

Sustainable Development Goes Massively Online As EdCast Launches With Sustainability Expert Jeffrey Sachs

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In the spring of 2015 thousands of students from universities around the world will participate in online negotiations under the tutelage of Jeffrey Sachs to draft a comprehensive treaty on climate change, ahead of the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change scheduled for December 2015 in Paris.

The curriculum and its massive dissemination is the first **test** for a new online education startup, [EdCast](#), launched by serial **entrepreneur** and Menlo Ventures venture partner, [Karl Mehta](#).

“This approach of online **education** is the future of the area I’m dealing with, which is global sustainable development,” says Sachs. “We need a mass scale-up in understanding of these issues to confront big challenges like climate change.”

To achieve that scale-up, Sachs is leveraging his position as director of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network, an organization comprised of hundreds of universities and think tanks created by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Through EdCast Sachs will distribute a curriculum he's designing including an introduction to the issues that climate change negotiators will face as they ready for the December 2015 Paris negotiations and, eventually, the mock negotiations among the thousands of students that are part of the [SDSN's network of universities](#).

In all, there are some 200 member institutions and think tanks that are part of the organization. Already the [38 universities around the world](#) that form a Global Association of Masters in Development Practice will offer the inaugural course from Professor Sachs, "The Age of Sustainable Development", as part of their core curricula. The class is also available for free to interested students around the world. When Sachs first taught the course last year, through Coursera, some 50,000 students enrolled globally.

"Starting in January we'll put on the table a draft agreement of the kind the governments will be negotiating at the end of the year and we'll spend several weeks in a massive online virtual negotiation," says Sachs of the 2015 curricula he envisions. As an advisor to the UN on climate change negotiations, Sachs is uniquely positioned to bring whatever the world's students approve to the table in Paris.

The collaboration between Sachs, and EdCast founder and chief executive **Karl Mehta** began in Davos, Switzerland, at the World Economic Forum. Mehta was coming off a stint as one of the first White House Innovation Fellows and had been working on EdCast as a way to transform higher education. "The best way to make a difference and an impact was to make sure we can strengthen the foundation of education using the technology we have to make quantum jumps," Mehta says.

He envisions what he calls a multiversity, with hundreds of campuses interconnected through public and private hosted clouds on the EdCast platform so that students can pick and choose a curriculum from the best courses on offer at major institutions around the U.S. and around the world.

It's a vision that aligns well with Sachs' notions about the future of education, and while EdCast is announcing its first project with the SDSN, the company has a network of educational institutions that extends far beyond the organization. "There's over 500 universities worldwide that we're working with," says Mehta. "And over 1,000 professors."

Investors in Mehta's new company include [Menlo Ventures](#), [Stanford StartX](#), where it was accelerated, and the [New Schools Venture Fund](#), launched by Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers partners Brook Byers and John Doerr and social entrepreneur Kim Smith.

"We have universities across the developed and developing nations that are using it," says Mehta. "There is tremendous demand from universities in the developing world. And we can bridge the gap between a developed and a developing country's educational system. This public, private, and multi-institutional platform can bridge this gap."

Ultimately, both Mehta and Sachs see the EdCast platform and its collaboration with SDSN as a way to bring education to potentially millions of students. "Solving the world's greatest challenges in climate change, poverty, hunger, disease begins with a solid analytical foundation," said Sachs, in a statement. "Free online education will tremendously democratize higher education and accelerate problem solving for sustainable development."