



The role of a public university in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals in a developing country



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1. Introduction

Universities play a key role in achieving the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by acting as centers of excellence that promote the transformation of society [1]. In 2020, UFES established an institutional development project focusing on the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the following objectives:

- 1) To identify what is already being done at the university toward the SDGs.
- 2) To evaluate the possibilities of integration, implementation and incorporation of the SDGs in university strategies, policies and plans.
- 3) To monitor, evaluate and communicate its actions with respect to the SDGs.

2. Methods

We used SciVal (Elsevier) to compile a list of SDG-related publications by UFES researchers. In addition, we searched university databases and used automated keyword searches followed by manual inspection to classify research projects and outreach initiatives according to each SDG. The integration of the SDGs in university plans occurred through the [Institutional Development Plan](#) and the communication was designed by the communication and information technology offices through the website and social media.

3. Results & Discussion

Between 2015 and 2020, researchers from UFES published 2,279 SDG-related articles, 40% of them on good health and well-being (SDG 3). Of the 2,017 research projects carried out between 2016 and 2020, 1,483 (74%) were aligned to at least one SDG, and all 17 SDGs were represented. Good health (SDG 3: 37%) and quality education (SDG 4: 15%) prevailed (Fig. 1). In 2020, there was a marked increase (from 35 to 45%) of SDG-related research projects focusing on health, which is associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.



Fig. 1. Research projects related to each SDG at UFES (2016–2020). Box size is proportional to the number of projects.

Out of 1,000 outreach initiatives analyzed in the same period, 97.7% aligned to at least one SDG, and all 17 SDGs were represented. Half (50%) of the outreach initiatives were on SDG 4, followed by SDG 3 (27%) (Fig. 2). In 2020, 57% of the outreach activities associated with SDG 3 were related to the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting UFES response to the current crisis.



Fig. 2. Outreach actions related to each SDG at UFES (2016–2020). Box size is proportional to the number of actions.

The Office of University Communications is classifying and tagging the [news related to the SDGs](#) at UFES news portal, including the logos of the corresponding SDGs at the bottom of the page. We have also established a [website](#) and a [social media profile](#) devoted to SDG-related activities at the university. The establishment of SDG-related actions is now part of the institutional development plan and the university vision for the next 10 years. Despite significant advances, we still need a proper framework to facilitate the inclusion of the SDGs as a whole in the programs of the university [2].

The actions reported here raise awareness of the SDGs among staff and students by showing what UFES has already done for the SDGs. They also provide basic information on the SDGs, help reinforce the university commitment to sustainable development, and increase UFES' reputation within the community and beyond by promoting SDG-related actions. In addition, the data clearly show the key role the university played in generating and disseminating knowledge related to the purposes of the 2030 Agenda.

5. References

- [1] SDSN Australia/Pacific (2017) Getting started with the SDGs in universities: A guide for universities, higher education institutions, and the academic sector. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Melbourne.
- [2] Leal Filho et al. (2021) A framework for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in university programmes. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 299 (2021) 126915.