



# Research for Real Impact: Orienting Postgraduate Studies Toward Societal Solutions

*Explore strategies to align postgraduate research with societal needs,  
enhancing the university's social impact through problem-solving research*

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# Introduction



- Enhancing the social impact of universities through problem-solving research involves several key steps:
- **Identifying societal needs:** Universities should conduct a thorough analysis of the social issues and challenges relevant to their location and the broader community to identify the most pressing problems that the research should address.
- **Collaborating with stakeholders:** Engaging with non-academic stakeholders, such as policymakers, NGOs, and businesses, can help universities understand their needs and expectations, ensuring that the research is relevant and useful to society



- **Adopting a problem-solving mindset:** Encouraging researchers to adopt a problem-solving mindset and focus on developing actionable solutions to address the identified social issues can lead to research that directly addresses societal needs and contributes to positive change.
- **Leveraging existing resources:** Utilizing the university's existing resources, such as research centers, institutes, and partnerships, can support the research and its societal impact.
- **Promoting interdisciplinary research:** Encouraging interdisciplinary research projects that bring together experts from various fields can lead to more innovative and effective solutions.



# WHY THE SDGS MATTER TO UNIVERSITIES?



# WHAT ARE THE SDGs?



**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS**

# SDGs



• In September 2015, world leaders at the UN unanimously adopted *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

• The agenda, which came into effect on 1 January 2016, aims to set the world on a path towards a better future for all by 2030.





# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS



- A full list of targets for each goal can be found at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>



### How do the SDGs help universities?

- Create increased demand for SDG related education
- Provide a comprehensive and globally accepted definition of a responsible university
- Offer a framework for demonstrating impact
- Create new funding streams
- Support collaboration with new external and internal partners

### How do universities help the SDGs?

- Provide knowledge, innovations and solutions to the SDGs
- Create current and future SDG implementers
- Demonstrate how to support, adopt and implement SDGs in governance, operations and culture
- Develop cross-sectoral leadership to guide the SDG response

**Knowledge**

**Learning**

**Demonstration**

**Impact**

**Collaboration**



# Aligning postgraduate research with societal needs



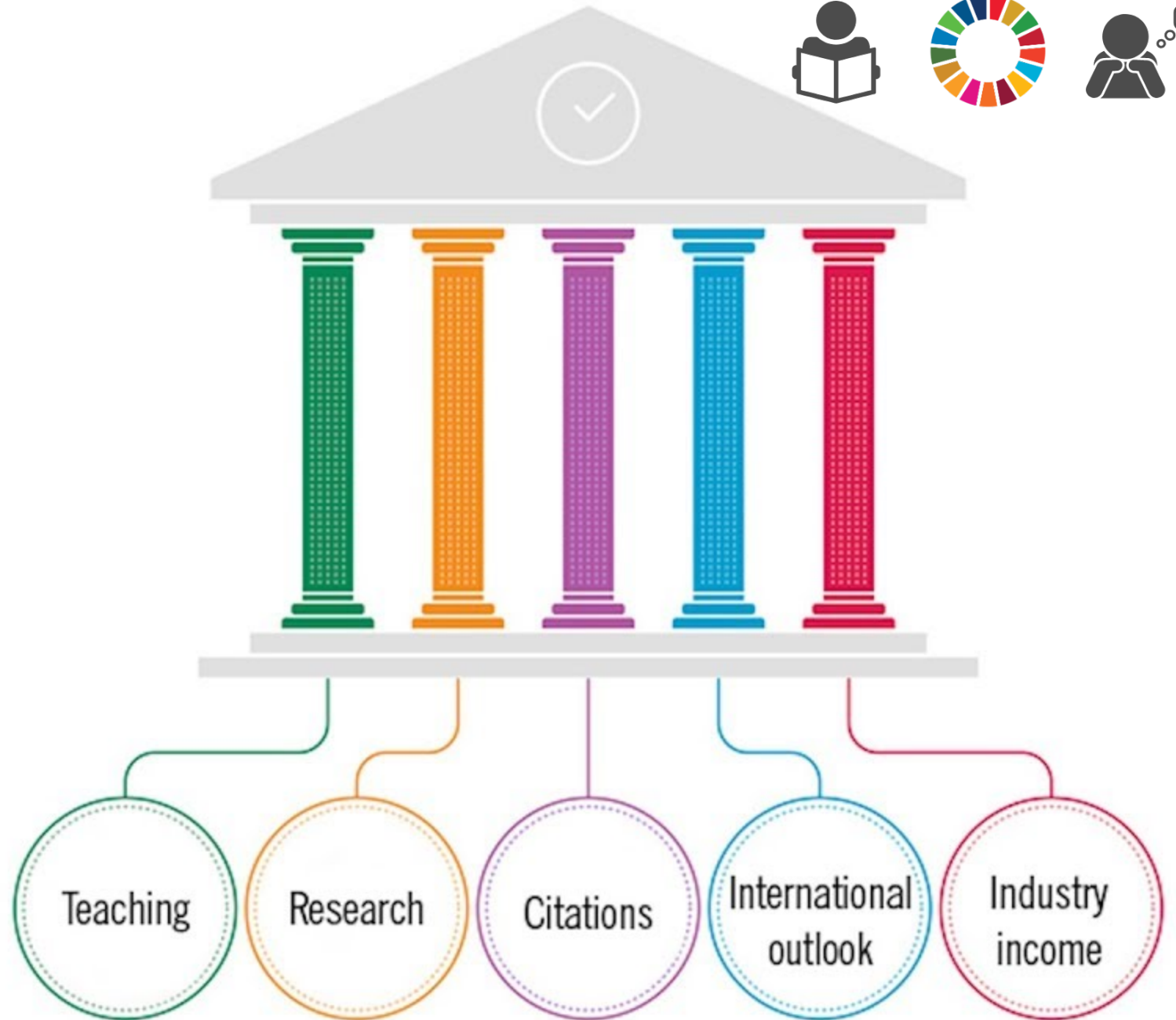
- Universities can encourage postgraduate students to align their research with societal needs by utilizing the SDGs as a framework.
- This approach provides a comprehensive guide for addressing societal needs and can serve as a source of motivation for postgraduate researchers



