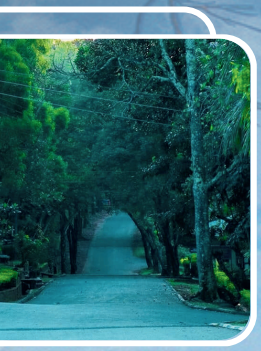

Workshop Report on

UPLIFTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR BETTER UNIVERSITY RANKINGS IN SRI LANKA

Hiruni Rathwatta, Chalaka Fernando, Nuwan Gunarathne, Warunika Hettiarachchi

UPLIFTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR BETTER UNIVERSITY RANKINGS IN SRI LANKA

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON WORKSHOP CONDUCTED ON
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AT
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Reflections from Workshop Leaders

The Open University of Sri Lanka is honoured to have hosted this workshop, which marks a significant step towards institutionalizing sustainability in higher education in the Sri Lankan university sphere. As a Vice Chancellor and the Chair of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD), I recognise the importance of uniting our universities to champion environmental stewardship while contributing to sustainable development. This initiative not only promotes ecological responsibility but also strengthens the position of Sri Lankan universities in global university rankings. I commend the passionate contributors and reiterate our pledge to lead in forming a Community of Practice for sustainability in Sri Lankan higher education institutes.

Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne, Vice Chancellor, Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL)

It is with great pride that the IEPSL joined hands in organising this timely and impactful workshop. As a national body committed to fostering environmental professionalism, we are encouraged by the active engagement of Sri Lanka's higher education institutions in advancing sustainability. This workshop underscores the importance of collaboration, leadership, and institutional transformation to align with global environmental goals. We are also proud that one of our own Chartered Environmental Professionals is the key resource person for this workshop and thankful to Dr Chalaka. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the organisers and participants for their dedication to embedding sustainability as a core academic and operational principle across universities.

Mr. Asela Iddawela, President, Institute of Environmental Professionals Sri Lanka (IEPSL)

With great pleasure and deep humility, I had the privilege to give back to my country as a volunteer and key technical resource person, highlighting the importance of connecting local education with global competitiveness through stronger university rankings and advancing environmental sustainability. While each university has unique strengths, many challenges are shared. This workshop has laid the foundation for a Community of Practice to enhance both sustainability and institutional rankings, and I wish all participants the very best in driving excellence and a forging greener future for Sri Lanka.

Dr Chalaka Fernando, Key Technical Resource Person, Australian National University

Coordinating this workshop has been a profoundly rewarding experience. The active participation, insightful contributions, and shared vision for sustainable transformation among Sri Lanka's higher education institutes reaffirm our collective potential. At CESSD, we believe that environmental sustainability must be deeply rooted in academic structures, governance, and community engagement. I sincerely thank the co-organisers, speakers, and participants for their unwavering support. May this workshop mark the beginning of a united journey toward greener, smarter, and globally recognised institutions.

Dr. Yohan Mahagamage, Workshop Coordinator, Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainability Development (CESSD), OUSL

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful completion of this workshop and the subsequent publication of this report would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of numerous individuals and organisations.

Deep appreciation is extended to Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne, Vice Chancellor of OUSL, for leading this initiative and supporting the dissemination of its outcomes through this publication. Our sincere gratitude is also extended to Professor Bandunee Athapattu, Director, and Dr. Yohan Mahagamage, Workshop Coordinator, from the CESSD, OUSL, for their tireless efforts in organising and facilitating the workshop, ensuring a seamless and enriching experience for all participants.

Our special appreciation is conveyed to Mr. Asela Iddawela, President; Emeritus Professor Niranjanie Ratnayake, Immediate Past President; Mr. Ajith U.K. Ethugala, Vice President; and Dr. Arosha Hemali, Assistant Treasurer, from the IEPSL, for their generous support and sponsorship, which significantly contributed to the success of the event and the realisation of this publication.

Furthermore, sincere acknowledgement is extended to the esteemed resource persons who generously shared their expertise, enriching the workshop with their valuable insights. These include:

- Ms. Clare de Castella, Associate Director of Environmental Sustainability at the Australian National University.
- Professor Mangala Yatawara, University of Kelaniya.
- Dr. Yohan Mahagamage, Senior Lecturer at the Open University of Sri Lanka.
- Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu, Director General/CEO of the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka.
- Dr. Ajith Gunawardene, Director (Environmental Education and Awareness), Central Environmental Authority.
- Mr. Randeewa Malalasooriya, Honorary Treasurer, IEPSL.
- Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala, Senior Lecturer, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka.

Their contributions brought valuable perspectives, adding depth and diversity to the discuss-ions.

Finally, our heartfelt appreciation is extended to the university academics and professional participants whose active engagement, thoughtful dialogue, and shared experiences greatly enriched the workshop.

The objective of this publication is to document and disseminate the knowledge shared during the workshop, highlighting best practices, challenges, and opportunities related to environmental sustainability in higher education. We hope this report will serve as a valuable resource and inspiration for continued collaboration and action in this critical field.

Contents

Authors

Hiruni Rathwatta

Hiruni is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Accountancy and Finance at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. She also serves as the Faculty of Management Studies' representative at the university's Sustainability Centre. Hiruni earned her Bachelor of Science in Accounting (Special) from the Department of Accounting at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, and subsequently completed her Master's degree at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. She is an Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), United Kingdom. Her research interests include sustainability, accounting history, accounting from a religious perspective, and strategic management accounting.

Dr. Chalaka Fernando

Chalaka is an accomplished Environmental Sustainability Manager who has led initiatives such as integrating the SDG-incorporated ranking: THE Impact Rankings and QS Environmental Sustainability into the Environmental Management Plan at The Australian National University (ANU). He holds a PhD in Consumer Choice Integrated Dynamic Life Cycle Assessment from the ANU, Canberra, MSc in Chemical and Process Engineering from the University of Moratuwa, and a BSc (Hons) from the University of Peradeniya. He brings nearly two decades of global, regional, and local sustainability experience in apparel & fashion, construction, cement, and higher education institutions. He is a Chartered Environmental Professional in Sri Lanka (CEnvP) and passionately advocates for data-driven impact and a minimalist lifestyle.

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Dr. Nuwan Gunarathne holds the position of Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accounting at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ), Sri Lanka. He is also the Director of the Research Centre at the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce of USJ. He is a Fellow Member of the Institute of Certified Management Accountants of Sri Lanka and a member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) United Kingdom. Dr. Gunarathne earned his doctorate in corporate sustainability and sustainability accounting from Griffith University, Australia. He also possesses an MBA from the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM) in Sri Lanka and a Business Administration degree from the USJ. Dr. Gunarathne's areas of research encompass corporate sustainability, digitalisation of sustainability reporting, waste management, and accounting education.

Warunika Hettiarachchi

Warunika is a Senior Lecturer (Grade II) attached to the Department of Marketing Management, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. She obtained her BSc. (Special) in Marketing Management from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIM), University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Warunika is a member of the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing and has an Advanced Diploma in Management Accounting (CIMA). Her areas of research interest include sustainability marketing, tourism and hospitality management, consumer behaviour, digital marketing, and consumer psychology.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AASHE - Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

CESSD - Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development

CoP - Community of Practice

HEIs - Higher Education Institutions

IEPSL - Institute of Environmental Professionals Sri Lanka

OUSL – The Open University of Sri Lanka

QS World University Rankings - Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings

SDGs - United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

STARS - Sustainability Tracking and Assessment System

THE IR - Times Higher Education Impact Ranking

UI GreenMetric - University of Indonesia GreenMetric World University Rankings

Executive Summary

As global higher education increasingly aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), university sustainability rankings, such as the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (THE IR), QS Sustainability Rankings, and UI GreenMetric, have emerged as influential frameworks for assessing institutional performance and visibility. These ranking schemes not only validate a university's commitment to sustainable development but also open doors to international recognition, research funding, and strategic partnerships. For universities in developing countries like Sri Lanka, aligning with these global benchmarks presents a timely opportunity to enhance their environmental stewardship, attract resources, and contribute meaningfully to national sustainability goals.

This report presents the outcomes of a national workshop conducted in February 2025 at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL), Nawala, organised by the Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development (CESSD) at OUSL in partnership with the Institute of Environmental Professionals Sri Lanka (IEPSL), aimed at empowering Sri Lankan Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to systematically enhance their environmental sustainability performance and competitiveness in global rankings. Through expert-led sessions, institutional case studies, and collaborative group exercises, the workshop emphasised that sustainability in HEIs requires not only technical implementation but also strong governance, stakeholder engagement, and strategic vision.

Critically, the workshop highlighted the importance of collaboration between universities, both state and non-state, as a key enabler for accelerating sustainability transitions. Inter-university collaboration allows institutions to share knowledge, leverage resources, co-develop solutions to common challenges, and collectively advocate for supportive national policies, and the following are the highlighted key deliverables to achieve both sustainability performance and university ranking.

- Initiate and formalise a Community of Practice (CoP) for university sustainability to facilitate continuous collaboration, knowledge exchange, and collective action among Sri Lankan HEIs.

- Establish a centralised sustainability governance structure within each university, ensuring leadership commitment, dedicated resources, and integration of sustainability goals into institutional strategies.

- Develop a standardised national framework for sustainability data management and reporting to support transparency, performance tracking, and alignment with international ranking criteria.

- Embed sustainability and SDGs competencies into university curricula and research agendas to foster interdisciplinary learning and research, enhance impact, and support sustainability rankings.

- Mobilise financial and human resources while building institutional capacity through targeted training, stakeholder engagement, and inclusion of sustainability responsibilities in official roles.

