IN CONCLUSION

Embedding Urban Ecology and Practice-Oriented Sustainability Education

Prof. Jagdish reflected on his transition into urban ecology as being both challenging and deeply rewarding. He highlighted a broader gap in the field—few ecologists are trained to work in urban environments, even as India rapidly urbanises. He went on to share the institutional journey at IIHS, that involved building ecological thinking from the ground up, including the establishment of a School of Environment and Sustainability and the development of the Kengeri campus with environmental systems - such as wetlands and biodiversity zones - planned prior to built infrastructure. A key insight was that sustainability practice emerged not through formal coursework alone, but through ongoing dialogue between disciplines, particularly between ecologists, architects, planners, and engineers.

He also emphasised that, while strong domain expertise remains essential, sustainability can be meaningfully integrated through exposure, shared language, and collaboration across fields. He underscored that sustainability education must extend beyond scientific knowledge to include softer dimensions of influence, viz. art, cinema, music, storytelling, which shape public imagination and values. Building empathy for non-human life and grounding sustainability as a normative societal expectation—on par with civic responsibility—were identified as critical shifts.



IN CONCLUSION

The day ended with other participants reflecting on the workshop as a valuable space for interdisciplinary exchange, with many noting initial hesitation about their place in the group but leaving with new perspectives, connections, and a stronger sense of shared purpose.

A recurring theme was the need to move beyond siloed knowledge and actively communicate practice, including through accessible platforms like digital media, to reach wider audiences and students. Participants from diverse fields—including mathematics, public health, and medicine—emphasised the importance of finding entry points for sustainability within their own disciplines, and building confidence to engage across social and disciplinary boundaries.

This connected to a call for deeper institutional collaboration and knowledge exchange including cross-campus learning, shared resources (such as syllabi and activity repositories), student exchanges, and the building of practical ecosystems - networks of skills, resources, and practitioners - to support real-world sustainability efforts. This could also open up new avenues for livelihoods and practice especially in areas like urban ecological restoration, presenting both a challenge as well as an opportunity. Participants stressed the importance of creating similar spaces for students, enabling them to engage with sustainability in open, interdisciplinary ways.

Overall, the day's discussions reinforced that sustainability must be taken forward not just as individual interest, but as a shared institutional and societal commitment, supported by ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and practice.



ANNEXURE



Getting to know each other



Amit Kurien

Amit is an Assistant Professor in Environmental Science at RV University, Bengaluru. He is an interdisciplinary environmental scientist interested in the political ecology of land use change in the jhum (swidden/shifting cultivation) landscapes and its consequences for people's livelihoods in Garo Hills, northeast India. He is interested in the multidimensional issues at the intersections of environmental change and rural societal dynamics with a focus on the interface of forest, agriculture, and livelihoods, aimed at informing environmental conservation and human well-being.

Amit is a methodological pluralist as a researcher, with a keen thematic interest in land change science, agrarian studies, and his most recent interest - environmental education. He has taught at science, social science, and arts undergraduate and post-graduate programs in the last four years. At the Environmental Science program at RV University, he teaches disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses including 'Earth and Environment', 'Biodiversity and Conservation', 'Environmental Social Science', and 'Global Environmental Change'.



Gayathri Naik

Dr Gayathri D Naik is an Assistant Professor of Law and Co Director of CEERA at NLSIU Bengaluru. She is a Commonwealth Scholar who completed her PhD in Environmental Law from SOAS University of London. She holds LLM in International Legal Studies with Gold Medal from SAU, NewDelhi; BAL.LLB from MG University as University Topper and MA in Public Administration from IGNOU.

She is a member of IUCN-WCEL and Rome based Association of Water Lawyers [AIDA] and executive member of Environment and Sustainability Chapter of Singapore based Asian Law School Association. She works on questions of Sustainability in Access and allocations of natural resources particularly Water in the context of climate change impacts. Her first book on Water Justice and Groundwater Regulation in India was published in 2024 by Routledge UK.

