

Going Green

Guidebook for Student Unions

2024



Going Green: Guidebook for Student Unions
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We Cannot Only Call for Others to Go Green



Going Green is a guidebook designed to lead student unions toward sustainability. We must, as the old saying goes, practise what we preach and see how our own ways of working can become fit for the future. Student unions across the world advocate for their schools and universities to invest in sustainability and teach green skills. Still, to spearhead the transformation towards the green world our time so desperately demands, we must also be willing to give up convenience and not always choose the cheapest option. This guidebook will make this work easier. I hope you will find it helpful.

This publication would not have been possible without the energy of our working group on Environmental Justice, the leadership of our Steering Committee, and the encouragement of our secretariat.

Jacob Blasius
Executive director
Global Student Forum

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Chapter 1

Navigating Sustainability

Let us start by figuring out what is holding us back

Sustainability, while a noble and essential goal, is not without its challenges, especially in the context of student unions.

This chapter aims to identify and explore these challenges, providing a realistic view of the hurdles student unions might face on their path to becoming more sustainable. Recognizing these challenges is the first step towards overcoming them.



Financial Constraints

One of the most significant challenges faced by student unions is financial limitations. Implementing sustainable practices often requires upfront investment in eco-friendly technologies, sustainable materials, or educational programs. For many student unions operating with limited budgets, prioritizing these investments can be difficult.



Balancing with Other Priorities

Student unions often juggle multiple priorities, from supporting student welfare to organizing events and managing administrative tasks. Integrating sustainability into these diverse areas while maintaining a focus on their primary objectives can be challenging.



Awareness Gaps

While there is a growing interest in environmental issues, understanding the specific actions and strategies that can lead to meaningful change is not always straightforward. Student unions may struggle to find reliable information or lack the expertise to implement effective sustainability practices.




Institutional Constraints

Student unions operate within the larger framework of their educational institutions, which may impose certain constraints. These could include institutional policies, regulations, or a lack of support for sustainability initiatives at a higher administrative level.



Engagement

Garnering widespread engagement from the student body is another challenge. While many students may be supportive of sustainability in principle, translating this into active participation in sustainability initiatives can be challenging. Overcoming apathy or a lack of interest is crucial.



Measuring and Demonstrating Impact

While there is a growing interest in environmental issues, understanding the specific actions and strategies that can lead to meaningful change is not always straightforward. Student unions may struggle to find reliable information or lack the expertise to implement effective sustainability practices.

Assessing Sustainability Challenges

Here is a way to measure your challenges

This assessment tool is designed to help student unions identify their specific challenges in implementing and maintaining sustainable practices. Answer the following questions honestly to gain insights into the areas where you might face obstacles.

Instructions

- Read each statement below.
- Rate your agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Strongly Disagree" and 5 means "Strongly Agree."
- Tally your scores to identify your key challenge areas.

Financial Constraints

- *Our student union struggles with allocating funds for sustainability initiatives. (1-5)*
- *There is a lack of financial resources to invest in sustainable technologies or infrastructures. (1-5)*

Knowledge and Awareness

- *We lack detailed knowledge about sustainable practices appropriate for our union. (1-5)*
- *There is a general lack of awareness about sustainability issues among our union members. (1-5)*

Engagement and Participation

- *It's challenging to engage a significant portion of the student body in our sustainability initiatives. (1-5)*
- *Our sustainability events and campaigns often see low participation rates. (1-5)*

Balancing Priorities

- *We find it difficult to integrate sustainability with our other operational priorities. (1-5)*
- *Sustainability often takes a backseat to more immediate concerns of the student union. (1-5)*

Institutional Constraints

- *Our institution's policies or lack of support hinder our sustainability efforts. (1-5)*
- *There is limited institutional encouragement or resources for implementing sustainability measures. (1-5)*

Measuring Impact

- *We struggle to measure the impact of our sustainability initiatives. (1-5)*
- *There's a lack of clear metrics or methods to track our progress in sustainability. (1-5)*