01. Workshop Overview

The Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and the Institute of Environmental Professionals Sri Lanka (IEPSL) collaboratively organised a workshop on "Uplifting Environmental Sustainability Performance to Improve University Ranking of Sri Lanka State and Non-State Universities" on 20th and 21st February 2025 at the OUSL, Nawala. This is an extension of the workshop organised in 2024 on 14th May titled "Workshop on Enhancing University Environmental Compliances: Special Focus on Times Higher Education Impact Ranking (THE IR) and QS World University Rankings". The workshop commenced with an inauguration ceremony, and the invitees were welcomed by Professor Bandunee Athapattu, Director of the Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development (CESSD) at OUSL. Then, Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne, the Vice Chancellor of OUSL, explained his motives for leading this workshop for a better, more sustainable Sri Lanka by empowering Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Subsequently, Emeritus Professor Niranjanie Ratnayake, the immediate past president of IEPSL, explained why they supported this inception. Following her, Dr. Yohan Mahagamage, workshop coordinator, CESSD, OUSL, conveyed the workshop's objective, which is to propagate the importance of adopting environmental sustainability in Sri Lankan HEIs and how it benefits in achieving university ranking, which is still in its blooming stage. Then, the keynote speaker and main resource person of the workshop, Dr. Chalaka Fernando, Environmental Sustainability Manager, The Australian National University (ANU), gave a brief introduction on the critical need for environmental sustainability management in universities and how it is linked to university sustainability rankings such as THE IR, UI GreenMetric, and QS World University Ranking for Sustainability. Further, he stressed the importance of tapping social capital and building a strong governance structure for resourcing, reviewing, and reporting, linked to HEIs' strategies, to achieve the expected outcomes. Finally, the inauguration session was concluded with Dr. Arosha Hemali's vote of thanks, representing IEPSL. There were around seventy participants from twelve state and four non-state HEIs, including academic and professional staff (non-academic).

The workshop started with a virtual session conducted by Ms. Clare De Castella, Associate Director of Environmental Sustainability at the ANU, on the importance of a governance framework for sustainability management. Then, Dr. Chalaka Fernando conducted a group exercise by dividing participants into their universities to discuss and present each university's current sustainability management structure, along with its challenges, and asked them to suggest the most effective way to manage the sustainability structure.

After that, the second half of the first day was allocated to present case studies by invited resource personnel from different universities. Ms Hiruni Rathwatta, a Lecturer from the Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, and Ms Warunika Hettiarachchi, a Senior Lecturer from Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, presented the early findings of a Systematic Literature Review on sustainability practices and university ranking. Subsequently, Dr. Nuwan Gunarathne, a Senior Lecturer from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, discussed the Jewels and barriers of establishing energy analysis for the Universities. Following Dr. Nuwan, Prof. Mangala Yatawara from the University of Kelaniya, showcased the success story of implementing THE Impact Ranking. Then, the final case study was presented by Dr. Yohan Mahagamage, a Senior Lecturer from OUSL, on the implementation process of the UI GreenMetric rank. After that, the first day of the workshop concludes with Dr. Chalaka Fernando summarising the key points of the case studies.

The second day of the workshop began with an ice-breaking activity conducted by Dr. Chalaka Fernando to recap the learnings of the first day sessions. Next, the workshop flowed to the most notable segment, where prominent sustainability professionals representing government agencies, professional bodies, and industries shared their thoughts on further enhancing sustainability and how it can be connected to HEIs, moderated by Dr. Chalaka Fernando. The series of sessions initiated by Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu, Director General/CEO, Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka, exhibited the national policies and strategic approaches for environmental sustainability in HEIs in Sri Lanka. In addition, Dr. Ajith Gunawardene, Director of Environmental Education and Awareness from the Central Environmental Authority, discussed the Importance of Environmental Regulations and Compliance in HEIs in Sri Lanka. In the meantime, Mr. Randeewa Malalasooriya, Treasurer of IEPSL, put forward the value of environmental networking for HEIs in Sri Lanka and expressed IEPSL's extended support towards achieving it. Following that, the expert opinion was presented by Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala, Senior Lecturer, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, and also the Former Chairman of the Sri Lanka Accreditation Board, on a systems perspective on environmental sustainability in HEIs in Sri Lanka.

After the expert opinion sharing session, there was a fruitful panel discussion with experts and participants, allowing participants to resolve their doubts.

The latter part of the workshop, led by Dr. Fernando, involved a group activity on optimising synergies and unique selling propositions in environmental sustainability activities that also support rankings from four perspectives: research, teaching, operationalisation, and governance. After an enthusiastic and thought-provoking break room discussion, the groups presented the current barriers they faced in implementing environmental sustainability and suggestions for overcoming them with an action plan and required resources. After this brainstorming session, the workshop reached its climax, where Dr. Fernando summarised the whole workshop and suggested the importance of initiating a Community of Practice (CoP) for sustainability in HEIs as a collaborative networking space for sustainability practitioners. It would foster knowledge sharing, best practices, and collective action to enhance sustainability in HEIs. The Vice Chancellor of OUSL, Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakaratne, highly appreciated the suggestion and committed to taking the leading role in initiating CoP for sustainability in HEIs in Sri Lanka. Then, the workshop was successfully concluded with the certificate awarding to participants and appreciation for resource persons (Annexure: Workshop Agenda).

02. Environmental Sustainability Management in Universities and Ranking

Dr. Chalaka Fernando
Environmental Sustainability Manager
Australian National University

The sessions, conducted by Dr. Chalaka Fernando, focused on the significance of environmental sustainability practices and management in HEIs in the current global context. He emphasised that sustainability is vital due to several factors, including economic and institutional benefits, regulatory and ethical responsibilities, global environmental concerns like the combat against climate change, challenges caused by resource depletion, and the role of universities as a change manager or agents. Additionally, he highlighted the non-marketing benefits and ranking advantages associated with sustainability initiatives in HEIs.

Dr. Fernando then elaborated on key university sustainability ranking systems, including**:**

- Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
- QS World University Rankings on Sustainability
- UI GreenMetric Rankings
- Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (AASHE STARS)

He explained the ranking criteria, with a specific focus on the QS World University Rankings on Sustainability, particularly its environmental impact category. This category is structured around three main dimensions:

1. Environmental sustainability – Institutional commitments to sustainability.
2. Environmental education – The integration of sustainability into the academic curriculum.
3. Environmental research – The contribution of universities to research in sustainability-related fields.

Providing practical insights, Dr. Fernando discussed strategies for developing and implementing environmental sustainability initiatives to enhance university rankings. He stressed that successful implementation depends on:

- Tapping into social capital, engaging students and both academic and professional (non-academic) staff.
- Collaboration among key stakeholders.
- Efficient data management, ensuring that sustainability data is properly tracked, reviewed, and used for decision-making.
- Managing double materiality, balancing financial sustainability with environmental and social responsibilities, and ensuring HEIs consider people, planet, and financial well-being.

A crucial part of his presentation focused on governance structures required for sustainability management in HEIs. He outlined key governance components, including:

- Management commitment to define and implement sustainability goals.
- Organisaiton's sustainability goals align with its strategic plan and overall mission.
- Resource allocation to ensure proper funding for sustainability initiatives.
- Regular reviews and reporting to track progress and maintain transparency by disseminating publicly.

Dr. Fernando also discussed stakeholder engagement in environmental sustainability strategies for Sri Lankan HEIs. He identified students, alumni, suppliers, academic and professional staff, prospective employers, neighbouring communities, and regulatory bodies University Grant Commission and Central Environmental Authority (CEA) as critical stakeholders whose involvement is essential for success.

Illustrating the practical application of sustainability strategies, Dr. Fernando presented a case study from the Australian National University. He described how they have successfully implemented various sustainability initiatives to achieve a strong ranking in university sustainability metrics. This real-world example provided participants with a clear roadmap on how HEIs can integrate sustainability into their operational, academic, and research structures.

The session concluded with an interactive discussion on the challenges faced by Sri Lankan HEIs on sustainability management and ways to overcome barriers through collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and structured governance frameworks. Overall, it was a valuable learning experience, equipping participants with practical strategies to enhance sustainability efforts in universities while harnessing global rankings.

03. Sustainability Management – Importance of a Governance Framework

Ms. Clare De Castella
Associate Director
Environmental Sustainability
Australian National University

Ms. Clare commenced her presentation by capturing the audience's attention with key barriers in implementing environmental sustainability at HEIs. These challenges include a lack of support, funding, and resources, competing priorities and agendas, and institutional inertia. She emphasised that overcoming these barriers requires a robust governance structure. Governance, in this context, refers to the framework of rules, relationships, systems, and processes by which an enterprise is directed, controlled, and held accountable. It ensures authority is exercised and maintained effectively within an organisation.

Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of a governance structure in an HEI that facilitates strategic alignment, accountability, transparency, stakeholder engagement, policy integration, risk management, and adherence to reporting best practices such as International Sustainability Reporting Standards. Ultimately, these reporting frameworks contribute to improve university sustainability rankings.

Ms. Clare outlined several key strategies to establish a strong sustainability governance structure

Leadership commitment and structure: Universities should secure strong commitment from top management, including vice-chancellors and deans. Dedicated committees or task forces should be established to oversee sustainability initiatives.

Defined roles and responsibilities: Higher authorities must clearly define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making levels, empowering key stakeholders with the necessary authority.

Development of goals, policies, and strategies: Comprehensive sustainability policies should be developed, covering areas such as energy consumption, waste management, and procurement. These policies must include measurable goals and targets to ensure timely implementation.

Collaboration, engagement, and communication: Universities should actively involve students, faculty, and staff in sustainability initiatives while fostering collaboration with local communities, businesses, and other educational institutions. Effective communication is essential for driving engagement.

Integration with research and teaching: Institutions should encourage research in sustainable technologies and practices. Additionally, sustainability-related topics should be incorporated into academic programs and courses.

Monitoring and reporting: Universities should implement Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track progress and publish annual sustainability reports, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Adaptive management: Strategies should be flexible, allowing adjustments based on feedback and evolving circumstances.

These strategies collectively contribute to a strong sustainability governance framework, enabling universities to manage and enhance their sustainability efforts effectively.

Additionally, Ms. Clare emphasised that in crafting sustainability strategies, universities must balance ambition with achievability. She highlighted the importance of aligning sustainability functions with finance, academic colleagues, and estates (facility management)/campus management, while ensuring clear accountability.

Key considerations include:

- The balance between ambition and realistic implementation.
- The role of university leadership, ensuring a balance between senior exposure and functional efficiency.
- Representation in committees, ensuring a mix of expertise and stakeholder involvement.
- Integration of sustainability initiatives into existing structures rather than creating entirely new systems.
- Context-specific governance adaptations.