Getting to know each other



Helen Roselene

Dr Helen Roselene is Associate Professor and HoD, Dept of Environmental Science at Mount Carmel College.

Dr Helen is a specialist in Environmental management and pollution analysis; and has initiated and deployed several environmental initiatives with a passion to contribute to environmental sustenance and education. She is keenly involved in empowering youth with required skills for nurturing the fragile environmental performance relating to air, water, soil quality and biodiversity through education and research.

Expertise and qualification in pollution analysis, teaching, statistical analysis and auditing has enabled her to serve institutions and community in catering to the needs of the society in monitoring water, air and soil quality and reaching out to farmers through scientific research.



**Jagdish
Krishnaswamy**

Jagdish is an ecohydrologist and a landscape ecologist. Jagdish has a B.Tech in Civil Engineering from Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay; and an MS in Statistics and Decision Sciences, and a PhD in Environmental Sciences, both from Duke University, North Carolina, USA.

Jagdish's work in climate science and impact of extreme rain and warming on ecosystems across India as well as his policy relevant work in conservation planning led to his nomination for the scoping and design of the IPCC Special Report on Land and Climate. Jagdish's work in research and practice straddles the social-ecological continuum from the semi-wild to mega-cities. His work on conservation science and planning contributed to the nomination of the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At IIHS, Jagdish as a Dean, is helping build the School of Environment and Sustainability, and leading a team that is building a Long-Term Urban Ecological Observatory in Bengaluru, the first of its kind for a mega-city in the Global South.

Getting to know each other



Muralidhar Reddy

Muralidhar KrishnaReddy is an architect and industrial designer who brings in more than two decades of experience in design-led entrepreneurship, manufacturing and design education. He is the founding partner of multidisciplinary research and production studio- Design Circle Bengaluru. He is the founder director of the CMR University School of Architecture (CMRUSOA) from 2014. At the school his core academic involvement is in the foundation program with a core objective of developing 'sustainability sensitivities' through hands on making activities. He is the President of the Association of Designers of India, Bengaluru chapter 2024-26 and the Action Group member of the World Design Protopolis (WDP) Bengaluru 2025-30. A strong believer that design education is a symbiotic result of professional practice and teaching with an innate ability to empathize, listen, inspire and motivate.



Malavika Sudhir

Malavika is a Learning Associate at Science Gallery Bengaluru. With two years of teaching experience, her work concerns development projects that work towards community development, driving meaningful change in the social sector.



Max Martin

Prof Maxmillan Martin is a geographer studying climate change and early warning early action options. He teaches climate science and agrometeorology at CHRIST University, Bengaluru; and coordinates the work of the Centre for Landscapes, Wildlife and Marine Ecology (CLIME). Earlier at the University of Sussex, he led the science component of the research initiative Forecasting with Fishers.

Getting to know each other



**Siddhartha
Krishnan**

Siddhartha Krishnan, is an environmental sociologist and environmental historian. He is Senior Fellow, ATREE. Former Convener of the ATREE Academy for Conservation Science and Sustainability Studies, he is now Lead, Ecosystems and Human Well-being Programme. In the Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas, he combines field and archival work in pursuing research questions around human well-being in conservation landscapes, environmental justice, political economy of agrarian change, and human and wildlife interactions.



Thejaswi Bhandary

Thejaswi Bhandary is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biotechnology at Mount Carmel College, Bengaluru. She enjoys working closely with student and is also interested in sustainability-focused science and in encouraging thoughtful, responsible use of biotechnology.

Getting to know each other



Upendra Bhojani

Dr. Upendra Bhojani graduated as a dentist and transitioned to public health doing his postgraduate and doctoral degrees in public health. He currently heads a Centre for Commercial Determinants of Health at the Institute of Public Health (Bengaluru), where he has been working for nearly 2 decades including being Director (2019-2023). He is also a DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance Senior fellow. His work interests are in areas of tobacco control, chronic health conditions, political economy of health, health inequities and urban health apart from using art for health. He also explores how business sustainability and responsibility aligns with enhanced public health for workers, consumers and broader societal stakeholders.