Sustainability Awareness Survey

When you need to understand what the student body think

Before we can start implementing changes to how the student unions operate, a good step can be to survey the broader student body. This will help identify what is important for the ordinary student and can help sharpen your argument for more engagement

General Awareness and Interest

- *How important is the issue of environmental sustainability to you personally? (Scale: 1-5)*
- *How well-informed do you feel about sustainability issues? (Scale: 1-5)*

Campus Sustainability

- *How important do you think it is for our campus to implement sustainability practices? (Scale: 1-5)*
- *Are you aware of any current sustainability initiatives on our campus? (Yes/No)*
- *If yes, please list any initiatives you are aware of:*

Student Union's Role

- *How important is it for the student union to lead sustainability efforts on campus? (Scale: 1-5)*
- *Would you like to see more sustainability-focused events or campaigns from the student union? (Yes/No)*

Participation and Engagement

- *How likely are you to participate in sustainability initiatives or events on campus? (Scale: 1-5)*
- *What type of sustainability initiatives or events would you be most interested in participating in? (Open-ended)*



Institutional Policies

- *Do you believe that our institution should invest more resources in sustainability? (Yes/No)*
- *What specific areas do you think the institution should focus on regarding sustainability? (Open-ended)*

Personal Practices

- *Do you engage in sustainable practices in your personal life? (Yes/No)*
- *If yes, what are some of the sustainable practices you follow? (Open-ended)*

Additional Comments

- *Please share any other thoughts or suggestions you have regarding sustainability on campus:*



Chapter 2

Overcoming Financial Constraints

Is your institution ready to support your green transition?

The pursuit of sustainability often comes with a price tag. For student unions, operating within the confines of limited budgets, the financial aspect of implementing sustainable practices can pose a significant challenge.

This chapter delves into understanding these financial constraints and offers strategies to overcome them, focusing on securing institutional support.

Student Interest



Use data from student surveys and feedback to show that sustainability is a priority for the student body. Institutions are more likely to invest in areas that are important to their students.

Long-Term Benefits



Emphasize the long-term financial, environmental, and social benefits of sustainable practices. This includes energy savings from eco-friendly technologies and the potential to attract more students who value sustainability.

Strong Case



Develop a compelling argument for why investing in sustainability is beneficial for the institution. This can include long-term cost savings, enhanced reputation, student engagement, and alignment with global sustainability trends.

Arguments For Institutional Funding

When they need to give you money or fund green initiatives

- *Emphasize how sustainable practices can lead to significant cost reductions over time. This includes energy savings from using renewable sources, reduced waste management costs, and lower utility bills through energy-efficient upgrades.*
- *Point out that sustainability efforts can boost the institution's image, attracting environmentally-conscious students and staff, and positioning it as a leader in social responsibility.*
- *Stress the trend of students preferring institutions with strong sustainability credentials. Implementing green initiatives can be a key differentiator in attracting and retaining students. [\(Source\)](#)*
- *Highlight that investing in sustainability can help the institution stay ahead of the curve in terms of environmental regulations, reducing the risk of future compliance costs.*
- *Argue that by investing in sustainability, the institution can demonstrate leadership in the community, fostering local partnerships and enhancing community relations.*
- *Point out the potential for sustainable initiatives to create new learning and research opportunities for students and faculty, enhancing the academic value of the institution.*
- *Emphasize how active participation in sustainability efforts can improve student engagement and well-being, contributing to a more positive and fulfilling campus experience.*



If you don't already have enough arguments, here are seven more



- *Stress the importance of taking action on global environmental issues, positioning the institution as a responsible global citizen contributing to broader sustainability goals.*
- *Mention that many alumni and potential donors are increasingly interested in funding sustainability initiatives, seeing them as a way to make a lasting impact.*
- *Explain how investing in renewable energy sources can reduce dependence on external energy suppliers and enhance energy security.*
- *Discuss how sustainability initiatives can be part of risk management, mitigating potential environmental risks and ensuring long-term operational stability.*
- *Showcase how sustainability drives innovation, encouraging the adoption of new technologies and practices that can keep the institution at the forefront of educational and operational advancements.*
- *If applicable, align the sustainability initiatives with the institution's stated values or mission statement, emphasizing the importance of 'walking the talk.'*
- *Describe how sustainability initiatives open doors for networking with other institutions, governmental bodies, and NGOs, leading to beneficial partnerships and collaborations.*




Chapter 3

Making Student Unions Green

Are you ready to take action?