Ms. Clare also shared her practical experience in designing a sustainability governance framework at her university. The proposed framework is structured around three key areas: Climate (SDG 13), Circular Economy (SDG 12), and Nature (SDG 15).

These areas are supported by eight pillars:

1. Energy (SDG 7)
2. Transport (SDG 11)
3. Climate Risk (SDG 13)
4. Waste/Resource Recovery (SDG 12)
5. Water (SDG 6)
6. Other Procured Goods and Services (SDG 12)
7. Built Environment (SDG 11)
8. Landscapes/Ecosystems (SDG 15)

The key drivers enabling this framework are:

- **Governance** – Policy development, strategic assessment, and reporting.
- **Operations** – Implementation and facilitation of sustainability initiatives.
- **Engagement and behaviour change** – Effective communication and partnerships.
- **Research and teaching** – Establishing programmes such as 'campus as a living lab' and educating graduates for a sustainable future.

In conclusion, Ms. Clare reiterated that a robust sustainability governance framework is essential to overcoming barriers to implement environmental sustainability and enhancing university rankings. However, she stressed that sustainability governance is highly contextual and must be tailored to each institution's unique needs.

04. Case Study I: Sustainability and University Ranking Trends: Early Findings of a Systematic Literature Review

Ms. Hiruni Rathwatta
Lecturer
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

Ms. Warunika Hettiarachchi
Senior Lecturer
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

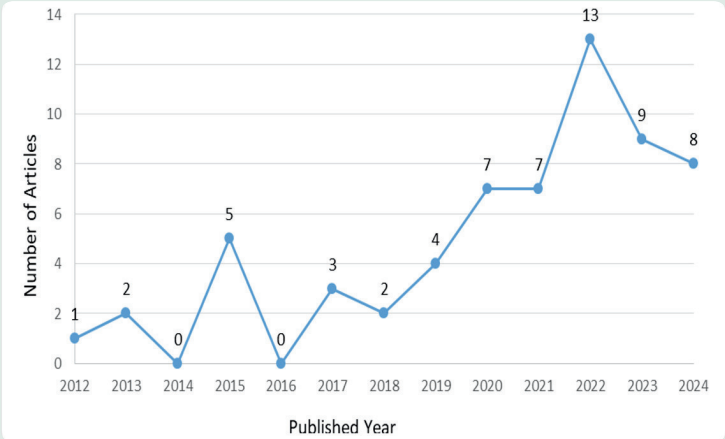
Ms. Rathwatta and Ms. Hettiarachchi presented the findings of a systematic literature review conducted on sustainability and university rankings. Their research team also included Dr. Nuwan Gunarathne from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, and Dr. Chalaka Fernando from the Australian National University, Australia.

Their analysis began with an overview of global publication trends based on data extracted from the Scopus database, covering the period from 2012 to 2024. The findings indicated a clear upward trajectory in research interest from 2019, with a notable peak in 2022. This surge can be attributed to key global developments, including the introduction of the UN SDGs in 2015, the launch of university sustainability ranking schemes such as the THE IR in 2019, and the QS Sustainability Rankings in 2022.

Another highlighted key finding was the geographical concentration of prior research, with most studies focusing on HEIs in the United States and Europe. Among sustainability ranking frameworks, the most commonly adopted systems include UI GreenMetric, THE Impact Rankings, and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) STARS. The presenters emphasised that there is a significant gap in research on sustainability and university rankings within the context of developing countries.

Following this, they outlined the most prevalent research themes in prior studies, including:

- Integration of SDGs and university rankings in HEIs' sustainability strategies
- Sustainability initiatives and indicators to help HEIs achieve SDGs and improve rankings
- The role of sustainability rankings in assessing HEIs' sustainable development efforts
- Green campus initiatives as a pathway to sustainable higher education
- AASHE STARS framework and its application in sustainability evaluation of HEIs



Implications for practitioners and policymakers

The presentation also discussed potential implications for both practitioners and policymakers in implementing sustainability initiatives to improve university rankings.

For practitioners:

- **Teaching:** Integrate sustainability and SDGs into curricula, utilise universities as living labs, and enhance sustainability literacy and competencies among stakeholders.
- **Research:** Allocate funding for sustainability related studies, promote multidisciplinary research, and establish recognition mechanisms for sustainability achievements.
- **Operations:** Foster a sustainability-oriented culture, secure funding for sustainable infrastructure, and leverage AI tools for sustainability management.
- **Governance:** Strengthen strategic commitment, establish governance structures, ensure sustainability reporting and disclosures, and empower responsible stakeholders.

For policymakers:

- **Alignment with national sustainability policies:** Encourage universities to contribute to national sustainability goals and collaborate with key national bodies in policy development.
- **Strengthening governance and reporting:** Develop clear policies and regulatory frameworks for integrating sustainability in HEIs, compulsory sustainability reporting, and ensure transparency in university rankings through performance evaluations.
- **Formation of national collaborations:** Establish multi-stakeholder partnerships between HEIs, government agencies, and industries to create a national platform for sharing best practices, resources, innovations, and sustainability initiatives.

The presentation concluded by emphasising that sustainability is not solely the responsibility of governments, universities, or policymakers but a shared duty that requires collaborative efforts across all stakeholders.

05. Case Study II: Jewels and Barriers of Establishing Energy Analysis for the Universities: Experiences and Insights

Dr. Nuwan Gunarathne
Senior Lecturer
University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Dr. Nuwan Gunarathne shared his experience and findings as a member of a committee appointed by his university to review overhead costs, identify inefficiencies, and recommend solutions in response to the university's increasing and unsustainable recurrent expenses. The analysis of the committee primarily focused on cost areas such as electricity expenses, cleaning and gardening services, rent, and security costs. The initial findings revealed that the actual average monthly costs significantly exceeded the allocated budget. Dr. Gunarathne's presentation focused on the analysis of electricity cost, which was significant among others.

In his presentation, Dr. Gunarathne discussed the main findings, reasons behind the inefficiencies and provided recommendations for mitigating the issues concerning electricity expenditure.

Key Issues and Recommendations:

1. Lack of monitoring, control, and centralised data: The absence of a centralised system for monitoring and managing energy expenditures resulted in fragmented data across different university divisions (Finance, Maintenance, and Welfare).

Recommendations:

- Appoint a dedicated person or unit responsible for energy management.
- Conduct an annual energy audit for key locations and use findings for monitoring, control, and decision-making.
- Implement continuous monitoring daily, weekly, or monthly basis and communicate findings to relevant decision-making bodies.

2. Inadequate analysis due to limited metering systems: The lack of dedicated electricity meters for each unit and the absence of a detailed energy map made it difficult to track consumption by building or department.

Recommendations:

- Develop an energy map indicating the coverage of each meter.
- Install a sub-metering system to accurately measure electricity usage at unit, building, and area levels.

3. Lack of awareness among the university community: University staff, faculty, and students have a limited understanding of energy consumption patterns, leading to inefficient use of electricity and underestimating its financial impact.

Recommendations:

- Conduct regular awareness campaigns and communication initiatives.
- Integrate electricity consumption education into student orientation programs and annual staff training.
- Establish an Energy Efficiency Award System to encourage best practices.

4. Absence of KPIs for monitoring and control: No standardised metrics are available to measure energy efficiency across different university units.

Recommendations:

- Develop KPIs such as electricity cost per student, per square foot, or per unit.
- Compare KPIs across different university locations to identify inefficiencies.
- Create a dashboard for real-time monitoring and assign responsible personnel for each unit.

5. Lack of a master plan for green energy transition: The university had no clear strategic plan or financial model for transitioning to renewable energy sources.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a feasibility study on implementing solar energy as an alternative power source.
- Explore opportunities for external funding and project-based financing for renewable energy initiatives.

Establishing a Sustainable Cost Management Framework

To address these challenges holistically, it was proposed to establish a 'Facility Management Unit' under the direct supervision of the university council. This unit should be led by trained and dedicated personnel responsible for:

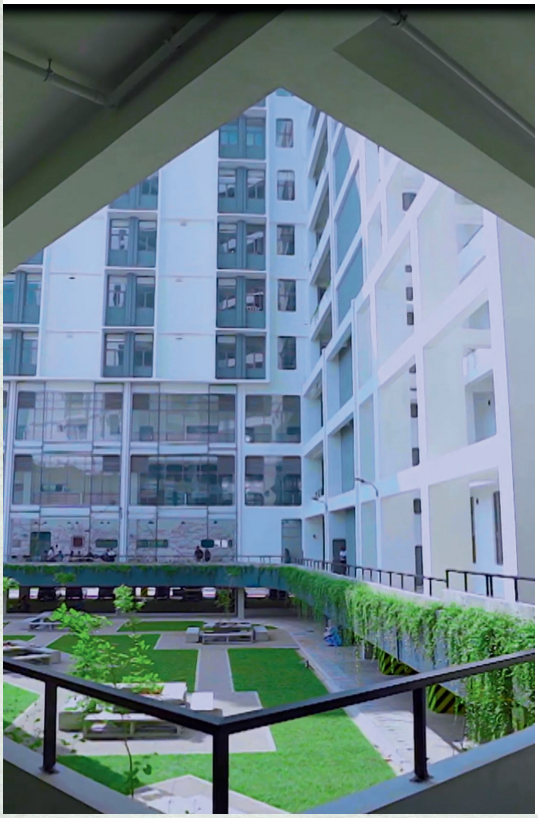
- Managing major cost drivers such as energy, infrastructure, and maintenance.
- Implementing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to enhance efficiency.
- Launching a "Green Campus" initiative to embed sustainability into university operations.
- Facilitating collaboration among faculties to develop innovative technologies for cost reduction.

Dr. Gunarathne concluded his presentation by emphasising that sustainable universities should serve as living laboratories for innovation, research, and responsible energy use. He stressed that sustainability is not a final destination but an ongoing journey that requires continuous commitment, institutional leadership, and collective action to make universities champions of sustainability.