Yash Bhandari

Yash Bhandari, an inter-disciplinary practitioner based at Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology. Formally trained as a sculptor, though now extends inquiry via cutting edge public engagement platforms and labs like Art in Transit, in collaboration with BMRCL, GOK, GBA and other government agencies has pivoted creative practice as a medium to further learning, interaction with traditional, community and academic knowledge systems by making creative processes accessible in various public spaces.

Getting to know each other



Harini Nagendra

Harini Nagendra is Director, School of Climate Change and Sustainability, at Azim Premji university. She is known for her research spanning over 30 years on forest conservation, and urban sustainability, with several seminal publications in both areas of work. Her interdisciplinary work on forests combines remote sensing, biodiversity studies and institutional analysis, and is recognised for elucidating the link between pattern and process in the human-dominated landscapes of South Asia. Her work on urban ecology and sustainability highlights the importance of urban ecosystems in contributing critical ecosystem services and impacting urban resilience and human well-being, especially of marginalised communities — an important global gap, especially for the Global South.



Vidya Ramesh

Vidya works at the School of Climate Change and Sustainability, Azim Premji University. She has Masters degrees in Environmental Management & Development and Environmental Science. Vidya has a work experience of over 18 years and her research interests include water management in rural and urban areas, gender, technology and livelihood.

Getting to know each other



Aswathy Arun

Aswathy Arun works on climate change and sustainability initiatives at Azim Premji University. Her interests lie in environmental education and in helping children connect with nature. She worked closely with student teams to create the biodiversity register for Azim Premji University campus and developed activity books for children and continues to adapt for different bio-geo regions of India. Her work focuses on bringing people closer to nature and helping communities appreciate the natural world.



Shashwat DC

Shashwat is a part of the Communications & Engagement team at APU. An experienced editor with two decades of experience in media and a background in Business, IT, Sustainability. Shashwat has been associated with some of the best media houses in the country. He has also created and launched two magazines: Sustainance (India's first corporate sustainability magazine) and IT Next (India's first magazine for IT Managers and professionals).



Manasi Pingle

Manasi Pingle is a filmmaker by training. After graduating from the Xaviers Institute of Communications, she worked in the television and film industry in Mumbai. She has directed and produced 2 documentaries on work done by peoples' movements. As a part of BSF she looks forward to working towards just, equitable and sustainable urban development.



Vinita

Vinita is a development professional by training. She has worked over the last three decades with children and adults on aspects of education, child labour, livelihood, waste and behaviour change. At BSF her focus is to engage with and explore how an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach can create a more equitable and sustainable Bengaluru.

Sustainability in Higher and Professional Education Courses

A day long deep dive into

How to craft an interdisciplinary, relevant, and holistic sustainability education programme for colleges and universities of higher and professional education, seeking to embed sustainability principles into practice

Organisers

Bengaluru Sustainability Forum & Azim Premji University

Participants

Invited college and university educators practicing and interested in sustainability education in Bengaluru

 In person | 9 January 2026

 9.30AM - 4.30PM

 Indian Heritage Academy, Koramangala

There is a growing recognition that progress towards sustainability, by its very nature, demands an understanding and engagement with different disciplines. Often, sustainability related learning is assumed to be relevant only to certain disciplines. However, it is becoming increasingly evident that a climate and sustainability lens needs to inform everyone's work and worldview, beyond the confines of only those working in specific sectors.

Sustainable development and climate change are no longer challenges of the

distant

future—they are harsh realities shaping our world today. And it is imperative that students working towards undergraduate and graduate degrees - soon to

become

working professionals stepping into future leadership roles - enter the workforce equipped to take informed actions and make decisions that positively impact

their

surroundings.

In Aug–Sep 2024, the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum(BSF), in collaboration with

CMR

University School of Architecture and Arathi Hanumanthappa, conducted a six-part lecture series to help final-year students understand the interlinkages between

For young people, sustainability is not an abstract issue but represents strong and central lived concerns. In fact, a recent survey found that climate change takes precedence for Indian Millennials, with 26 percent emphasising its significance. The same survey reveals that climate concern is deemed important by 79 percent of Indian Gen Zs and 81 percent of Indian Millennials.