For student unions with sustainability aspirations, the journey begins from within. Before advocating for broader institutional change, it's crucial to embody the principles of sustainability in their own operations and culture.

This chapter outlines actionable steps that student unions can take internally to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.




Eco-Friendly Office Practices

- Minimize paper use and adopt digital documentation.
- Use recycled materials for any necessary printed materials.
- Implement energy-saving practices, such as using energy-efficient lighting and appliances.




Green Purchasing

- Prioritize the purchase of eco-friendly and sustainably sourced products.
- Choose local vendors and suppliers to reduce carbon footprint.



Sustainable Events

- Organize events with a focus on sustainability, like zero-waste initiatives, and use of biodegradable materials.
- Encourage the use of public transport or carpooling for event attendees.



Training

- Conduct regular workshops or training sessions on sustainability for union members and volunteers.
- Invite experts to speak on sustainability topics.



Campaigns

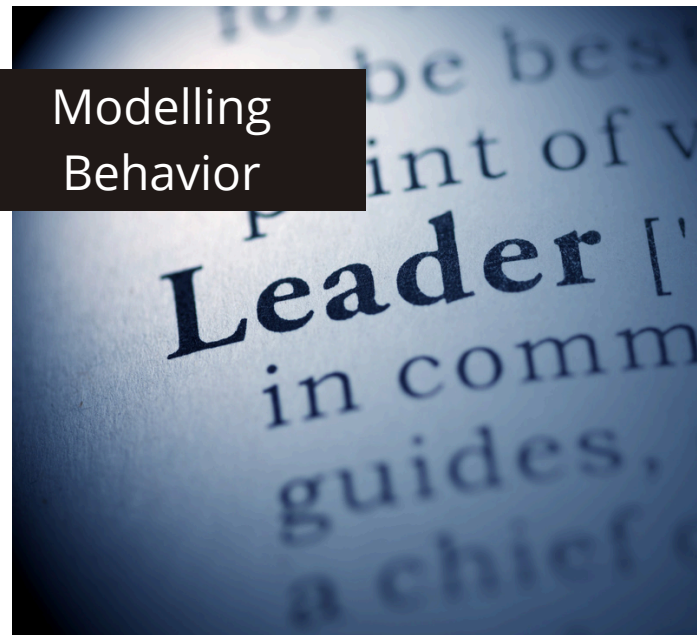
- Use social media, newsletters, and posters to share information on sustainability practices and their impact.
- Highlight the importance of individual actions in contributing to a sustainable future.



Lifestyle

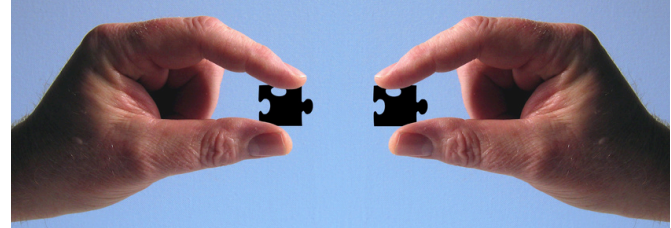
- Encourage members to adopt sustainable lifestyles, such as reducing waste, recycling, and conserving energy.
- Share stories and experiences of members who practice sustainable living.

Modelling Behavior



- Union leaders should model sustainable behaviors to inspire others.
- Implement sustainability-focused policies in the union's own governance.

Collaboration



- Partner with other campus organizations or external groups to work on sustainability projects.
- Engage in community service projects that focus on environmental conservation.