06. Case study III: The Success Story of THE Impact Ranking

Prof. Mangala Yatawara
Professor
University of Kelaniya

Professor Mangala Yatawara commenced her speech with a brief introduction on University of Kelaniya (UoK), highlighting its commitment to academic excellence, research, and sustainability. Her focus was on the THE Impact Ranking (THE IR) and she highlighted that THE IR is used as a global assessment of HEIs based on their contributions to the 17 SDGs. These rankings had been evaluated across four key areas: Teaching, Research, Stewardship, and Outreach, aiming to provide a comprehensive view of how institutions address global challenges.



She further elaborated the key aspects of THE IR, emphasising that they encourage institutions to align their strategies with global sustainability goals. She also underscored the significance of applying for THE IR, highlighting several benefits, including global recognition and enhanced institutional reputation, providing opportunities for benchmarking and improvement, attracting top talent students, securing funding for research and sustainability projects, driving sustainability efforts within HEIs, and strengthening community impact through outreach programmes.

Professor Yatawara then presented UoK's gradual improvement in THE IR from 2022 to 2024, demonstrating how strategic efforts contributed to its success.

Key Drivers of Success in THE Impact Rankings

She outlined the key drivers that was succeeded in the ranking of UoK, along with the specific strategies implemented under each driver:

Research output and SDG-aligned publications

- High-impact research that aligns with the SDGs significantly enhances rankings.
- UoK implemented a unique 'SDG Progress Tracker' and published on its official website.
- Strengthened global collaborations to improve citation impact.
- Encouraged multidisciplinary research in sustainability, public health, education, and technology.

Sustainability practices and green campus initiatives

- Demonstrated commitment to environmental sustainability through green policies.
- Implemented initiatives such as carbon footprint reduction, energy-efficient infrastructure, recycling programs, and water conservation measures.
- Adopted renewable energy sources, including solar power, wind power, and biogas.

Community engagement and social impact

- Actively participated in community-driven projects, public health initiatives, and educational outreach programmes.
- Strengthened collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies, and social enterprises to enhance impact.

Student impact and social inclusion

- Launched programmes to prepare students as global citizens with strong SDG awareness (e.g., Sustainability Leadership Training Programme (SLTP)).
- Encouraged student-led initiatives, sustainability-focused curricula, and experiential learning.
- Promoted volunteer programmes, climate action projects, and innovation hubs, collaborating with student societies such as Rotaract and Leo Clubs.

Institutional policies and governance

- Implemented strong governance, transparency, and equitable education policies to enhance rankings.
- Focused on diverse leadership, gender equity policies, and faculty development programmes to improve institutional sustainability.

Challenges and Strategic Solutions - THE Impact Rankings

Despite its success, UoK encountered several challenges in its sustainability ranking exercises. Professor Yatawara highlighted these challenges and the strategic measures that had already been taken to address them:

Data collection and documentation issues: The absence of a centralised data collection system made it difficult to track sustainability efforts.

- Solution: Established the Centre for Strategic Planning and University Statistics to systematically collect and document data.

Lack of specific policies for certain SDGs: Some sustainability policies were missing, such as: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being): Smoke-free campus policy; SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy): Policy on divesting investments from carbon-intensive energy industries (e.g., coal and oil); SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): Policy on waste disposal to track landfill waste and recycling efforts.

- Solution: Having taken the efforts to study these policies and drafted them with the assistance of the legal body in the university, for necessary approvals.

Limited funding for sustainability projects: Some sustainability initiatives lacked financial support.

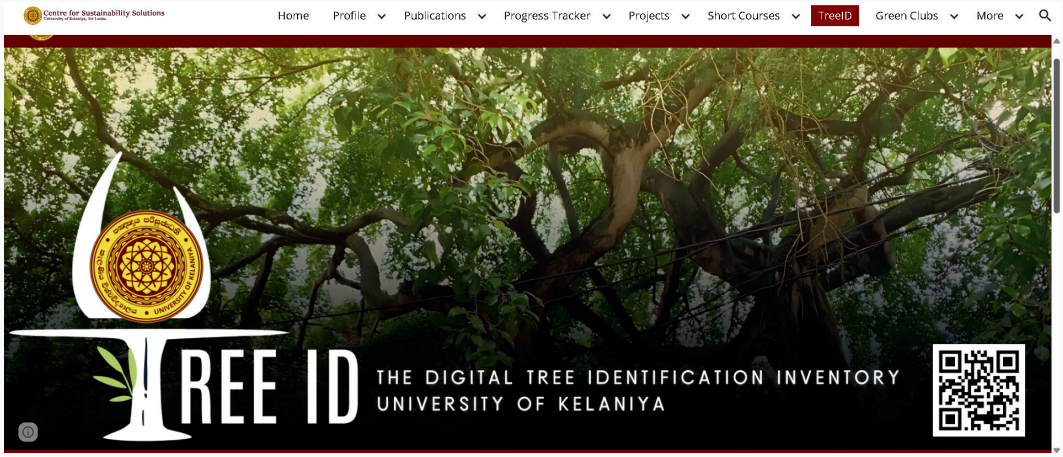
- Solution: Partnered with private corporates to sponsor sustainability projects and generated additional funds through sustainability-focused initiatives, such as vegetable farming and landscape development projects to support campus sustainability efforts.

Lack of awareness of university ranking processes: The university community had limited awareness of the ranking process and its importance.

- Solution: Planned to conduct training and awareness programs for academic staff, non-academic staff, and students.

Challenges in predicting target dates for some sustainability measures: Certain sustainability goals, such as achieving carbon neutrality, lacked clear implementation timelines.

- Solution: Strengthened collective commitment among the university community to gradually build a carbon.



Difficulty in meeting certain ranking indicators: Example: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) includes an indicator requiring universities to share sports facilities with the local community.

- Solution: UoK initiated a facility-sharing program, allowing neighbouring schools to use university playgrounds for sports events.

Professor Yatawara concluded her speech by informing that UoK has addressed almost all 17 SDGs in its sustainability ranking efforts this year, although many concerns remain to be addressed. She reiterated that continuous improvement and collective commitment are essential for successfully implementing university sustainability initiatives.

07. Case Study IV: Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education: OUSL's Journey in UI GreenMetric World University Rankings

Dr. Yohan Mahagamage
Senior Lecturer
Open University of Sri Lanka

Dr. Yohan Mahamalage began his presentation with a brief introduction to the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) and its participation in the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings. He explained that UI GreenMetric evaluates universities based on six key indicators: (a) Setting and Infrastructure, (b) Energy and Climate Change, (c) Waste, (d) Water, (e) Transportation, and (f) Education and Research, each contributing a specific percentage to the overall ranking. He then proceeded to discuss the best practices implemented at OUSL under each category.

Best Practices Implemented by OUSL

1. Setting and infrastructure
OUSL has actively increased green spaces on campus by planting native trees and developing eco-parks to enhance environmental sustainability. The university has also improved facilities for differently-abled students and established maternity care services. Additionally, efforts have been made to upgrade campus buildings through operational and maintenance activities to ensure environmental friendliness. Notably, OUSL has established dedicated conservation centres for plant, animal, and wildlife genetics, including butterfly gardens.

2. Energy and climate change
To enhance energy efficiency, OUSL has increased the use of energy-efficient appliances and renewable energy sources such as solar panels while also reducing overall electricity consumption. Green building elements, such as natural lighting systems, have been incorporated into infrastructure projects. The university also maintains a database on its energy sources and has launched impactful climate change programs, including integrating sustainability topics into international conferences and collaborating with government agencies (e.g., the Central Environmental Authority) on the "Less Plastic Movement".

3. Waste
OUSL has implemented a waste categorisation system, classifying waste into non-biodegradable, biodegradable, electronic, and hazardous types. A comprehensive 3R (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) waste management mechanism is in place, enabling the university to recycle significant quantities of glass and plastic on a regular basis. Biogas is produced daily from biodegradable waste generated in university canteens, and compost is also produced consistently each month as part of the university's sustainability initiatives.

Additionally, the university conducted a hazardous waste survey and established a database to track waste disposal. To ensure responsible hazardous waste management, OUSL signed an agreement with INSEE Cement for proper disposal. The university also encourages the use of soft copies instead of printed lecture materials, enforces restrictions on plastic use on campus, and recycles paper waste from its in-house printing press.

4. Water
Recognising the challenges of scoring high in the UI GreenMetric for water management, OUSL has implemented several conservation strategies, including water conservation programs and the development of two rainwater harvesting reservoirs used for restrooms and gardening. The university has also installed automated taps and sewage treatment plants with the support of the Department of Civil Engineering.

5. Transportation
To reduce private vehicle usage on campus, OUSL promotes the use of bicycles for internal transportation by making them available at each faculty. Additionally, the university provides public transport buses for staff members to encourage sustainable commuting.

6. Education and research

OUSL has taken several steps to integrate sustainability into education and research, including:

- Incorporating sustainability-related subjects into academic curricula.
- Organising numerous sustainability-related activities each year through student associations.
- Maintaining a dedicated sustainability website managed by the Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development (CESSD).
- Publishing an annual sustainability report to document progress and achievements.
- Conducting social inclusion projects in collaboration with various stakeholders.
- Encouraging students to launch sustainability-focused startups.

On average, OUSL allocates a significant amount of funds for research annually and produces approximately 327 research publications last year.

Overall Performance and Key Success Factors

In 2024, OUSL achieved a UI GreenMetric score of 69.60%, with 97% achievement in the Education and Research category. The university currently holds 436th place in the world ranking and is ranked 4th in Sri Lanka.

Two key factors contributing to OUSL's success in UI GreenMetric are:

1. The Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development - a dedicated unit overseeing sustainability initiatives.
2. The Green Committee – a decision-making body that includes academic staff, non-academic staff, and students, ensuring a collaborative approach to sustainability governance.

Dr. Mahamalage concluded his presentation by emphasising that sustainability is a journey, not a destination. He encouraged all universities to work together in creating greener, smarter, and more responsible institutions for a sustainable future.

08. Industry Expert I: National Policies and Strategic Approaches for Environmental Sustainability in HEIs in Sri Lanka

Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu
Director General/CEO (2020-2025)
Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka

Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu, Director General/ CEO of the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka, presented the national policies and strategic approaches for promoting environmental sustainability in HEIs.