We believe that integrating sustainability and climate consciousness in the ongoing

learning process for the younger generation is one way of supporting them to understand these issues and how they can apply it to their chosen professions.

For the youth of today, grappling with the complex interconnectedness of the various

aspects of sustainability entails going beyond a theoretical /academic knowledge to understanding its application in their everyday lives and in their surroundings. As

they

consume information and build their worldview primarily through the digital world, it

is essential that their college education equips them with the necessary knowledge,

skills, and tools to interpret, analyse, and discern the information they encounter.

Ultimately, meaningful change will come only when individuals begin to apply a sustainability perspective to every decision and action—understanding the trade-offs,

evaluating impacts, and distinguishing between superficial “green” solutions and those

with true transformative potential. Education must therefore empower learners with

the tools to think critically, act responsibly, and make informed choices that

contribute

to a more sustainable and just future.

Educators today play a key role in helping students connect to the real world and

make

sense of it; while also building their capacity to make a difference. At the same time,

educators themselves need to reflect on how to internalise a climate and

sustainability

perspective and bring it into their own work. Their inputs will be critical to help students

navigate their understanding beyond their respective disciplines - in an integrated

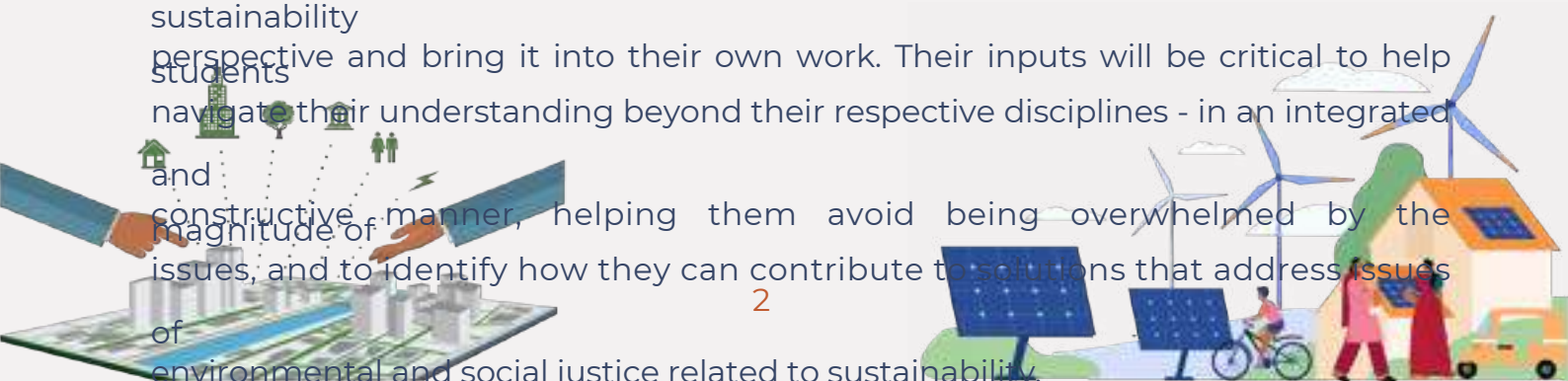
and

constructive manner, helping them avoid being overwhelmed by the magnitude of

issues, and to identify how they can contribute to solutions that address issues

of

environmental and social justice related to sustainability.



The collective deliberation on January 9th is one step in this direction. Some of the questions we hope to reflect on:

- What does embedding sustainability education in your teaching mean for you?
- What is at the core of the imaginations that students must take away?
- What resources and approaches have been most useful for you in terms of producing transformative learning etc.
- What have your experiences been with developing interdisciplinary curricula and integrating it in your teaching?
- What are the main challenges you face?
- What are some of the innovative pedagogical approaches you have developed and experimented with?
- How can you develop a sense of agency and optimism for young students on grim issues around sustainability?