Inspiration

Template

For A Student Union

Sustainability Policy



Sustainability Policy for [Your Student Union's Name]

This Sustainability Policy sets forth the commitment of [Student Union Name] to environmental stewardship and sustainable operation. It is designed as a comprehensive guideline, encompassing various facets of our daily operations, activities, and overall ethos. This policy applies to all facets of the student union, ensuring that our commitment to the environment is reflected in our actions and decisions.

Our office will champion eco-friendly practices, significantly reducing paper use by prioritizing digital communication and documentation. To further reduce our environmental footprint, we will implement energy conservation measures, such as using energy-efficient lighting, optimizing heating and cooling systems, and encouraging the use of power-saving modes on all electronic devices. We are committed to establishing a robust recycling program and will explore opportunities for composting organic waste. Additionally, we aim to create a green office space with plants and utilize environmentally friendly cleaning products.

We will adopt a green procurement strategy, giving preference to environmentally responsible products and services. This includes sourcing office supplies made from recycled materials, choosing fair trade and organic products, and collaborating with local suppliers to minimize transportation emissions. We will also evaluate the sustainability practices of our vendors and encourage them to align with our environmental standards. Our procurement policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains aligned with the best sustainable practices.



Our event planning will embody our commitment to sustainability. We will strive for zero waste events by using reusable or compostable materials, avoiding single-use plastics, and ensuring proper waste segregation and disposal. Transportation to events will be eco-conscious, promoting carpooling, cycling, and public transit options. Energy conservation will be a priority, with events utilizing natural lighting whenever possible and minimizing energy consumption. We will also incorporate themes of sustainability into our events to educate and engage attendees on environmental issues.

In our pursuit of reducing energy and water usage, we will conduct regular audits to identify and address inefficiencies. Initiatives such as installing low-flow faucets and toilets, using drought-resistant plants for landscaping, and adopting rainwater harvesting techniques will be explored. We will also encourage behavior change among our members, such as turning off lights and electronics when not in use and promoting shorter showers and responsible water usage.

Our commitment to waste reduction will be proactive and innovative. Apart from standard recycling measures, we will explore partnerships for electronic waste recycling and engage in initiatives like pen recycling programs. We will provide clear signage and education on waste segregation and strive to host educational workshops on reducing personal waste. Our goal is to move towards a circular economy model within our operations, where waste is minimized, and materials are reused or recycled.

We will launch a comprehensive sustainability education program, including workshops, guest lectures, and interactive campaigns. These initiatives will cover topics like sustainable living, waste reduction, and the importance of biodiversity. We will also collaborate with academic departments to integrate sustainability into the curriculum and research projects. Our communication channels will regularly feature sustainability tips, success stories, and updates on our environmental initiatives.

We will actively seek out and participate in partnerships that promote sustainability within and beyond our campus. This includes working with local environmental organizations, participating in community clean-up events, and advocating for sustainable practices at a municipal level. We will also offer volunteer opportunities and internships focused on environmental projects, encouraging our members to engage in meaningful environmental action.





Making a good time a green time

Sustainable Event Planning Checklist

Sustainable event planning is a critical aspect of demonstrating a student union's commitment to environmental responsibility. This section provides a comprehensive checklist that student unions can use to ensure their events are as sustainable as possible. The checklist covers various facets of event planning, from initial conception to post-event activities.

- ☐ Choose a venue that is easily accessible by public transport, and if possible, one that practices sustainability.
- ☐ Opt for digital invitations to reduce paper waste. If printed invitations are necessary, use recycled paper.
- ☐ Choose caterers who use local, organic, and seasonal produce. Ensure options for vegetarian and vegan diets are available.
- ☐ Accurately estimate food needs based on RSVPs and consider donating any leftover food to local shelters or food banks.
- ☐ Use reusable dishes, cutlery, and napkins, or ensure that disposables are compostable or recyclable.
- ☐ Encourage exhibitors or stallholders to use sustainable materials for their setups.
- ☐ Use digital resources or QR codes for handouts, schedules, and informational materials.
- ☐ Utilize natural lighting when possible and opt for energy-efficient lighting and equipment.
- ☐ Implement water-saving measures, especially for outdoor events.
- ☐ Encourage attendees to use public transport, carpool, bike, or walk to the event.
- ☐ Ensure the venue is accessible, reducing the need for long-distance travel by attendees.
- ☐ Provide clearly labeled recycling and compost bins throughout the venue.
- ☐ Make announcements or display signs about the sustainability features of the event.
- ☐ Be prepared to make real-time adjustments to maintain sustainability practices during the event.
- ☐ Review the sustainability successes and areas for improvement.



