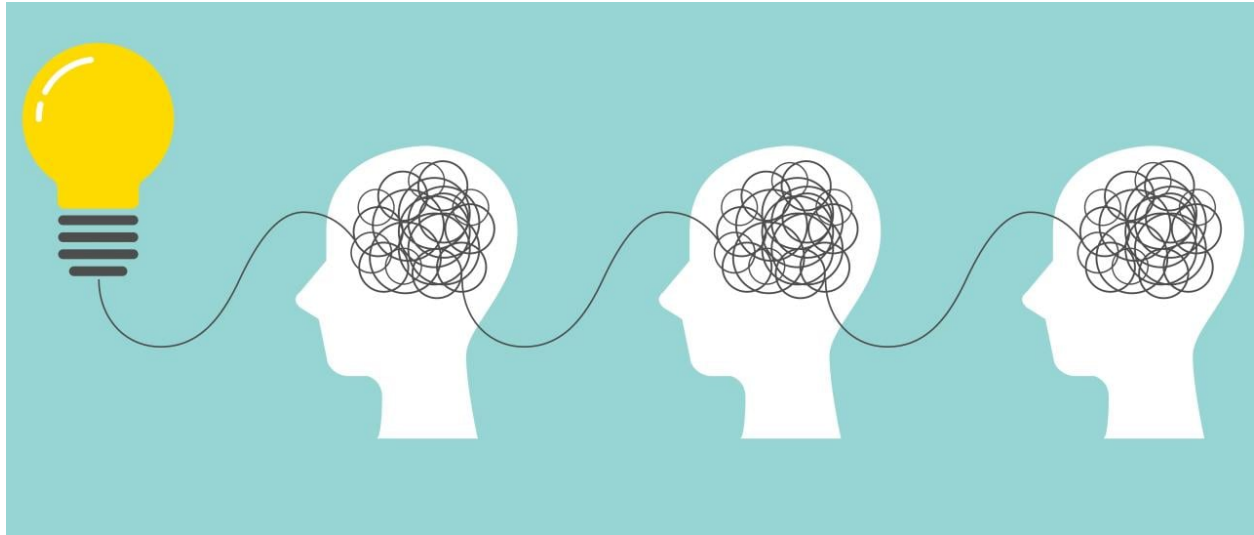

Collaboration Towards A Common Goal



By [Francisco Veloso](#) , INSEAD

The role of business schools in empowering the next generation of sustainability-focused entrepreneurs.

Achieving a more sustainable world is one of the most pressing issues we face today, and the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) are a key instrument to help us tackle this challenge. Rather than taking a piecemeal approach to the SDGs, it is vital that we view them through a holistic lens. Businesses, organisations and communities have to contribute to a better world – not along a few select areas, but across the various SDG dimensions. Such a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process is necessary to achieve these goals.

Yet, we are living in a time of volatile uncertainty, particularly in terms of geopolitics, with many countries increasingly seeking to protect their own interests. This can make it difficult to attain cooperation and consensus on addressing the aims of the SDGs.

It is therefore more essential than ever that we find ways of bringing together various stakeholders to collaborate on meeting SDG targets. That

means people from different countries – often with different perspectives and experiences – who share a willingness to debate these issues, listen to alternative views and devise entrepreneurial solutions to the challenges we face.

Both sustainability and collaboration are important aspects of our mission at INSEAD, where we bring together people, cultures and ideas to develop leaders that can have a transformational impact on the world. That potential impact was recently demonstrated at **ChangeNOW**, an annual sustainability summit joining over 35,000 participants from across the globe. It was founded by INSEAD alumni Santiago Lefebvre and Kevin Tayebaly (both from the MBA'15J cohort), together with their partner Rose-May Lucotte.

At the event, I joined a panel where we discussed the urgency and challenges of addressing the SDGs, as well as how sustainability-minded entrepreneurship holds the key to meeting 2030 SDG targets. We also spoke about why it is imperative that business schools integrate sustainability across their curricula, as INSEAD did for its MBA, if we are to prepare the next generation of leaders to understand and act differently.

Preparing the leaders of tomorrow

Globally, there are **over 1.8 billion** people aged between 10 to 24, the largest youth generation in history. Close to **90 percent** of them live in developing countries, where they make up a significant proportion of the population. These are the leaders of tomorrow.

How do we ensure that these individuals and future business leaders have access to the right skills, training and opportunities they need to play a part in achieving the SDGs? Education is key, and as a business school, we believe it is our role to provide our students with the tools, instruments, understanding and knowledge about sustainability – as well as the urgency to act.

Many of these future leaders are deeply passionate about fostering a sustainable world. At INSEAD, they constantly push us and their fellow students to do more on this front. Because, ultimately, the call for action must come from the people, and it is especially powerful when it originates from peers. There are still too many that are perhaps less sensitive, have not been exposed to or have not reflected as much on the case and urgency for change.

Leading global business schools such as INSEAD offer a unique opportunity for individuals from around the world, with different views and perspectives, to learn from each other about nuanced sustainability issues. They provide a space where people can work together to find common solutions to important problems that we simply must address. These debates are taking place in our classrooms and on our campuses every day, creating opportunities for us to exchange ideas, find common ground and spark action.

A more focused approach

This academic year, we introduced a [new MBA curriculum](#) to further encourage this debate and collaboration at INSEAD. We have embedded sustainability into all 14 MBA core courses and infused it in many electives, placing it at the centre of our offering.