Note on organisers

The Bengaluru Sustainability Forum (BSF) is a multi- institutional initiative, focusing on issues of urban and peri-urban sustainability in Bengaluru. The primary objective of the forum, comprising both academic institutions and practitioners, including WIPRO Foundation, National Centre for Biological Sciences, Azim Premji University, BIOME, Indian Institute for Human Settlements and Science Gallery Bengaluru, is to convene and curate conversations and collaborations that integrate various perspectives, approaches and areas of expertise to examine issues of long-term urban sustainability - with a focus on air, biodiversity, climate, mobility, planning, waste, and water.

Azim Premji University was founded in 2010, with the vision to contribute to the

realisation

of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society. The School of Climate Change and Sustainability at the university aims to address the climate crisis through research,

education,

and action. With its rich natural resources, large population at risk, and significant potential for

future growth, India must find a way to address the challenges of climate change

without

sacrificing its human development goals. There is no single solution or silver bullet. We

focus on climate change interconnections with sustainability and social justice to forge

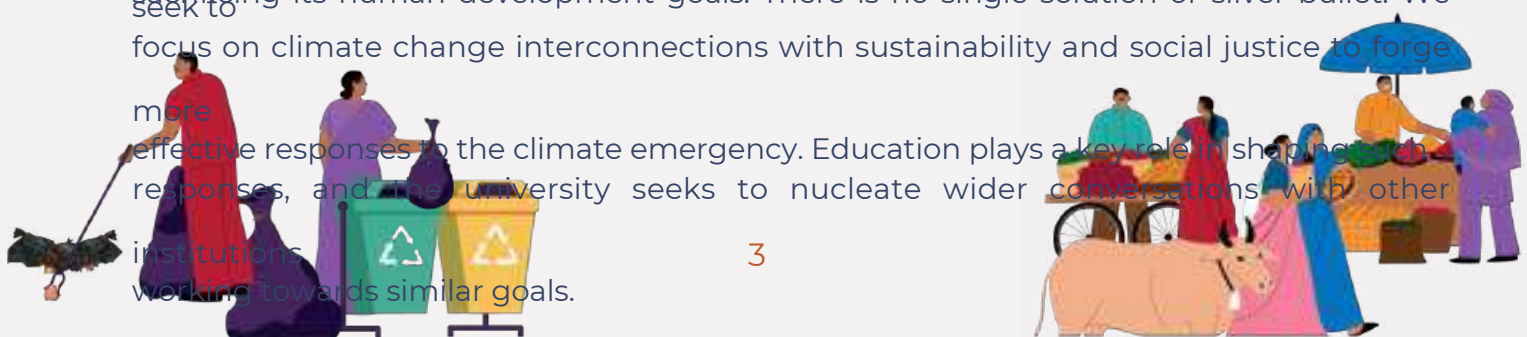
more

effective responses to the climate emergency. Education plays a key role in shaping such

responses, and the university seeks to nucleate wider conversations with other

institutions

working towards similar goals.



Sustainability in Higher and Professional Education courses

- A day long deep dive

**In person | 09 Jan 2026 | 9:30 am - 4:30pm
Venue : Indian Heritage Academy, Koramangala**

organised by



Schedule

Time	Session
9:30am - 9:45am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Registration• Browsing Resource table
9:45am - 10:10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome• Introduction• Context Setting
10:10am - 11:00am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participant Introductions over Tea/Coffee
11:00am - 11:15am	Bio break
11:15am - 12:00pm	Session 1 : What Exists Today? Stories from Practice
12:00pm - 1:00pm	Session 2 : What Should Sustainability Education Enable?
1:00pm - 2:00pm	Lunch (+ Group Photo)
2:00pm - 3:00pm	Sharing from session 1 & 2
3:00pm - 3:45pm	Session 3 : Opportunities and Constraints
3:45pm - 4:20pm	Reflections and Wrap up
4:20pm - 4:30pm	Vote of Thanks