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ANNUAL
REPORT:
SDG REPORT

4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

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UJ SDG REPORT 2023

SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

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Report on the University of Johannesburg's Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 4

SDG 4: Quality Education

OVERVIEW: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) has established itself as a leading institution in advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on Quality Education. This report highlights UJ's significant contributions during the 2023 calendar year, showcasing a commitment to inclusive, equitable, and innovative education practices.

UJ's efforts are guided by its Strategic Plan 2035 and the Global Excellence and Stature (GES) framework, particularly the GES 4.0 initiatives, which focus on leveraging Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies and fostering societal impact. The university has implemented a range of academic, community, and technological initiatives that align with SDG 4 objectives, including digital learning platforms, AI-enhanced teaching tools, and extensive financial aid programmes.

INTRODUCTION

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) has consistently demonstrated a commitment to advancing educational excellence, equity, and innovation. These efforts are deeply intertwined with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. UJ's multifaceted initiatives span academic innovation, community engagement, technological integration, and targeted programmes for underserved populations. This report provides an in-depth analysis of UJ's contributions to SDG 4 during the 2023 calendar year, as detailed in the institution's Annual Report.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONAL VISION

UJ's institutional strategies are aligned with its Global Excellence and Stature (GES) framework, particularly the GES 4.0 initiatives centred on Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) advancements and societal impact. The Strategic Plan 2035 articulates UJ's renewed mission to dynamically shape a sustainable future, prioritising quality education as a cornerstone of this vision. The integration of SDG 4 within the broader framework underscores UJ's commitment to fostering inclusive educational practices while leveraging technology and innovation to enhance learning outcomes.

To ensure the strategic alignment of its goals, UJ has embedded the principles of sustainability and societal impact across all its programmes. For instance, the institution has introduced metrics to monitor progress towards these objectives, such as key performance indicators (KPIs) for graduate output, research excellence, and diversity.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATIVE TEACHING PRACTICES

UJ's focus on academic excellence is evident in its teaching and learning policies, which prioritise innovative pedagogical approaches. The university has implemented digital learning platforms and AI-enhanced tools to support student success, particularly in addressing the needs of a diverse student body. In 2023, over 19,000 students completed the Artificial Intelligence in the 4IR module, exceeding targets and reflecting UJ's leadership in preparing students for future-ready careers.

The Division for Teaching Excellence has spearheaded initiatives such as the Centre for Academic Technologies (CAT) and the Academic Development Centre (ADC), which offer tailored support to enhance teaching methodologies and promote inclusive learning environments. Special projects like the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) further amplify UJ's efforts to integrate evidence-based strategies into its educational offerings.

Additionally, UJ's Centre for Academic Staff Development (CASD) runs workshops and mentoring programmes designed to enhance the skills of lecturers. These programmes emphasise the integration of 4IR technologies into the curriculum, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to address contemporary educational challenges.

ENHANCING ACCESS AND EQUITY

Access to education remains a pivotal aspect of SDG 4, and UJ has made significant strides in this domain. With over 60% of its undergraduate students relying on financial aid from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the university has supplemented these efforts through initiatives like the SRC Trust Fund and the Missing Middle Campaign. These programmes provide financial relief to students from low-income households, enabling them to pursue higher education without the burden of insurmountable debt.

UJ also launched the Double Our Future Campaign, which aims to secure additional funding for scholarships and infrastructure development, particularly for historically disadvantaged students. In 2023, the university awarded bursaries to over 2,000 students, covering tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses.

Moreover, UJ's focus on employment equity extends to its academic staff, with ongoing efforts to increase the representation of historically marginalised groups. By the end of 2023, black South Africans comprised over 53% of the academic staff, marking steady progress towards achieving equitable representation across all levels of the institution.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

UJ's community engagement initiatives underscore its commitment to lifelong learning and societal upliftment. The university's Soweto Science Centre (UJ-SSC) provides STEM education outreach to school learners, particularly in underserved communities. These efforts have enhanced learners' access to quality science education, equipping them with skills essential for academic and professional success.

The UJ Women in Community Engagement Empowerment Programme (UJWiCEEP) is another noteworthy initiative. This programme empowers women in local communities by providing workshops on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and health education. In 2023, UJWiCEEP reached over 1,500 participants, many of whom have since launched small businesses or pursued further education.

Similarly, UJ's Continuing Education Programmes (CEPs) address diverse learning needs by offering short courses and professional development opportunities. Many of these programmes are tailored to upskill workers and integrate 4IR competencies, ensuring that education remains relevant and accessible to all segments of society.

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY FOR EDUCATION

As a trailblazer in 4IR initiatives, UJ has seamlessly integrated technology into its educational offerings. The institution's investments in AI-driven research and smart classroom infrastructure have transformed traditional learning environments. Notable achievements include the development of interactive e-learning modules and the deployment of advanced analytics to track student progress, ensuring timely interventions for at-risk students.

UJ's Virtual and Augmented Reality in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education (VARSTEME) project demonstrates the power of immersive technologies in enhancing learning outcomes. By creating virtual laboratories, the university enables students to conduct experiments in a controlled digital environment, addressing challenges such as limited physical resources.

The establishment of the UJInvnt intellectual capital platform highlights the university's commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. By providing seed funding for interdisciplinary research projects, UJ has cultivated a robust ecosystem for technological innovation that directly benefits the education sector.

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

UJ's leadership in quality education is internationally recognised, as evidenced by its top-tier rankings in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. The institution ranked 55th globally for SDG 4 and achieved the highest ranking in Africa for SDG 1: No Poverty. These accolades reflect UJ's ability to address interconnected challenges of education and socioeconomic development.

Regionally, UJ's participation in the inaugural Times Higher Education Sub-Saharan Africa University Rankings reinforced its status as a leader in African higher education. The university ranked second in the region, showcasing its influence and contributions to advancing quality education across the continent.

Additionally, UJ has established partnerships with institutions across the Global South to promote collaborative research and knowledge exchange. These partnerships focus on addressing regional educational challenges, such as teacher shortages and curriculum development.

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

UJ's commitment to advancing knowledge production aligns with SDG 4's emphasis on lifelong learning. The university's research output reached unprecedented levels in 2023, with over 3,100 accredited units published. Many of these research initiatives address critical issues such as education equity, innovative pedagogy, and the role of technology in learning.

The Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA) exemplifies UJ's focus on impactful research. Projects undertaken by the CSDA explore education's role in reducing inequalities and empowering marginalised populations, contributing directly to the achievement of SDG 4. For example, one 2023 study examined the impact of digital literacy programmes on youth employment outcomes, providing actionable insights for policymakers.

SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

UJ's Strategic Plan 2035 places societal impact and sustainability at its core, with education as a critical pillar. Plans to establish a parallel online university and a medical school further demonstrate UJ's forward-thinking approach to addressing gaps in access to education and healthcare. These initiatives aim to expand opportunities for learners worldwide while maintaining the institution's reputation for academic excellence.

The university also plans to scale its hybrid learning model, combining online and in-person instruction to accommodate diverse learning needs. This model is particularly beneficial for students in remote areas, who may face barriers to accessing traditional campus-based education.

CONCLUSION

The University of Johannesburg's comprehensive approach to advancing SDG 4 underscores its role as a leader in promoting quality education. By integrating innovation, equity, and community engagement into its core strategies, UJ continues to make a profound impact on local and global education landscapes. As the institution embarks on its Strategic Plan 2035, it remains steadfast in its commitment to shaping a sustainable and inclusive future through education.

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