

The End of Poverty

Subjects: Social Issues

Contributor: Lucía Martínez-Virto

The end of poverty is the first of the 17 sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development is one of the main challenges our societies faces. However, as point out, sustainability must be understood on a triple environmental, financial and social basis.

In September 2015, the United Nations (from now on UN) presented the document “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which had the unanimous support of world leaders. This agreement implied a new international agenda that, from 1 January 2016, should aim at advancing in the fulfilment of the 17 objectives for the year 2030. This path, classified as one of the most relevant global agreements in our recent history, aspires to progress in an alliance towards a more sustainable future. Therefore, the 2030 agenda has become a horizon from state to local, for public institutions, companies, organisations, and also for universities.

Ending poverty in all its forms is the first of these objectives (from now on SDG1), and the UN defines it not only as a human rights problem that affects hunger but also as the absence of opportunities, limited access to essential services and social participation . Furthermore, a European consensus agrees on using the AROPE indicator (At risk of poverty or social exclusion) to measure this phenomenon. This indicator compiles the population who are either at risk of poverty, materially and socially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity (Those people who live with a low income (taking as a threshold 60% of the median equivalent income), who suffer from severe material deprivation (at least 4 of the nine defined elements) and/or those who live in households with very low or no employment intensity (in a household with two adults it is equivalent to only one person working part-time). . This is the primary indicator to monitor the goal of the 2030 horizon. As a result, the fight against poverty implies building a more just and inclusive society and contributing to eradicate the inequalities present in our societies . The UN encouraged that the different social agents must work towards this objective, involving their environment and their own capacity for action to promote inclusive growth, responsible and sustainable consumption and promote a fairer society with opportunities for all people. In the search for answers to these complex challenges, the universities' role has become a key component so are influential spaces with leadership capacity and influence in decision-making life .Moreover, universities offer a wide variety of academic services to their territory, not only because of their educational potential, also because of their research capacity, their opportunities for sustainable governance and the projection they develop in their territories through volunteer actions and engagement, among others .

In this sense, they have the ability to advance towards the goals that the UN attributes to SDG1 through its four main lines of action. (1) Its productive capacity can contribute to students applying this approach to all their professional activities. (2) Moreover, its research potential supports innovation to build a more sustainable society, disseminate results, promote debates on poverty's consequences, and participate in developing strategies and inclusive regulations. (3) The territory outreach of universities makes them leaders in promoting public-private alliances, offering to volunteer, cooperating with the environment, accompanying sustainable growth models, and helping social economy companies. (4) Finally, its internal policy also has the capacity to create a more inclusive university model towards its community, preventing poverty from being a reason for dropping out, promoting equality policies, responsible consumption and the promotion of social clauses on businesses.

2. The Role of University in Ending Poverty: Take the Public University of Navarre as an Example

The literature review shows that a good part of these actions has been analysed from the social responsibility perspective at the university. However, universities have other opportunities in teaching, research and attention to their students that must be analysed. Similarly, the studies found on the contribution of SDG1 tend to present isolated experiences in some of the lines of action, especially in teaching and research. This study aims to address this research gap by conducting a case study that comprehensively addresses the four lines of action of universities: teaching, research, their relationship with the local environment and their internal policies.

The Public University of Navarre (from now on UPNA) was born 33 years ago in Navarre, a northern Spanish region. It currently has 8431 students, 1104 research faculty, offers 31 undergraduate degrees and 29 master's degrees, collaborates with 385 companies and public institutions in the territory on the teaching and research framework, and has trained almost 40,000 graduate students ^[1]. This university is located on three campuses, two in its capital, Pamplona, and a third campus in the 2nd city, Tudela, located in the southern part of the region. This implies that the university's presence is divided into two geographic areas of reference, the South and the North. Since its inception, the Public University of Navarre tried to generate strong links with its territory. The regional proximity and size of its university allowed for closer ties with the environment and generated a dynamic contribution to the economic and social development of the area. As a result, in 2020, this institution topped the Knowledge and Development of universities ranking as the centre that most contributed to the regional development of universities in Spain.

The case study carried out at the Public University of Navarre has identified the University's contribution to SDG1 and how to increase its impact.

Concerning teaching, UPNA maintains a high potential for professional training at specific bachelor's and master's levels in this field of poverty. In the same way, the university frequently designs specialised courses for working professionals. Next year, in line with the literature recommendations, UPNA will work to develop crosscutting SDG1 training for all students.

In regards to research, UPNA has a long history of research in the study of poverty and social exclusion in Navarre. As a result, it has participated in designing the different government inclusion plans for the territory. However, the lack of an access framework has been an obstacle to promoting new lines of research that could support SDG1.

Finally, from the outreach field, the university has developed two parallel lines of action. On the one hand, the participation and promotion of networks and alliances, such as the Network to Fight poverty in the region or the consolidation of collaboration agreements with the social and business network. On the other hand, it has not neglected internal action, preventing poor students from abandoning their studies through financial aid and developing a framework of action for responsible contracting services. This last experience is not without obstacles, encouraging the relaunch of other collaboration formulas with companies and entities of the third sector from the field of applied research for SDG1.

These results place the challenges to increase the impact on SDG1 of the Public University of Navarre in the same line as the literature review. The necessity of improving an institutional governance framework that supports, registers and promotes actions aimed at sustainable development. Likewise, UPNA should address each of the objectives from a multidisciplinary perspective, a challenge identified in this case study also in the field of SDG1. Finally, although the design of training towards transversal competencies is recognised, this approach should be incorporated into designing and evaluating all study plans.

Identifying and assessing the above data made it possible to structure all the actions that have contributed to SDG1. This is also happening to other universities, where social responsibility actions are often isolated and disconnected within the institution itself. Nonetheless, the SDG framework is an opportunity to measure this contribution, encourage development and target new development paths. This work has tried to contribute to this.

This journey substantiates the Public University of Navarre as an active agent searching for formulas and public-private partnerships that combat such complex problems as poverty and social exclusion. A recent study comparing the development of inclusion policies in Spain points to this alliance, in which the university has played a central role, as the key to having advanced models in the end of poverty ^[2].

However, there is still a long way to go. The literature examination demonstrates that the challenges of universities regarding sustainable development objectives are consolidated in a crosscutting way in their teaching, research,

university outreach actions and internal policies. In this sense, social commitment and academic excellence must walk together; otherwise, it will not be easy to find a balance that rewards and recognizes the contribution of the different Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 agenda.

References

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