Ms. Saparamadu began by outlining the key responsibilities of the Sustainable Development Council and provided an overview of Sri Lanka's progress in achieving the SDGs. She presented data from the National SDG Dashboard, which was launched in 2023 to monitor progress toward the 2030 targets using information received mainly from government institutions. According to the dashboard, Sri Lanka has successfully achieved its expected outcomes for SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Additionally, when comparing 2023 to 2024, notable improvements were observed in SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). However, significant gaps remain in SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water). Furthermore, SDG 4 (Quality Education), which is directly relevant to HEIs, has yet to meet expected targets.

Ms. Saparamadu further analysed the progress of indicators of SDG 04 in 2024, emphasising that technical and vocational education and training and tertiary education have shown positive progress, whereas early childhood development, access to scholarships, and the availability of qualified teachers continue to face challenges.

Before discussing how national policies, programs, and strategies support environmental sustainability in HEIs, she emphasised that environmental sustainability is not explicitly addressed in existing national policies for HEIs. However, she highlighted several policies and strategies that indirectly contribute to environmental sustainability:

Relevant national policies and strategies for sustainability in HEIs are:

1. **National Policy Proposals on Higher Education (2019):**

- **Policy 44:** Calls for the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council, University Grand Commission, and Standard Committee for Quality Assurance and Accreditation to develop a national assessment framework for ranking state and non-state HEIs.
- **Policy 49:** Advocates for a complex learning environment that integrates authentic learning, assessment, and personal development, encouraging real-world problem-solving.
- **Policy 51:** Requires universities to incorporate social responsibility-related content and practical learning experiences into teaching, learning, and research, which can be linked to environmental sustainability.

2. National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) – Volume III:

- Aims to improve access to quality education, quality assurance, and skill development among undergraduates through World Bank-funded projects implemented by the Ministry of Education.
- Includes policies for promoting inclusive and equitable education. Though they are not directly linked to environmental sustainability, can be integrated into sustainability initiatives.

3. Manual for Institutional Review of Sri Lankan Universities and HEIs (2015) – UGC:

- Provides guidelines for state and non-state universities on conducting institutional reviews in accordance with UGC quality assurance requirements.
- Sustainability could be incorporated as a new criterion or linked to existing quality assurance criteria.

4. National Strategies for the Implementation of Sustainability in HEIs – UGC:

- Among the five strategic goals, Goal number 4 can be directly linked to environmental sustainability, as it focuses on equipping HEIs with efficient human resources, excellent facilities, and sustainable/green concepts.

Ms. Saparamadu further emphasised that, despite the absence of specific policies or guidelines for environmental sustainability in HEIs, several universities have already taken voluntary initiatives to integrate sustainability into their curricula, research, and institutional practices. She highlighted the increasing trend of universities introducing sustainability-related courses and establishing research and innovation activities in compliance with global standards. To streamline these initiatives, discussions with the UGC have been initiated to develop a more coherent and structured approach to environmental sustainability in HEIs.

Global Frameworks for Environmental Sustainability in HEIs

Ms. Saparamadu also introduced three global frameworks that Sri Lankan HEIs can adopt to align their environmental sustainability efforts with national requirements:

1. **The United Nations' general guidelines for the implementation of sustainability in HEIs (UNESCO and UN academic impact):**
   - Aims to maximise HEIs' contributions to the 2030 United Nations Agenda by systematising sustainability initiatives.
   - Provides ten key steps for implementation: conceptual alignment and rationale, awareness raising, leadership commitment, stakeholder engagement, strategy design and drafting, knowledge provision, mapping current initiatives, prioritising future initiatives, resource provision, implementation, and long-term sustainability.

2. **The principles for responsible management education – foundation for the global compact:**
   - Focuses on transforming academic institutions into advocates for a sustainable global economy.
   - Integrates sustainability into teaching, research, and thought leadership using six principles: Purpose, Values, Method, Research, Partnership, and Dialogue.

3. **The United Nations' Environment Programme (UNEP) Sustainable University Framework:**
   - Defines the concept of a sustainable university based on a whole-institution approach, ensuring sustainability is embedded across all aspects of operations.
   - Organises HEIs into four core areas:
     - Environment and Climate
     - Teaching and Research
     - People and Society
     - Administration and Governance

Ms. Saparamadu concluded her presentation by emphasising that HEIs play a crucial role as pioneers of new thinking and sustainability practices. She stressed that the climate change requires a shift in mindset, and HEIs must prepare the next generation of decision-makers by fostering sustainability education and research. While there is no specific national policy framework for environmental sustainability in HEIs, she highlighted that global frameworks provide an entry point for universities to adopt and integrate sustainability into their operations. She commended the workshop's initiative in fostering discussions on advancing sustainability in HEIs and encouraged all stakeholders to continue this conversation to drive meaningful change.

09. Industry Expert II: The Importance of Environmental Regulations and Compliance in HEIs in Sri Lanka

Dr. Ajith Gunawardene
Director
Environmental Education and Awareness
Central Environmental Authority

Dr. Ajith Gunawardene, Director of Environmental Education and Awareness at the Central Environmental Authority, delivered a presentation on the importance of environmental regulations and compliance in HEIs in Sri Lanka. He began by providing an overview of environmental regulations in Sri Lanka, emphasising that these regulations should apply to all institutions, including HEIs, with no exceptions. These regulations are designed to protect the country's biodiversity, natural resources, and ecosystems and are enforced through various legal frameworks, policies, and institutions.

Dr. Gunawardene outlined the primary environmental laws governing institutional compliance in Sri Lanka, including the National Environmental Act No. 47 of 1980, which was later amended by Act No. 56 of 1988 and Act No. 53 of 2000; the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance No. 02 of 1937, which has undergone multiple amendments, with the latest in 2009; the Forest Ordinance No. 16 of 1907, amended by Act No. 65 of 2009; and the Soil Conservation Act No. 25 of 1951, which was revised in 1996. He further elaborated on the role of the CEA in enforcing these regulations, emphasising its key responsibilities. The CEA plays a crucial role in regulating environmental management and policy implementation, ensuring compliance across various sectors. It is also responsible for issuing Environmental Protection Licenses (EPLs) for industries and institutions, including HEIs, to monitor environmental impacts, including proper waste management. Additionally, the CEA conducts Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), particularly for development projects in ecologically sensitive areas, and prescribed processes, ensuring that new constructions, establishments and expansions should be adhere to environmental sustainability standards.

He emphasised that acquiring and maintaining a valid EPL is crucial for HEIs, as they regulate waste management, space utilisation, and environmental impact, particularly for hostel facilities.

While private HEIs generally comply with obtaining EPLs, state HEIs often lag behind. Additionally, HEIs are required to conduct EIAs for new infrastructure projects in environmentally sensitive areas or if they are within the prescribed thresholds of the environmentally sensitive parameters.

Dr. Gunawardene also noted that the CEA organises an annual Presidential Environmental Awards Ceremony, recognising the best government institutions, schools, and universities for their exceptional environmental practices based on quality and sustainability indicators.

Contribution of HEIs for Environmental Sustainability

He stressed that HEIs play a crucial role in environmental sustainability, as they are:

- Centres of research and innovation, with the ability to drive sustainable solutions.
- Responsible for shaping future generations by instilling sustainability values.
- Contributors to national and global environmental goals, aligning with Sri Lanka's sustainability commitments.

Key Environmental Challenges in HEIs

Dr. Gunawardene then discussed global environmental challenges, including global warming, earthquakes, air quality degradation, freshwater scarcity, ocean acidification, deforestation, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, epidemic diseases, energy waste, volcanic activity, food insecurity, and climate change.

He further outlined specific environmental challenges faced by HEIs, such as:

- Waste management inefficiencies.
- Excessive water and energy consumption.
- Biodiversity conservation issues.
- Environmental pollution control.

Benefits of Environmental Compliance for HEIs

He highlighted several benefits of adopting environmental regulations in HEIs:

- Enhanced institutional reputation and international recognition.
- Cost savings through sustainable practices.
- Positive impact on student and staff well-being.
- Contribution to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals while implem-enting beyond compliance projects.

Recommended Environmental Strategies for HEIs

Dr. Gunawardene proposed several strategies for HEIs to improve environmental compliance:

1. Environmental education and research

- Sustainability-focused curriculum: introduce courses, programs, and degree programmes related to environmental studies, climate sciences, and sustainability.
- Sustainability research output: Encourage publications, research grants, and projects focused on renewable energy, environmental science relevant topics, and sustainability.
- Community outreach and awareness: Conduct university-led environmental education programs in collaboration with communities.

2. Carbon footprint and climate action

- Carbon emissions reduction: Implement strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency and sustainable transportation initiatives.
- Renewable energy usage: Invest in solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources for campus operations.
- Climate change adaptation and resilience: Develop policies for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation.

3. Waste management and circular economy

- Recycling and waste reduction: Establish campus-wide recycling policies to minimise landfill waste.
- Single-use plastic reduction: Implement plastic reduction initiatives, including bans on single-use plastics.
- Composting and food waste management: Promote organic waste management and sustainable dining practices.

4. Sustainable transportation

- Public transport accessibility: Provide bus, train, or shuttle services for students and staff.
- Cycling and walking infrastructure: Develop bike lanes, bicycle-sharing programs, and pedestrian-friendly campus designs.
- Electric vehicles (EVs) and charging Stations: Encourage the use of EVs by installing charging infrastructure and incentives.

5. Sustainable procurement and ethical investments

- Eco-Friendly procurement: Prioritise sustainable, fair-trade, and locally produced goods.
- Divestment from fossil fuels: Avoid investments in industries contributing to climate change.
- Green IT practices: Promote energy-efficient servers, paperless initiatives, and sustainable technology.

6. SDG alignment and global partnerships

- Commitment to UN SDGs: Align policies and initiatives with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).
- Global sustainability collaborations: Partner with universities, NGOs, and governments to advance sustainability efforts.

Dr. Gunawardene emphasised that HEIs must go beyond compliance by shaping the mindset and ethical behaviour of students. He stressed that not all sustainability measures can be enforced through laws and regulations alone, highlighting the importance of embedding sustainability values within university communities. To foster environmental consciousness, the CEA has initiated training programs on environmental concerns, starting at the school level. One such initiative is the Environmental Pioneers Program, which educates students about sustainability and prepares them to be environmental leaders when they enter HEIs.