Many of the SDGs directly intersect with the core values of responsible business practices. These goals guide businesses to promote diversity and inclusion, prioritise ethical labour practices and operate sustainably, all of which are becoming increasingly vital elements for success in today's global market. Another critical aspect we teach at INSEAD is the importance of implementing business solutions at scale and across national borders, which is vital if we want to make headway on achieving SDG targets.

Specific challenges are brought to life by our leading faculty, who have published over 100 SDG-related papers in the last five years and bring their research to the classroom. Our students work together to analyse real-world case studies of companies navigating these issues, acquiring critical thinking and problem-solving skills while understanding the positive impact that responsible businesses can have on society and the environment.

At the end of their MBA journey, students undertake a capstone project that challenges them to tackle real-world challenges aligned with the SDGs. Acting as leaders of a company navigating strategic dilemmas, they put their learnings into action by integrating sustainability principles across various business and management functions, including operations, strategy and finance.

We are proud to have over 90 different nationalities in our current MBA cohorts at INSEAD. Our diverse student body lends a holistic and international perspective to discussions around the SDGs and prevents

students from viewing these challenges in isolation. Through spirited dialogue with our faculty and each other, students learn how issues such as climate change are intricately linked to education, poverty and economic growth. They are also encouraged to think beyond single solutions and consider the broader global implications of business actions.

Recognising the challenges faced by people around the world cultivates a sense of shared humanity and a shared responsibility for collective action. This creates a mindset of ethical leadership, which is crucial for businesses operating in a globalised and interconnected world.

Fostering an entrepreneurial spirit

As someone whose academic work has revolved around innovation and entrepreneurship, I strongly believe that you need an entrepreneurial mindset to effect meaningful change.

Many of the solutions we need to achieve the SDGs do not currently exist or are in the research labs of universities around the globe. For the world to make real progress towards SDG targets and stay within our planetary boundaries, it will require motivated, purpose-driven entrepreneurs to devise and scale innovative solutions.

The root of entrepreneurship is creative destruction, and this is especially critical when it comes to sustainability. We need to dismantle old ways of thinking, experiment with new solutions and embrace new ways of working and producing in order to make a difference. We need regeneration and justice.

This is an amazing opportunity for sustainable transformation in the entrepreneurial space. And it is important for business schools to equip their students with the tools, knowledge and confidence to hone an action-oriented, entrepreneurial capacity and move those solutions forward.

To do so, business schools can guide their students to approach sustainability from the perspectives of alignment and opportunity, rather than through the narrow lens of trade-offs, while considering the triple bottom line: people, profit and the planet. Developing a business orientation drives students to be sensitive to the issue of scaling – the need to create solutions to address the SDGs that can be implemented on a global level.

A key player in INSEAD's drive towards fostering an entrepreneurial, sustainability-driven ecosystem is the [INSEAD Centre for Entrepreneurship](#). The Centre runs start-up boot camps, venture competitions and various programmes to support students in their entrepreneurship journeys. MBA students can opt to participate in summer start-up tours, where they visit entrepreneurial hubs and gain insights into the start-up ecosystem. Many of our alumni have gone on to establish companies that address pressing sustainability challenges. These include sustainability ratings start-up [EcoVadis](#), online carpooling platform [BlaBlaCar](#) and ocean carbon capture and storage venture [PRONOE](#), just to name a few.

Launched in 2023, our [Hans H. Wahl Impact Entrepreneurship Programme](#) supports impact entrepreneurs by helping them build connections among stakeholders and attract the investors required to scale and maximise impact. Additionally, we have a long-standing partnership with the [Cartier Women's Initiative](#) to help raise the profiles of women entrepreneurs, including those working on sustainability-related ventures.

INSEAD also sponsored several start-ups from around the world, such as e-scooter and e-bike company [Cyclecure](#), food tech venture [Fabumin](#) and healthcare organisation [HealthSetGo](#), helping them showcase their solutions at ChangeNOW. Meanwhile, our sustainability efforts are underpinned by the [Hoffmann Institute](#). It helps drive the integration of the SDGs throughout all aspects of the school – from research and teaching to our operations – and is an integral part of our effort to be at the forefront of sustainability.

The key role of business schools

Business schools have a crucial role to play in ensuring that we meet SDG targets by 2030. At INSEAD, we equip our students with the knowledge about sustainability issues, entrepreneurial mindset and tools to design globally scalable solutions – all of which will be necessary as we strive to create a more sustainable future.

By bringing together diverse individuals and providing them with the environment, experience, skills and support to make a real and lasting impact in the entrepreneurial space, business schools can empower them to become responsible leaders that will transform business, society and the planet for the better.

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/responsibility/collaboration-towards-common-goal>

About the author(s)

Francisco Veloso is a Professor of Strategy and the Dean of INSEAD since September 2023, leading the school across its full range of activities and four locations.

About the series

Crossroads: Business & Society

The [Hoffmann Institute](#) at INSEAD explores the intersection of business and society. The challenges of our times are unprecedented, and the decisions made by leaders today determine the future. The institute aims to equip these leaders to make decisions in ways that deliver positive outcomes for business, communities, people and our planet in line with globally agreed sustainability goals.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals offer a cohesive and centralised framework for discussing a new development model that is good for all people and the planet. INSEAD is aligning more closely with the SDGs as more businesses use the 17 global goals to enhance their contributions to society.

This series provides much-needed clarity regarding what the SDGs mean for strategies, operations and business models.