# Enhancing the university's social impact through problem-solving research

- Modern universities are developing research strategies aimed at improving their rankings through generating significant societal impact.
- This involves fostering interdisciplinary research approaches to address complex societal challenges and actively engaging with non-academic stakeholders to ensure the practical application of research outcomes.

# TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS



# Times Higher Education World University Rankings

## 18 performance indicators

Note: study abroad will be added in the future as the 18th indicator



**29.5%**

Teaching

Teaching reputation **15%**

Doctorate staff ratio **5.5%**

Staff-to-student ratio **4.5%**

Institutional income **2.5%**

Doctorate bachelor ratio **2.0%**

**29%**

Research environment

Research reputation **18%**

Research income **5.5%**

Research productivity **5.5%**

**30%**

Research quality

Citation impact **15%**

Research strength **5.0%**

Research excellence **5.0%**

Research influence **5.0%**

**7.5%**

International outlook

International students **2.5%**

International staff **2.5%**

International co-authorship **2.5%**

**4.0%**

Industry

Industry income **2.0%**

Patents **2.0%**

## NUMBER ONE RANKED INSTITUTIONS ACROSS RANKINGS

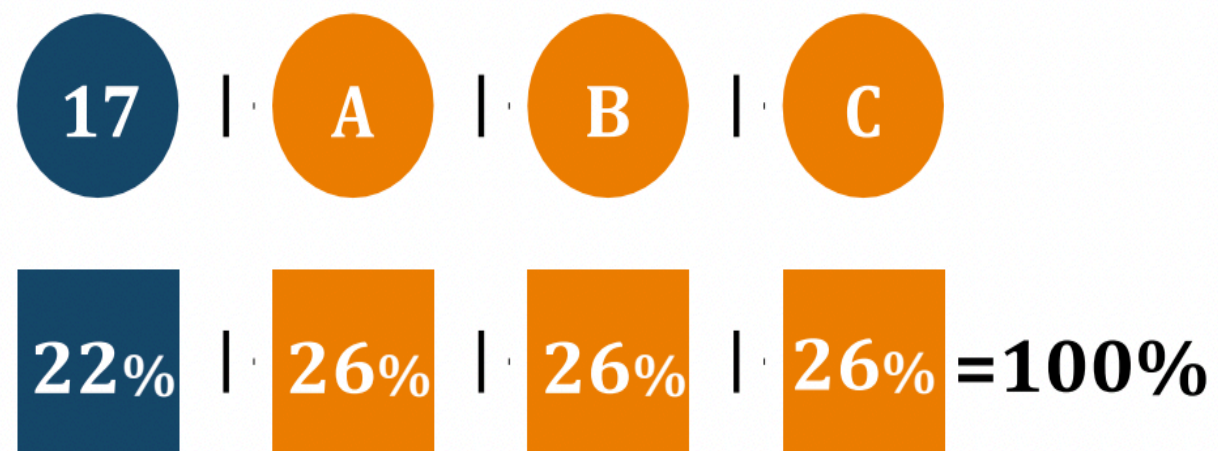
Ranking	University	Country/ Region
Overall	University of Manchester	United Kingdom
SDG1	Queen's University	Canada
SDG2	Metropolitan Autonomous University	Mexico
SDG3	Oregon Health and Science University	United States
SDG4	Aalborg University	Denmark
SDG5	Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University	Saudi Arabia
SDG6	University of Sydney	Australia
SDG7	King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi	Thailand
SDG8	University of Johannesburg	South Africa
SDG9	= University of British Columbia	Canada
SDG9	= University of Toronto	Canada
SDG9	= Technical University of Munich	Germany
SDG9	= Delft University of Technology	Netherlands
SDG10	University of Canberra	Australia
SDG11	University of Manchester	United Kingdom
SDG12	University of Manchester	United Kingdom
SDG13	University at Buffalo	United States
SDG14	University of Plymouth	United Kingdom
SDG15	La Trobe University	Australia
SDG16	Queen's University	Canada
SDG17	University of Newcastle	Australia





# The methodology

## SDGS 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS





Times Higher Education  
**Impact Rankings 2023**

## Top 10 Overall

Partnerships for the goals  
+ top 3 SDGs

2023 rank	Institution	Country/ region	Score
1	Western Sydney University	Australia	99.4
2	University of Manchester	United Kingdom	97.5
3	Queen's University	Canada	97.2
4	Universiti Sains Malaysia	Malaysia	96.9
5	University of Tasmania	Australia	96.6
6	Arizona State University (Tempe)	United States	96.5
=7	University of Alberta	Canada	96.4
=7	RMIT University	Australia	96.4
=9	Aalborg University	Denmark	95.8
=9	University of Victoria	Canada	95.8
=9	Western University	Canada	95.8

[www.thewur.com](http://www.thewur.com)

#THEglobalimpact



# Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework

- Use SDGs as a framework for aligning research with societal needs.
- Address complex challenges faced by society through interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches.

# University's Research Strategy



- Nurturing talent and engaging in strategic collaborations.
- Attracting students through research strengths.
- Focusing on long-term fundamental research and interdisciplinary potential.

# Fostering Research with Societal Impact



- Effective community engagement, as a potential pathway to societal impact of research, requires deep understanding and adept navigation of the highly complex ecosystem that shapes research and impact work.
- This knowledge is often the hard-earned product of years of work, but individual researchers shouldn't be expected to do this alone.
- Institutions and disciplines play critical roles in supporting academics to realize social change from their research in addition to the influence of funders, government policies, industry needs, and other factors that inform the chances of success.



What can universities do?

# What can universities do?

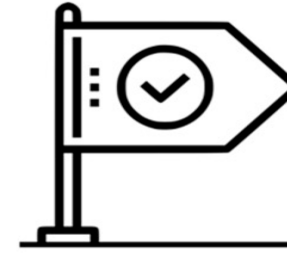
- Provide students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to understand and address the challenges of the SDGs
- Empower and mobilize young people.
- Provide in-depth academic or vocational training to implement SDG solutions .
- Enhance opportunities for capacity building of students and professionals from developing countries to address challenges relating to the SDGs . Provide students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to understand and address the challenges of the SDGs.