Dr. Gunawardene concluded his presentation by inviting HEIs to apply for the Presidential Environmental Awards, recognising institutions with exemplary environmental practices. He reiterated that sustainability is not just about regulation but about fostering a cultural shift, and HEIs play a crucial role in shaping a greener, more sustainable future.

10. Industry Expert III:

The Value of Environmental Networking for HEIs in Sri Lanka

Mr. Randeewa Malalasooriya
Hony. Treasurer
Institute of Environmental Professionals Sri Lanka (IEPSL)

Mr. Malalasooriya emphasised the value of IEPSL membership for academics and non-academics in HEIs, highlighting the key benefits such as professional growth, networking opportunities, career development, and advocacy. He elaborated that IEPSL members gain access to exclusive resources, including research papers, industry reports, and professional certifications, which enhance their recognition and credibility in the field. Additionally, membership provides opportunities to participate in environmental events, conferences, and community engagement projects, fostering collaboration with leading professionals and organisations.

Types of Membership and Application Process

IEPSL offers four types of membership, catering to different levels of expertise:

1. Student membership - Available for students pursuing a degree in environmental and relevant studies.
2. Associate membership - Designed for early-career professionals with less than five years of experience in the environmental sector.
3. Full membership - Open to professionals with over five years of experience in the environmental field.
4. Fellow membership – Reserved for distinguished professionals who have made significant contributions to the field.

Mr. Malalasooriya then outlined the IEPSL membership application process, which consists of three key stages:

- Application submission - Interested individuals submit their applications along with the required documents.
- Review process - Applications are evaluated by the IEPSL committee to ensure eligibility and adherence to professional standards.
- Membership fees - A structured fee system applies based on the membership category.

Environmental Networking and HEIs

He highlighted the role of IEPSL in environmental networking, particularly in HEIs, and showcased past successful initiatives, including:

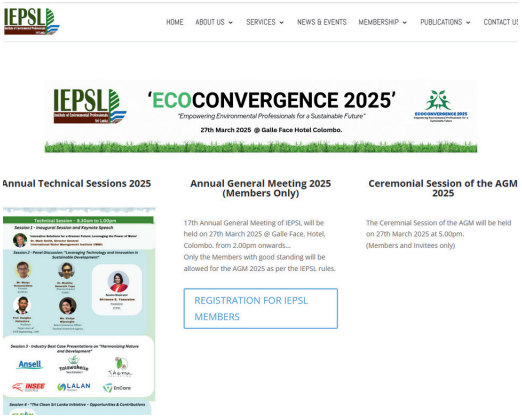
- Workshops and discussions on sustainability and environmental policies.
- Annual technical sessions and conferences that bring together professionals from diverse environmental fields.
- Training sessions and field programs are designed to enhance practical knowledge and skills.

Insights from the Corporate Sector and Key Takeaways

As a senior professional in the corporate sector, Mr. Malalasooriya shared his insights on the role of top-level management in HEIs in advancing environmental sustainability. He emphasised three key points:

1. **Leadership commitment:** The successful implementation of environmental sustainability initiatives requires the passion and commitment of HEI decision-makers. Without their leadership and strategic direction, achieving long-term sustainability goals would be challenging.
2. **Sustainability as a journey:** Environmental sustainability is a gradual process that must be approached step by step, rather than as a one-time initiative.
3. **Genuine action vs. greenwashing:** HEIs must genuinely implement environmental initiatives rather than engaging in superficial or symbolic sustainability efforts (greenwashing). It is crucial to educate students about the true meaning of sustainability, ensuring they adopt responsible environmental practices as they transition into the workforce.

He stressed that sustainability should not be confined to a single discipline but should be integrated into all academic programs, as it is a necessity rather than an option. He further highlighted IEPSL's educational initiatives, including training programs and CEA's Environmental Pioneers Program in schools, which nurture young environmental leaders and prepare them to champion sustainability when they enter HEIs.



Mr. Malalasooriya concluded his presentation by reiterating that "Network is your net worth," emphasising the importance of environmental networking for HEIs in Sri Lanka. He invited the audience to participate in the IEPSL Annual General Meeting, scheduled for March 2025, and encouraged HEIs to actively engage with IEPSL initiatives to strengthen sustainability efforts at the institutional level. He further emphasised that sustainability is not merely an option but a necessity, stating that "sustainability is not to do things but must do." HEIs must embed sustainability into their core strategies and educational frameworks, ensuring that future graduates internalise sustainability principles and implement genuine environmental practices rather than superficial initiatives.

11. Industry Expert IV:

A Systems Perspective on Environmental Sustainability in HEIs in Sri Lanka

Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala
Senior Lecturer
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala, representing the Faculty of Management Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and also in his capacity as the former Chairman of the Sri Lankan Accreditation Board, commenced his presentation by sharing his experiences with how HEIs contribute to environmental sustainability, particularly in teaching and producing graduates equipped with sustainability knowledge. He emphasised that many in the audience, including himself, are products of this educational process, but he highlighted a distinct evolution in sustainability education over recent years. Previously, sustainability was taught in isolation within different disciplines, such as science, commerce, engineering, management, and social sciences. However, the current educational approach is more integrated and collaborative, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability challenges.

Dr. Wahala then elaborated on the SDGs origined from sustainability development which is intrododuced in 1987, with a focus on ensuring the well-being of future generations. He posed a thought-provoking question: Where is the future generation, if we are still talking about it today? He commended the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka for its initiatives to achieve the 2030 agenda to achieve SDG targets and used this as a foundation to introduce the main topic of his discussion, A Systems Perspective on Environmental Sustainability in HEIs in Sri Lanka.

The Systematic Approach to Sustainability in HEIs

Dr. Wahala emphasized that policies and procedures are gradually being established to enhance sustainability in HEIs, aligning with global standards. He acknowledged the incorporation of sustainability into curricula, even in the non-state HEI sector, as a positive step forward. However, he also raised a key concerning question and shared some observations:

Producing sustainability-ready graduates: meeting local and global industry expectations

Despite the inclusion of sustainability-focused subjects in curricula, he argued that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient, and practical implementation is often overlooked. He referenced Dr. Gunawardena's earlier point regarding the lack of EPLs for university operations, despite claims of having "green buildings."

Dr. Wahala highlighted that, this analogy highlighted the contradiction of teaching sustainability while failing to practice it within HEIs. He noted that students are often taken to industries to observe best practices, such as waste management, but suggested that if HEIs implemented sustainability practices on their own campuses, students would be exposed to these concepts daily, reinforcing learning through both theory and practice.

The connection between sustainability, ISO standards, PDCA[1] cycle, Institutional Review Framework, University Rankings, and Global Frameworks

Dr. Wahala explained how university rankings and sustainability frameworks are interconnected. He emphasised that the SDGs will not end in 2030; instead, they will evolve with necessary adjustments. However, he pointed out that many HEIs operationalise SDGs in isolation, lacking an integrated approach. He provided examples from Sri Lankan universities that are working towards carbon neutrality and implementing ISO standards such as ISO 14001 and ISO 21001.

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[1] PDCA - Plan, Do, Check, and Act. The four components of the Deming's cycle

One key issue, he noted, is the continuity of sustainability initiatives. While there is enthusiasm for launching sustainability projects, many initiatives fail to sustain momentum beyond their initial phase. Dr. Wahala suggested that this lack of continuity stems from the absence of a systematic mechanism to initiate and maintain sustainability efforts within HEIs. He observed that many sustainability initiatives rely on individual interest and passion, rather than being institutionalised. He stressed the need for a dedicated person or committee responsible for overseeing sustainability initiatives and ensuring their long-term implementation.

The role of ISO standards and PDCA cycle in achieving SDGs

Dr. Wahala highlighted how ISO standards can be effectively linked to SDG implementation. He cited ISO 53002:2024, which provides guidelines for contributing to UN SDGs and offers a structured framework for embedding sustainability into HEIs through the PDCA cycle. He emphasised that this systematic approach, combined with strong leadership and continuous monitoring, can ensure long-term sustainability success.

Other relevant ISO standards that can support sustainability efforts in HEIs include:

- ISO 50001 – Energy Management Systems
- ISO 14001 – Environmental Management Systems
- ISO 20400 – Sustainable Procurement

Integrating sustainability into institutional reviews

He further discussed the potential for integrating sustainability into institutional quality assurance reviews. Currently, sustainability is not explicitly linked to Criterion 10: Quality Assurance in HEI evaluation guidelines.

However, he acknowledged Dr. Chalaka Fernando's suggestion that sustainability should be added as a separate criterion, ensuring that HEIs systematically measure and report on sustainability performance. Additionally, he proposed that sustainability could be incorporated into Criterion 01: Governance and Management, ensuring that sustainability is institutionalised at the highest levels of HEI decision-making.

Moving forward: Practical steps for intitutionalising sustainability in HEIs

While waiting for systematic or mandatory sustainability policies to be implemented, Dr. Wahala encouraged HEIs to take proactive steps by incorporating sustainability into day-to-day activities. He emphasised the importance of institutional collaboration, suggesting that HEIs should engage with organisations such as IEPSL to enhance sustainability implementation through industry partnerships and expert guidance.

Dr. Wahala concluded by emphasising that sustainability should not be treated as a separate initiative but as an integral part of HEIs' operations, policies, and educational frameworks. He stressed that sustainability is a continuous process that requires systematic planning, leadership, and institutional commitment. While global frameworks, ISO standards, and university rankings provide valuable structures, true sustainability begins with practical, everyday actions within HEIs.

He urged universities to move beyond theoretical discussions and actively implement sustainability practices within their own institutions, setting an example for future generations of graduates who will become leaders in sustainability.

12. Outcomes of Expert Panel Discussion

Following the expert opinion-sharing session, a fruitful panel discussion was held with experts and participants, providing an opportunity for participants to clarify their doubts and gain deeper insights. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Chalaka Fernando and featured a series of questions from participants and responses from experts.

