

Extended Abstract | Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Sustainable Economies and Inclusive Growth

Higher Education for Sustainable Economies and Inclusive Growth: Evidence from Egypt

Randa El Bedawy 

The American University in Cairo, Egypt

KEYWORDS

Higher Education, Sustainable Development, Inclusive Growth, Sustainable Economies, Egypt, Education for Sustainability, Innovation, Human Capital

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published:

In the context of accelerating global economic, social, and environmental challenges, the pursuit of sustainable economies and inclusive growth has become a priority for governments, institutions, and international organizations. Issues such as climate change, resource scarcity, unemployment, inequality, and technological disruption require integrated and long-term responses that balance economic progress with social justice and environmental responsibility. Within this context, higher education institutions are increasingly recognized as strategic actors in shaping knowledge-based economies and promoting inclusive development. Universities play a critical role in developing human capital, generating research and innovation, supporting entrepreneurship, and preparing graduates to contribute effectively to sustainable societies.

Education for sustainable development provides an important framework through which higher education can respond to these emerging challenges. It seeks to equip learners with the knowledge, values, skills, and competencies needed to understand the interconnected dimensions of sustainability and to act responsibly in professional and civic life. Beyond traditional teaching functions, education for sustainable development encourages critical thinking, systems thinking, ethical reasoning, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities that are essential for addressing complex development issues. As a result, universities that embed sustainability into their strategies, curricula, governance structures, and campus operations can make substantial contributions to national competitiveness, social inclusion, and long-term resilience.

The relationship between higher education and inclusive growth is particularly significant in developing countries, where expanding access to quality education can reduce inequality, improve employability, empower youth and women, and strengthen social mobility. At the same time, universities can foster innovation ecosystems that support small enterprises, green industries, and responsible investment. Through partnerships with government, business, and civil society, higher education institutions can also contribute to local development and community well-being. However, realizing these benefits requires institutional commitment, policy alignment, and the integration of sustainability principles across academic and administrative functions.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Randa El Bedawy · rbedawy@aucegypt.edu · The American University in Cairo, Egypt

© 2026 The Authors. Business Research Proceedings Published by Luminous Insights, Wyoming, United States.

Distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license terms.

Egypt has increasingly emphasized sustainability through national strategies such as Egypt Vision 2030, which highlights economic development, social justice, environmental protection, and institutional reform. In this context, the higher education sector has an important opportunity to align educational outcomes with labour market needs while advancing innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable practices. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including limited awareness of sustainability concepts, fragmented implementation efforts, insufficient interdisciplinary approaches, and the need to better connect university learning with real-world economic and social priorities.

This paper examines the contribution of higher education to sustainable economies and inclusive growth through a case study of Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development in Egypt. As the first non-profit university in the Middle East to embed sustainable development into its mission, governance model, educational philosophy, and institutional practices, Heliopolis University represents an innovative model within the regional higher education landscape. The university's approach integrates sustainability across teaching and learning, research activities, community outreach, entrepreneurship support, and environmental practices. This case offers practical insights into how universities can move beyond symbolic commitments toward more transformative institutional models.

The study adopts a qualitative case study methodology to explore the opportunities, challenges, and lessons emerging from this experience. It highlights how mission-driven higher education institutions can contribute to employability, ethical leadership, social inclusion, community engagement, and environmentally responsible innovation. It also identifies barriers such as financial constraints, resistance to change, policy limitations, and the complexity of measuring long-term impact.

The paper contributes to the growing literature on higher education for sustainability by providing evidence from a developing country context that remains underrepresented in existing research. It offers policy and managerial implications for university leaders, educators, and decision-makers seeking to strengthen the role of higher education in advancing sustainable economies and inclusive growth. While the analysis focuses on a single case, the findings may provide broader lessons for comparable institutions in emerging economies. Future research may undertake comparative studies across countries and institutional types to better understand the conditions that enable successful sustainability transformation in higher education.

Funding Statement

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest

Randa El Bedawy declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Publisher Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of their institutions, the publisher, editors, or reviewers. The publisher and editorial team make no warranties regarding the accuracy or completeness of the content and accept no responsibility for errors, omissions, or any consequences arising from its use. The publisher remains neutral regarding jurisdictional claims in maps and institutional affiliations.

Cite as

El Bedawy, R. (2026). Higher Education for Sustainable Economies and Inclusive Growth: Evidence from Egypt. In *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Sustainable Economies and Inclusive Growth* (pp. 1–1). Business Research Proceedings. 10.51300/BRP-2026-11