# Education for Sustainable Human Development



Teaching and promotion  
*SDGs* at university



Competences



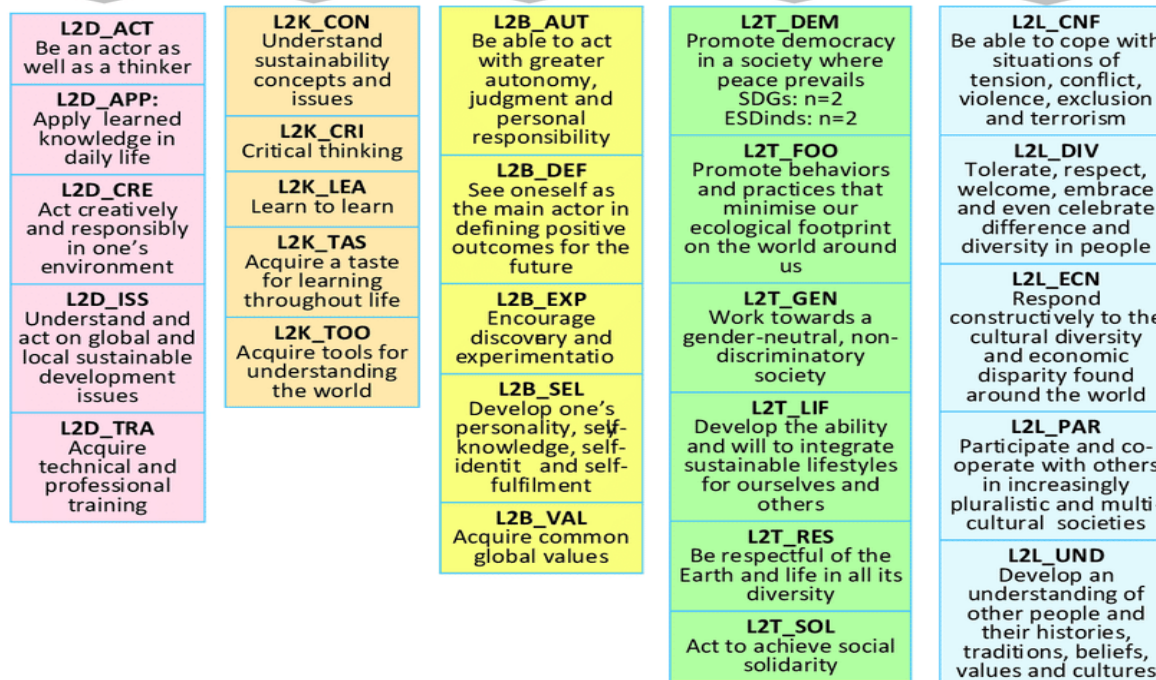
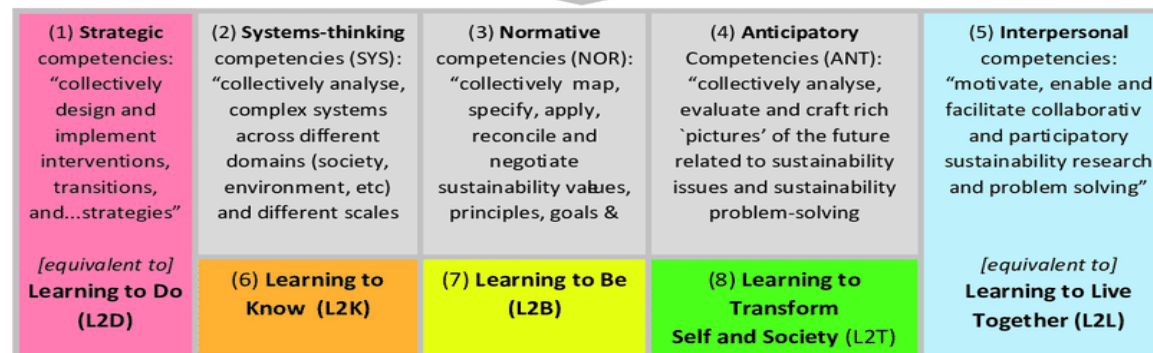
Students

# Cross-cutting skills and 'key competencies'

### Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals:

“By 2030, ensure that **all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (SD)**, including, among others, through education for SD and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to SD.”