Organizing Sustainability Campaigns

Campaigning means Organising Loudly

Sustainability campaigns are powerful tools for student unions to raise awareness, engage the student body, and drive change towards more environmentally friendly practices on campus. Effective campaigns can educate, inspire, and mobilize students, creating a culture of sustainability within the university community. This chapter will explore various topics and strategies for organizing impactful sustainability campaigns.

Campaign Topics Ideas



Waste Reduction and Recycling

- Campaigns focusing on reducing waste, promoting recycling, and educating about the importance of waste segregation.
- Initiatives like 'Zero Waste Week' or 'Recycle Right Challenge.'



Transportation

- Promote the use of public transportation, cycling, walking, and carpooling through campaigns like 'Car-Free Day' or 'Bike to Campus Week.'
- Collaborations with local transit authorities to provide discounts or improved services for students.



Energy Conservation

- Campaigns to encourage energy-saving behaviors, such as switching off lights and unplugging devices when not in use.
- Energy challenges, like 'Campus Blackout' events or 'Energy-Saving Competitions' between dorms.



Water Conservation

- Campaigns to raise awareness about water usage and conservation techniques.
- Initiatives like 'Turn-Off-the-Tap' reminders in bathrooms and 'Water-Wise Gardening' workshops.

Campaigns are like pants, they are best when they fit



Biodiversity and Green Spaces

- Campaigns to promote campus biodiversity, such as tree planting drives, setting up campus gardens, or 'Adopt a Plant' programs.
- Awareness events about local wildlife and the importance of green spaces.




Eating

- Encourage plant-based eating and the reduction of food waste through campaigns like 'Meatless Mondays' or 'Local Food Fairs.'
- Educational events on sustainable food choices and cooking demonstrations.



Sustainable Fashion

- Organize events like 'Sustainable Fashion Shows' or 'Clothing Swap Meets' to encourage a shift away from fast fashion.
- Workshops on upcycling clothes and sustainable fashion choices.



Climate Change Education

- Educational campaigns on the impacts of climate change and the importance of individual actions.
- Hosting climate change experts for talks, panels, or film screenings.



Green Technology

- Promote the use of sustainable technologies through exhibitions or innovation challenges.
- Collaborations with university departments or local startups to showcase advancements in green technology.



Community

- Campaigns that involve the local community in sustainability efforts, like neighborhood clean-ups or joint sustainability projects.
- Partnering with local organizations for broader impact.



This is one way to do it

Campaign Plan Example

"Cycle to Sustainability"

Introduction to the campaign

"Cycle to Sustainability" is a campaign designed by the student union to promote cycling as a sustainable mode of transportation. The campaign aims to reduce carbon emissions, encourage healthy living, and create a more environmentally friendly campus atmosphere.

Campaign Objectives

- *Increase the number of students cycling to campus by 20% over the next six months.*
- *Raise awareness about the environmental and health benefits of cycling.*
- *Collaborate with local businesses and the university to improve cycling facilities on and around campus.*

Target Audience

- *Primary: Students who currently commute by car or public transport.*
- *Secondary: Faculty and staff members.*

Key Messages

- *Cycling is an eco-friendly alternative to motorized transport.*
- *Regular cycling contributes to physical and mental well-being.*
- *Every individual's choice to cycle is a step towards a greener campus.*

Strategies and Activities

Kick-Off Event

- *Launch the campaign with a 'Bike to Campus Day' event, encouraging students and staff to cycle to campus.*
- *Set up information booths on cycling benefits, bike safety, and local cycling routes.*