QUESTION 01:

What are the mechanisms implemented by the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka to manage carbon emissions in the construction industry? (A question raised by the audience)

Response by Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu

There are approximately 140 indicators for SDGs outlined by the global framework, which have been localized in Sri Lanka. The Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka collaborates with various government institutions to collect and analyze relevant data, although this is a long and complex process. After gathering information, we conduct comparisons with global benchmarks and allow institutions to propose solutions to address identified data gaps in alignment with global definitions.

In Sri Lanka, we define national SDG goals based on the 17 global SDGs and establish a baseline for tracking progress, for example, using 2015 as a reference year. We then apply the SDG Tracker developed by the UN to monitor progress. However, there are discrepancies and variations across different SDGs, including SDG 11- Sustainable Cities and Communities, which you mentioned. Our current system is not yet fully equipped to capture all levels of disaggregation, but we are working towards aligning with global expectations to the greatest extent possible, given existing data limitations. Another crucial aspect of the National SDG Dashboard is that it is developed based on data gathered from government institutions. This ensures that our progress tracking and policy implementation efforts are grounded in official national data while striving to meet international sustainability standards.

QUESTION 02:

How can ancient knowledge and traditions be integrated into modern sustainability education, and how can society be guided toward more sustainable values that counteract status-driven consumption?

Response by Dr. Chalaka Fernando

That is an excellent question, and the points raised are both highly relevant and interconnected. The idea of integrating traditional knowledge into modern sustainability practices, particularly in relation to social and environmental factors is widely recognised as valuable.

While most would agree on the importance of incorporating conventional wisdom into sustainability education, addressing this complex issue requires in-depth discussion and further exploration. Due to time constraints, we may not be able to fully address this topic at this moment, but there are significant opportunities within emerging educational frameworks to bridge traditional knowledge with contemporary sustainability efforts.

QUESTION 03:

Do sustainability rankings genuinely reflect institutional efforts, or do they risk becoming another form of greenwashing that favors developed countries and certain institutions?

Response by Dr. Chalaka Fernando

That is an important question, and both greenwashing and greenhushing have strengths and weaknesses. As with any ranking system, there is a potential for manipulation. Some organisations engage in greenwashing to enhance their image without genuine sustainability efforts, while greenhushing can create misleading perceptions about real sustainability practices. Over the past one and a half days, we have heard many valuable insights from the panellists and audience,

and one key takeaway is that many institutions engage in excellent sustainability initiatives but do not effectively communicate or publish their achievements. This lack of visibility can create the perception that only certain institutions perform well in sustainability rankings.

Similar to health check-ups, rankings provide a snapshot of performance, they may not always be perfect, but they offer a benchmark for progress. The key issue is management commitment and actual impact rather than the ranking itself. While manipulation can occur, a robust system is necessary to ensure credibility. Ultimately, what truly matters is delivering real sustainability outcomes, not just achieving a high ranking.

Response by Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu

I believe it is all about how we perceive rankings. Whether we refer to them as accreditation systems, standards, or compliance mechanisms, the fundamental purpose remains the same. The sustainability rankings should not be viewed purely as compliance measures, but rather as tools to assess real impact.

This perspective is also relevant in the private sector, where businesses are increasingly adopting Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards. The key focus should be on impact, if sustainability rankings add value to universities by enhancing their global recognition, then they serve a useful purpose. Sri Lankan universities must strive for international recognition and should not simply follow a checklist approach. Instead, institutions should engage in meaningful sustainability initiatives because they genuinely believe in their importance, rather than just to fulfill ranking criteria.

Response by Dr. Ajith Gunawardene

This is an interesting discussion, and I appreciate the question. However, I believe that focusing solely on rankings is not the most critical aspect. Instead, universities should concentrate on achieving tangible sustainability goals. If an institution is actively implementing sustainability initiatives, whether it receives a ranking or not, the real impact remains, for example, reducing energy consumption, improving environmental awareness, and fostering sustainable attitudes. These outcomes are not always quantifiable, but they are invaluable. The rankings may provide recognition, but the true value lies in the positive environmental impact institutions create.

Response by Mr. Randeewa Malalasooriya

At IEPSL, we have been discussing this topic for some time. We believe that sustainability rankings, accreditation, and standards are part of a broader change management process. To drive sustainability forward, there should be leadership commitment, policy changes, and structural reforms at the university and national levels. IEPSL is willing to take a leadership role in facilitating discussions with the UGC and other key stakeholders to introduce necessary policy changes. The focus should be on ensuring compliance while simultaneously fostering the right mindset and leadership. If universities achieve sustainability at a meaningful level, it will positively impact multiple sectors and future generations. We look forward to continuing this conversation and contributing to practical solutions.

Response by Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala

Expanding on Dr. Fernando's point regarding greenwashing and greenhushing, I believe the discussion on sustainability rankings ties directly into the broader context of why SDGs have gained significant global attention. The sustainability issues, particularly climate change, have been widely discussed and, at times, exaggerated, reflecting the nature of human perception and global discourse. The adoption of sustainability rankings and certification systems is not driven solely by regulatory pressure but also by institutions seeking global recognition. This has led to increased adoption of standards such as ESG frameworks, ISO certifications, and sustainability benchmarks. However, sustainability rankings must be streamlined through top-level leadership, ensuring they are implemented meaningfully rather than just as a symbolic exercise. A collective effort is required to establish systematic policies and sustainable long-term initiatives.

13. Group Activities and Outcomes

ACTIVITY 01

As part of the workshop, participants were grouped according to their respective universities and asked to draw the current sustainability management structure at their institutions. They were instructed to refer to the following key positions when mapping their structures:

- Vice Chancellor
- Senate/Council
- Deans
- Registrar
- Director/Head – Sustainability Centre (if applicable)
- Director/Head – University Ranking
- Works Manager/Chief Engineer/Curator/Public Health Inspector (or equivalent)
- Student Bodies (formal/informal)
- Environmental Officer/Manager
- Other relevant positions

Key Observations from the Current Sustainability Structures of participated HEIs

The analysis of the sustainability management structures drawn by participants from different universities revealed several key insights:

1. University of Sri Jayewardenepura

- Operates a Centre for Sustainability under a Director, with academic representatives as members.

[More details: http://sustainability.sjp.ac.lk/]

2. University of Kelaniya

- The Centre for Sustainability Solutions consists of academics, non-academics, and students.
- In addition to this, the Director of Sustainability, Director of University Statistics, and Director of the University Ranking Committee report directly to the Vice Chancellor.
- The Curator is positioned under the Director of Sustainability.

[More details: https://units.kln.ac.lk/css/index.php/about/team]

3. University of Colombo

- The university has established a Centre for Environmental Initiatives to promote sustainability practices.
- A dedicated Environmental Officer works within the Centre.
- The Centre is connected to the Works Engineer, Curator, Faculty Registrars, academic and non-academic staff, and students.

[More details: https://cmb.ac.lk/cei/staff]

4. Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

- The university has formed a Sustainability Committee, led by a Director and a management team comprising: Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties, Librarian, Director of the Quality Assurance Cell, Coordinator for Sustainability (also serving as Webmaster/Statistician), Registrar, and Bursar
- Each faculty is represented by an Academic Coordinator for Sustainability.
- University rankings are overseen by the Coordinator for Sustainability.

[More details: https://sdg.rjt.ac.lk/]

5. The Open University of Sri Lanka

- Established the Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainability Development (CESSD), led by a Director reporting to the Vice Chancellor.
- The Green Society and UI GreenMetric Committee operate under this Centre.
- The university also has a Green Committee reporting directly to the Vice Chancellor, while Green Clubs in each faculty report to the Green Committee.
- A subcommittee on university rankings functions under the Senate.

[More details: https://ou.ac.lk/cessd/]

6. University of Ruhuna

- Established a Centre for Environmental Protection and Sustainability, formerly known as APEX.
- This centre reports to the Senate.
- The university has a separate committee for rankings.
- Additionally, student environmental clubs are actively engaged in sustainability initiatives.

7. Other participating HEIs

Either other participating HEIs don't have a robust and designated structure or depend on management teams based on the needs that are situational, such as ranking submissions.

Overall Observations and Key Recommendations

The findings indicate that the maturity level of sustainability applications operates in a wider spectrum in Sri Lankan HEIs. Some universities have taken proactive steps to establish centres or committees for sustainability management. However, several key challenges and critical requirements were identified for the effective implementation of sustainability initiatives in HEIs:

1. Appointment of a sustainability manager/officer: Establishing a role that oversee, manage and report on sustainability-related activities in universities.

2. Engage the university rankings team/responsible into the sustainability structure: Greater awareness is needed regarding university rankings, particularly sustainability rankings. Universities should incorporate ranking recognition into their overall sustainability plans to enhance visibility and impact.

3. Increase the involvement of non-academic staff: Managing sustainability in HEIs is a collective task that can often be practically led by subject experts and accountable professional staff, such as Works Engineers and Curators. The related non-academic staff should be actively engaged, trained, and sustainability-relevant tasks should be reflected in their job descriptions.

4. Enhancing student participation in the sustainability structure: Student involvement in sustainability initiatives supports wellbeing and building a positive culture that cares about environmental responsibility and social inclusiveness.

These findings are based on the sustainability structures mapped by the workshop participants and highlight the diverse approaches taken by Sri Lankan HEIs to integrate sustainability into their institutional frameworks.

ACTIVITY 02

This activity aimed to identify barriers within the current higher education system in Sri Lanka in relation to the identified sustainability management organisation structures and rankings and to propose practical solutions to overcome them. The participants from HEIs were randomly divided into four groups, each representing one of the following key segments representing the key generic components of the university sustainability ranking schemes as Teaching, Research, Operations and Governance.

Each group was assigned with identifying existing barriers in their respective areas and suggesting actions to overcome these challenges.

