



**Title:** Advancing Towards Net Zero Higher Education Institutes (HEIs): A Structured Approach

**Date:** 25<sup>th</sup> February 2026 (Wednesday)

**Time:** 02.00 PM – 03.30 PM

**Venue:** Jehangir 1, Taj Palace, New Delhi

## Concept and Rationale

The 25<sup>th</sup> edition of the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2026, by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), is convened at a critical juncture for global and national climate action. Despite strengthened commitments, global emissions trajectories remain misaligned with the Paris Agreement, and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continues to be uneven. Reflecting this urgency, the WSDS 2026 theme “*Transformations: Vision, Voices, and Values for Sustainable Development*” calls for systemic, long-term, and values-driven transitions rather than fragmented or incremental responses.

Within this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) occupy a uniquely strategic role. As centres of education, research, innovation, and societal influence, HEIs function simultaneously as significant institutional emitters and as incubators of future leadership. When HEIs pursue structured net-zero pathways, campuses operate as living laboratories where climate mitigation, governance reform, behavioural change, and skills development converge in practice.

The thematic track “**Advancing Towards Net Zero Higher Education Institutes (HEIs): A Structured Approach**” represents the **second edition** of focused engagement on net-zero higher education at WSDS by the **Emerson Centre of Excellence for Sustainability Studies** at **TERI School of Advanced Studies**, a subsidiary of TERI to advance education in climate change, environment and sustainability. Building on the 2025 thematic track on *Building Leadership for Carbon Neutrality (Net-Zero) in HEIs*, the 2026 edition marks a clear progression from leadership intent and conceptual framing towards structured implementation, institutionalisation, and capacity building within the Indian higher education ecosystem.

## Policy Anchoring: National Vision to Institutional Action

India’s net-zero transition is anchored in a strong national vision articulated by Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, particularly through **Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment)**, which emphasises environmentally responsible lifestyles rooted in behavioural change, moderation, and collective action. Mission LiFE positions institutions, including universities, as key enablers of sustainable values and practices across society.

Operationalising this vision within higher education, the **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has advanced the **U75 Net-Zero Universities Initiative**, initially launched across 75 HEIs and subsequently expanded to over 250 institutions nationwide. The initiative, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, mandates time-bound emission reduction pathways while encouraging integration of sustainability into curricula, research, campus operations, and outreach activities. Together, Mission LiFE, NEP 2020, and UGC directives establish a coherent policy framework that positions HEIs as critical actors in delivering India’s climate commitments.

This thematic track explicitly situates net-zero action within this policy continuum, linking national vision to institutional strategies, campus-level initiatives, and educational interventions.

### Focus of “Advancing Towards Net Zero Higher Education Institutes (HEIs): A Structured Approach”

This year, the thematic track focuses on **Indian HEIs** and their efforts to advance net-zero transitions through structured and measurable approaches. Key areas of emphasis include:

- Institutional frameworks for quantifying, monitoring, and reporting greenhouse gas emissions.
- Campus-based initiatives across energy, mobility, water, waste, procurement, and infrastructure.
- Integration of net-zero principles into teaching, research, and institutional governance; and
- Capacity building for academic leadership, administrators, and students.

A defining focus of the track will be on the role of HEIs in **fostering climate-relevant skills and leadership among Generation Alpha and Generation Beta**. As cohorts that will experience the most acute climate risks and transition pressures, these generations will assume leadership during decisive decades for mitigation and adaptation. By embedding net-zero practices into campus operations and pedagogy, HEIs transform climate action into a comprehensive educational process, equipping students with practical competencies for a low-carbon economy while reinforcing the values promoted under Mission LiFE.

### Concluding Perspective

By aligning national policy vision, institutional action, and intergenerational leadership development, our thematic track positions Indian HEIs as drivers of long-term, values-based transformation towards net-zero. The track emphasises the role of higher education not only in reducing institutional emissions but in shaping the knowledge, skills, and ethical foundations required for India’s sustainable development trajectory (UNEP, 2020).

### Bibliography

1. Government of India, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). *Mission LiFE: Lifestyle for Environment*.
2. University Grants Commission (UGC). *Annual Report 2022–23* and U75 Net-Zero Universities Initiative. New Delhi.
3. Government of India. *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*. Ministry of Education.
4. Kalluri, B. et al. (2024). Net-Zero Energy Campuses in India: Blending education and governance for sustainable transition. *Sustainability*, 16(1).
5. Kourgiouzou, V. et al. (2021). Scalable pathways to net-zero carbon in higher education institutions. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 147.
6. Emerson CoE for Sustainability Studies, TERI School of Advanced Studies, 2025. Developing a Net Zero Transition Framework for HEIs: Working Paper, TERISAS, New Delhi.
7. UNEP, 2020. Race to Zero for Universities and Colleges

#### About Emerson Centre of Excellence for Sustainability Studies

The **Emerson Centre of Excellence for Sustainability Studies** at **TERI School of Advanced Studies** is a dedicated research centre established in partnership with **Emerson Electric Co. (India) Pvt. Ltd.**, for tackling complex sustainability challenges through research, collaboration, and innovation. The Centre integrates diverse perspectives to co-create knowledge and develop actionable solutions by engaging various stakeholders in critical areas such as climate adaptation, energy transition, urban development, water management, and ecosystem resilience.

#### About the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS)

The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship Track II initiative organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Instituted in 2001, the Summit series has a legacy of over two decades for making ‘sustainable development’ a globally shared goal. The only independently convened international Summit on sustainable development and environment, based in the Global South, WSDS strives to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of global communities by assembling the world’s most enlightened leaders and thinkers on a single platform. The 25th edition of the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)—the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS)—will be held from 25-27 February 2026 in New Delhi. The deliberations of the **Silver Jubilee** edition of the Summit will focus on the umbrella theme of *Parivartan*: **Transformations: Vision, Voices and Values for Sustainable Development**.