Partnerships

- *Collaborate with local bike shops for discounts on bicycles and accessories.*
- *Work with the university to improve bike racks and cycling lanes on campus.*

Workshops and Training

- *Organize workshops on bike maintenance, urban cycling safety, and effective cycling routes.*
- *Offer free or subsidized bike safety checks and basic repair services.*



Promotional Materials

- *Distribute flyers, posters, and digital content highlighting the benefits of cycling and success stories of student cyclists.*
- *Use social media platforms for regular updates and engagement.*

Incentive Program

- *Develop a reward system for frequent cyclists, such as vouchers or discounts at local cafes or stores.*
- *Implement a bike-sharing program or offer subsidized bike rentals.*

Community Rides

- *Organize regular group cycling events, including themed rides, scenic route explorations, and charity rides.*

Feedback and Engagement

- *Conduct surveys to understand barriers to cycling and gather suggestions.*
- *Engage with the campaign audience through social media challenges or contests.*



Timeline

- **Month 1:** Campaign planning, partnership formation, and promotional material development.
- **Month 2:** Official launch with 'Bike to Campus Day' and workshop series commencement.
- **Months 3-5:** Ongoing activities, community rides, and regular social media engagement.
- **Month 6:** Campaign review, survey distribution, and celebration event.

Evaluation Metrics

- *Increase in the number of bikes at campus racks.*
- *Engagement levels on social media and event participation rates.*
- *Survey feedback on cycling habits before and after the campaign.*



Budget

- *Allocate funds for promotional materials, event organization, and incentive program.*
- *Seek sponsorships from local businesses and potential university support.*

That our government has made significant progress in bringing potable water nearer to so many more people than was previously the case, I rate amongst the most important achievements of democracy in our country

Nelson Mandela, 2002

Social Media Content Ideas

Creating engaging and informative content for social media is crucial in spreading awareness about sustainability. Here are some ideas that student unions can use to effectively communicate sustainability messages.

Weekly Sustainability Tips

- Share simple and practical sustainability tips that students can easily incorporate into their daily lives.
- Example Post: "🌱 Sustainability Tip Tuesday: Switch to a reusable water bottle and reduce single-use plastic waste!"

Myth-busting Mondays

- Dispel common myths about sustainability and provide factual information.
- Example Post: "Myth: Recycling uses more energy than it saves. Fact: Recycling aluminum cans saves 95% energy compared to producing new ones!"

Spotlight

- Feature different sustainable initiatives or practices on campus or by student groups.
- Example Post: "Spotlight on the Campus Garden Club: Growing community and sustainability one plant at a time! 🌿"

Eco-Challenges

- Encourage followers to participate in eco-friendly challenges.
- Example Post: "Join our 7-Day Vegetarian Challenge! 🥗🌱 Share your plant-based meals with us using #..."

Success Stories

- Share stories of students or staff who are actively engaged in sustainability.
- Example Post: "Meet Jane from Environmental Sciences, leading the charge in campus recycling initiatives! 🌍"



Chapter 5

Embracing Indigenous Knowledge

Let us learn from those who know

In the journey towards a more sustainable future, the integration and acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge systems play a crucial role. Indigenous communities around the world have long practiced sustainable living, deeply rooted in a profound understanding of their natural environment. This chapter explores the importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge in sustainability advocacy, recognizing it as a vital resource in developing effective environmental strategies and policies.



Understanding Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge refers to the wisdom, practices, and understandings that indigenous communities have developed over generations, often relating to the management of their local environment. This knowledge is not merely a set of practices; it is a holistic way of viewing the world that intertwines culture, spirituality, community, and the health of the land, going beyond the realm of sustainability. Respecting and integrating this knowledge in all sustainability efforts can provide valuable insights into how we can live in harmony with nature.