Perspective	Identified Barriers	Suggested Implementations
Teaching Perspective	● Resistance to changing academic frameworks and traditional teaching approaches to accommodate sustainability-focused learning. ● Limited exposure of the academic staff to environmental sustainability components and specifically their link with university sustainability ranking schemes.	● Include sustainability as a compulsory component in CTHE/SDC courses for academic staff training. ● Integrate sustainability criteria into Institutional Review, Program Review, and Accreditation processes. ● Incorporate sustainability competencies into the graduate profile to ensure students develop relevant knowledge and skills. ● Enhance sustainability literacy, capabilities and university sustainability ranking knowledge among academic staff. ● Foster collaborations with industry to improve academics' and students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward current sustainability practices.
Research Perspective	● Lack of funding for sustainability-focused research. ● Low application of sustainability concepts across disciplines. ● Insufficient disclosure of research alignments with SDGs.	● Seek industry and foreign collaborations to gain sustainability research funding. ● Establish a culture and system to collaborate across disciplines and institutions, including resource sharing. ● Increase university grants and foreign grants specifically for sustainability related research that align with the prioritised SDGs while promoting multidisciplinary research work. ● Motivate students to engage in sustainability research. ● Encourage commercialization of sustainability-focused research outcomes. ● Ensure research publications explicitly link to SDGs in disclosures.

Operations Perspective	● Insufficient funding allocation for sustainability initiatives. ● Rigid government policies and procedures that hinder sustainability-focused decision-making. ● Attitudinal barriers among university stakeholders towards implementing sustainability.	● Establish self-funding mechanisms within universities to generate resources for sustainability initiatives. ● Advocate for government policy reforms to support sustainability integration in university operations. ● Implement awareness and training programs to foster a sustainability-oriented mindset among staff and students.
Governance Perspective	● Lack of mandatory legal compliance or national policies enforcing sustainability practices in HEIs. ● Absence of a structured approach to sustainability governance. ● No dedicated personnel to oversee sustainability efforts—existing sustainability centers often rely on part-time staff. ● Limited availability of financial resources.	● Introduce mandatory sustainability compliance requirements through UGC, integrating professional associations such as IEPSL and state bodies. ● Integrate sustainability management responsibilities into institutional structures. ● Assign a full-time sustainability manager/officer. ● Allocate adequate resources (human and financial) to support sustainability governance within HEIs.

The findings from this activity highlight critical gaps in the current sustainability framework of HEIs in Sri Lanka and emphasise the need for systematic interventions across teaching, research, operations, and governance to overcome them. The key recommendations include institutionalising sustainability through structured policies, increasing funding and resource allocation, and fostering industry collaboration to bridge existing gaps. Addressing these barriers through policy reforms, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement will be crucial in ensuring Sri Lankan universities align with global sustainability standards and to increase university sustainability rankings that attract funding, motivate students, and recognition to HEIs.

14. Establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) for Sustainability in Sri Lankan HEIs

The concept of a Community of Practice (CoP) for Sri Lankan HEIs to enhance sustainability practices through knowledge sharing, best practices, and collective action was identified as a vehicle to drive sustainability among Sri Lankan HEIs. Both state and non-state HEIs can collaborate and actively contribute to its establishment, with support from governing bodies such as the Ministry of Higher Education and the UGC to empower and strengthen the initiative.

Senior Professor P.M.C. Thilakarathne, Vice Chancellor of the OUSL and the present chair of Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors, highly appreciated this initiative and pledged to take a leading role in establishing the CoP for sustainability in Sri Lankan HEIs. This section provides a brief overview of the concept of CoP and outlines its initiation process.

CoP for University Sustainability

The proposed Sustainability in HEI CoP is a collaborative network of sustainability practitioners within Sri Lankan HEIs, aimed at fostering knowledge sharing, promoting best practices, and facilitating collective action to enhance university sustainability. This concept is similar to Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS) , which provides a structured platform for sustainability-focused collaboration in higher education (https://www.acts.asn.au/).

Main Objective of the CoP

The primary objective of the CoP is to strengthen sustainability efforts within Sri Lankan universities by promoting collaboration by effectively connecting staff and students.

By facilitating collaboration among state and non-state universities to enhance sustainability practices, the CoP can support:

- Reduce duplication of efforts, tackle common issues/challenges for Sri Lankan HEIs and find synergies among them.
- Explore collective/generic efforts driving cost reduction through sustainability initiatives (e.g.: reduction of waste, electricity, and water consumption)
- Improving sustainability performance to enhance university rankings.
- Promote research, policy advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives related to sustainability.
- Establish a long-term network for continuous engagement and collective action.

Establishing the Sustainability in HEIs CoP

The CoP can be established by forming a core group of sustainability representatives from both state and non-state universities, defining common goals, and creating a platform for continuous engagement, discussions, and knowledge exchange. The following steps outline the process for initiating the CoP:

1. **Form a core group** – Identify key sustainability practitioners from state and non-state universities to lead the initiative.
2. **Appoint a convenor** - Identify an individual or a body (such as a Sustainability Centre of a University) to coordinate and support the initiative as a secretarial function.
3. **Create a communication platform** – Develop an online forum (e.g., email group, WhatsApp, or a dedicated website) for discussions and resource sharing.
4. **Define objectives and scope** – Establish clear goals, focus areas, and expected outcomes for the CoP.

5. **Host an inaugural meeting** – Bring together interested members to discuss the structure, roles, and initial activities. The current workshop provides an ideal platform for this discussion.
6. **Develop an action plan** – Outline short - term and long-term initiatives, including knowledge-sharing sessions, research collaborations, and policy advocacy.
7. **Engage stakeholders** – Seek support from university leadership, government agencies, and sustainability organisations for guidance and resources.
8. **Formalise the CoP** – Establish governance mechanisms, a constitution, participation criteria, a reporting body or committee and a framework for ongoing activities.
9. **Launch pilot initiatives** – Implement small-scale collaborative sustainability projects to build momentum and demonstrate impact.

15. Conclusion

The two-day workshop has ignited a vital dialogue and laid a strong foundation for advancing environmental sustainability within Sri Lanka's higher education sector. By bringing together diverse stakeholders from university leaders and academic staff to policymakers and industry experts, the event successfully unpacked the multi-dimensional nature of sustainability in HEIs and its pivotal role in influencing global university rankings.

The participants gained not only theoretical insights but also practical strategies through case studies, governance models, expert sessions, and interactive group activities. The discussions underscored that sustainability must be embedded across teaching, research, operations, and governance to create lasting institutional change. Notably, the proposal to establish a national CoP marks a promising step toward collective progress, peer learning, and systemic transformation.

Looking ahead, the future of sustainability in Sri Lankan HEIs will depend on institutionalising clear governance structures, embracing interdisciplinary research, enhancing capacity through digital innovation, and securing dedicated resources. Further, aligning with global frameworks such as the UI GreenMetric, QS Sustainability, and THE Impact Rankings, while ensuring context-specific adaptability, will enable universities to better position themselves in international platforms.

More crucially, the journey ahead demands a cultural shift from compliance-driven efforts to purpose-driven action. Universities must evolve into living laboratories where sustainability is practiced, taught, and championed by every member of the academic community.

This report serves not only as documentation of this milestone workshop but also as a roadmap towards building green, responsible, and globally competitive universities in Sri Lanka.

Annexure: Workshop Agenda

Workshop Day 1 - 20th February 2025

Venue: The Open University of Sri Lanka, Colombo

Time	Session	Resource Person/s
09:00 am – 09:30 am	Registration	
09:30 am – 10:50 am	Inauguration	
10:50 am – 11.00 am	Tea Break	
11.00 am – 11:15 am	Sustainability terms – Word Game/Group Exercise	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
11:15 am – 12.00 pm	Sustainability Management – Importance of a governance framework	Ms Clare de Castella Associate Director Environmental Sustainability The Australian National University
12.00 pm – 01:15 pm	Understanding current Sustainability Management structures – Group Exercise + Present the Baseline Questionnaire	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
01:15 pm – 02:00 pm	Lunch Break	
02:00 pm – 03:30 pm	Case study presentations	
	Sustainability & University Ranking Trends An early finding of a Systematic Literature Review	Ms. Hiruni Rathwatta Lecturer, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka Ms. Warunika Hettiarachchi Senior Lecturer, Sabaragamuwa University
	Jewels and barriers of establishing energy analysis for the Universities	Dr Nuwan Gunarathne Senior Lecturer, University of Sri Jayewardenepura
	Ranking: THE Impact Ranking Case Study	Prof. Mangala Yatawara Professor, University of Kelaniya
	Ranking: UI Green Metric Case Study	Dr Yohan Mahagamage Senior Lecturer The Open University of Sri Lanka
03:30 pm – 03:45 pm	Wrap-up Day 01	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University

Workshop Day 2 - 21st February 2025

Time	Session	Resource Person/s
09:00 am – 09:15 am	Icebreaking exercise	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
09:15 am – 09:25 am	National Policies and Strategic Approaches for Environmental Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sri Lanka	Ms. Chamindry Saparamadu Director General/CEO (2020-2025) Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka
09:25 am – 09:35 am	The Importance of Environmental Regulations and Compliance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sri Lanka	Dr. Ajith Gunawardene Director (Environmental Education and Awareness) Central Environmental Authority
09:25 am – 09:45 am	The Value of Environmental Networking for Higher Eductaion Institutions (HEIs) in Sri Lanka	Mr. Randeewa Malalasooriya Hony. Treasurer Institute of Environmental Professionals (IEPLS)
09:45 am – 09:55 am	A Systems Perspective on Environmental Sustainability in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sri Lanka	Dr. Sampath Bandara Wahala Senior Lecturer Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka
09:55 am – 10:15 am	Q&A Session	
10:15 am – 10:30 am	Tea Break	
10:30 am – 11.00 am	Sustainability Ranking: the Structure & How it works	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
11.00 am – 12:30 pm	Breakout group exercises: how to optimise Synergies and Unique Selling Propositions in Environmental Sustainability Rankings | the key 4 Segments: – Research, Teaching, Operationalizing and Governance	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
12:30 pm – 01.15 pm	Lunch Break	
01.15 pm – 02:15 pm	Group presentations By participants	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
02:15 pm – 02:45 pm	Summary and an Approach to Prepare Action Plans	Dr. Chalaka Fernando Environmental Sustainability Manager The Australian National University
02:45 pm – 03:15 pm	Establishing a Community of Practice for Sustainability in HEIs	Expert from participants
03:15 pm – 03:45 pm	Certificate awards and closing remarks	

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