**SUB-TARGET 2:** All learners and educators involved in organised learning activities, both formal and non-formal, acquire **skills** needed to promote SD



# Research and Impact Strategy



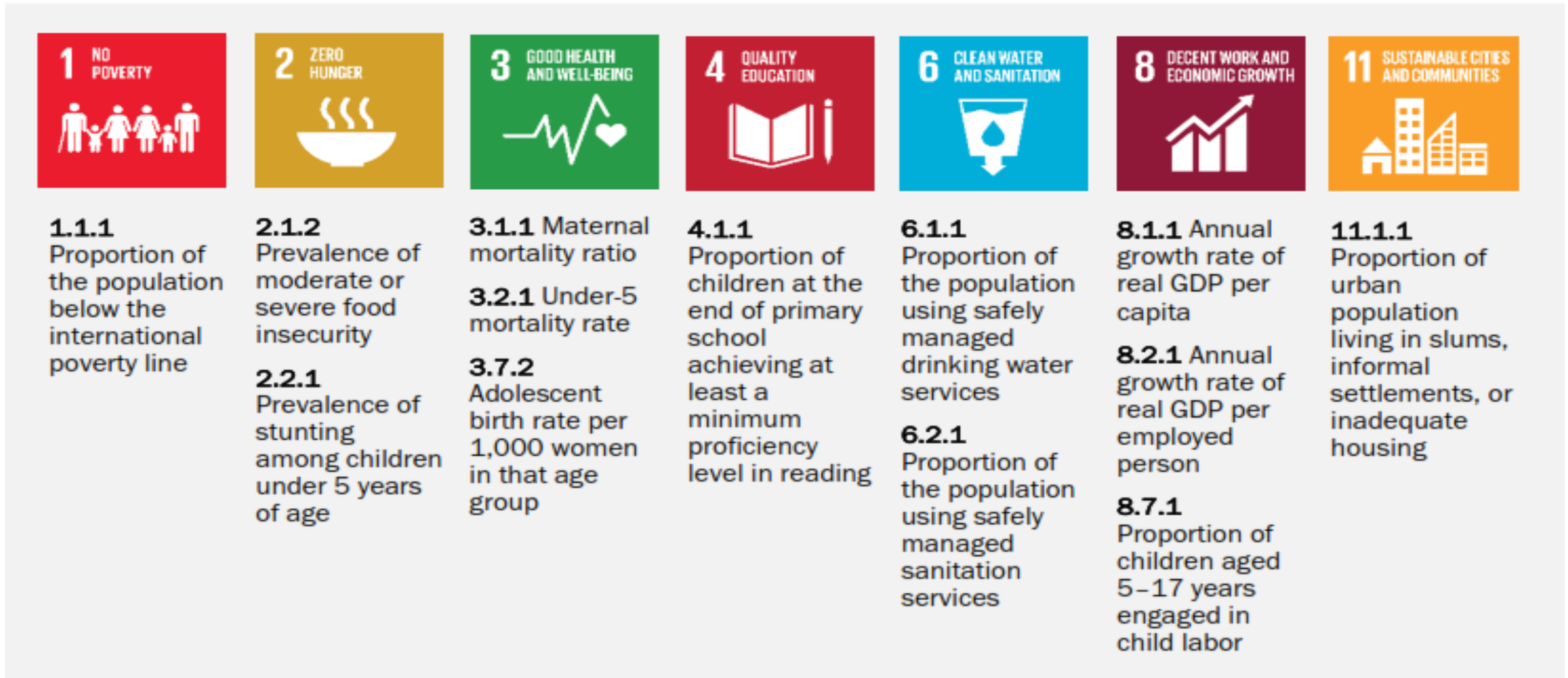
- Encourage and promote the SDGs as a topic of research within the university.
- Support the full spectrum of research approaches needed to address the SDGs, including interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research.
- Support and incubate innovation for sustainable development solutions.
- Actively support national and local implementation of the SDGs.



- Advocate for national support and coordination of research on the SDGs.
- Support capacity building for developing countries to undertake and use research on the SDGs

# How to start deepen the engagement with the SDGs?

Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Included in the FP-SDGs Model Outputs





## **A whole-of-university approach is essential and universities can use the following Steps to start and deepen their engagement with the SDGs:**

1. Mapping what they are already doing.
2. Building internal capacity and ownership of the SDGs.
3. Identifying priorities, opportunities and gaps.
4. Integrating, implementing and embedding the SDGs within university strategies, policies and plans.
5. Monitoring, evaluating and communicating their actions on the SDGs.

# For further reading

- [https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/partnerships-for-the-goals.](https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/partnerships-for-the-goals)
- [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IIA4WsOMk7A-48gOvU\\_WFMwGP4jMyrkQpqGa4H4O-Uw/edit.](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IIA4WsOMk7A-48gOvU_WFMwGP4jMyrkQpqGa4H4O-Uw/edit)