The Role of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous perspectives offer sustainable solutions that are often overlooked in conventional environmental management strategies. These solutions are grounded in a philosophy of balance and respect for nature, emphasizing the need to use resources in a way that is sustainable for future generations. For instance, traditional agricultural practices of certain indigenous groups involve crop rotations and natural pest control methods that preserve biodiversity and soil health.





Collaborating with Indigenous Communities

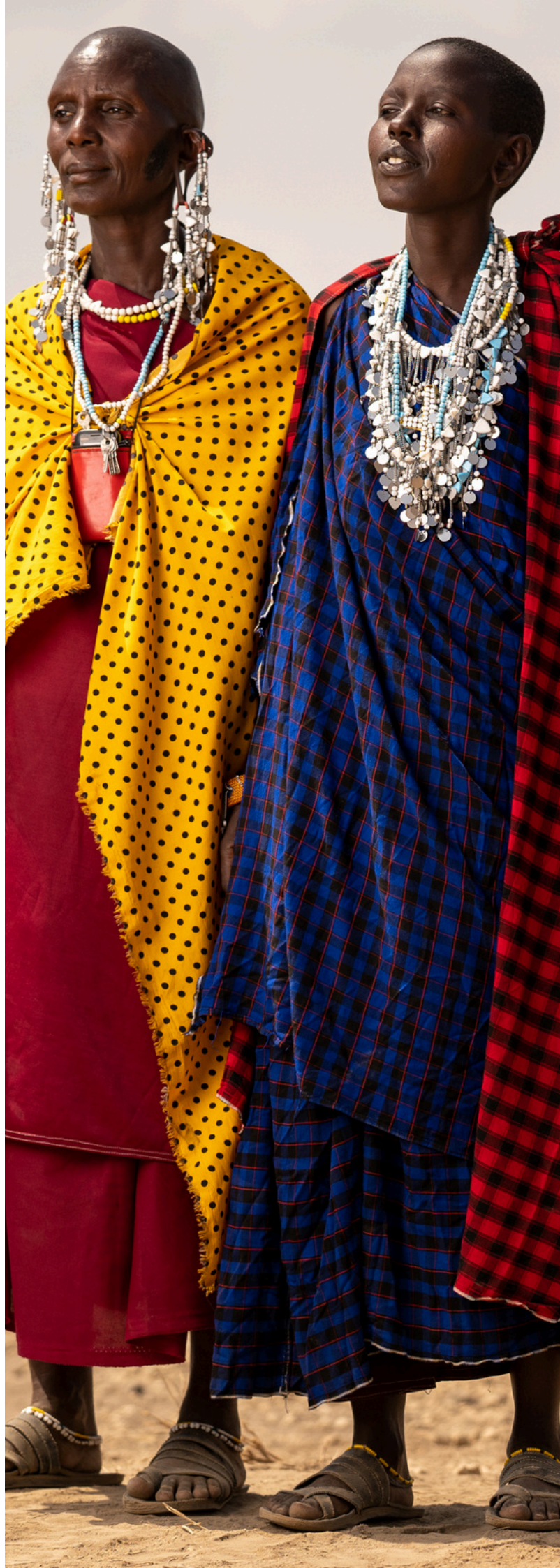
To effectively integrate indigenous knowledge, student unions and sustainability advocates should seek genuine partnerships with indigenous communities.

This involves:

- Engaging with local indigenous groups to understand their perspectives on sustainability.
- Ensuring that these communities have a voice in shaping sustainability initiatives and policies.
- Collaborating on projects that support and enhance traditional practices and knowledge.

Challenges and Sensitivities

Incorporating indigenous knowledge into sustainability advocacy must be approached with sensitivity and respect. It is crucial to recognise the historical and ongoing injustices faced by indigenous peoples and avoid the commodification or misappropriation of their knowledge. Advocates should strive for relationships based on mutual respect, consent, and benefit sharing.





That was all

You have now reached the end of Going Green. We hope you can use this knowledge in your work for a more sustainable world. We have tried to enable you to make your own work more green, while also giving you tools to make the world fit for the future.

Further Reading

If you can't get enough, here are additional resources

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