

## **Multiculturalism and Sustainability within**

### **Higher Education Institutions in Australia and Malaysia:**

*An exploration of forms, barriers and solutions, and its implications for the development of a multiculturally inclusive higher education for sustainable development (HEfS) framework*

#### **SYNOPSIS OF RESEARCH:**

Cultural diversity and the valuing of local and indigenous knowledge structures are significant objectives of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (UN-DESD) and the post 2015 SDGs. Interestingly though, the parameters of cultural diversity have largely been defined and scoped through monocultural philosophies and ideologies, which has, for the most part, neglected the rich sustainability philosophies, values, traditions, knowledge and skills that local and indigenous knowledge structures have to offer. Ironically also, much of these imbalanced representations of sustainability are, more often than not, envisioned as academic and institutional philosophies and practices within higher education institutions, which in turn shape distorted interpretations of higher educational outcomes and graduate competences for sustainability. With internationalization being a global higher education aspiration, universities are progressively becoming melting pots for diverse individuals, communities, ethnicities and cultures to assimilate. What this evidence further suggests, is that multiculturalism is a crucial HEfS objective to be met, and a core sustainability competence to be developed if higher education is to produce globally competitive graduates. Driven by socio-ecological, inclusive and transformative education theoretical orientations, this study, which is run in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development, Greater Western Sydney, and the Centre for Educational Research, explores the forms, barriers and solutions for multiculturalism and sustainability within higher education institutions in Australia and Malaysia, and proposes multiculturally inclusive HEfS indicators and a framework which can be used as assessment and integration tools by institutions of higher learning wanting to incorporate or evaluate multiculturalism within their HEfS policies, educational philosophies, curriculum, pedagogy and practices.

**RESEARCHER BIOGRAPHY:**

Subarna Sivapalan is a senior academician and researcher from Malaysia. She obtained her Ph.D. in Engineering Education for Sustainable Development from the University of Nottingham. Subarna's research interests include higher education for sustainable development, sustainability communication and social transformation and development for sustainability. Subarna is the Co-Chair of the National Education for Sustainable Development Workgroup hosted by WWF Malaysia, and an Adjunct Fellow at the School of Education, Western Sydney University. She is presently engaged in a comparative study on manifestations of multiculturalism within sustainability agendas of higher education institutions in Australia and Malaysia, in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development, Greater Western Sydney and the Centre for Educational Research.