

## Sustainability Awareness and Institutional Readiness for the "Nawa" Initiative at the University of Tripoli

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الوعي بالاستدامة والاستعداد المؤسسي لمبادرة "نوى" في جامعة طرابلس

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### Abstract

Background: Universities are increasingly recognised as catalysts for sustainable development, yet there is limited empirical evidence on whether academic communities are cognitively and institutionally ready to engage in structured sustainability initiatives.

Objective: This study investigates sustainability awareness, behavioural practices, and institutional readiness within the University of Tripoli to assess the strategic viability of the "Nawa" Initiative, a multi-pillar program integrating digital empowerment, leadership, mental health, environmental sustainability, water management, disability inclusion, and crisis management.

Methods: A descriptive-analytical design was used, surveying 200 randomly selected participants (students, faculty, and staff) across multiple faculties. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire measuring awareness, practices, familiarity with Nawa's pillars, and willingness to engage.

Results: While individual sustainable behaviours are high (95.4% maintain cleanliness; 47.7% consistently rationalise resources), organised institutional participation is very low (64.4% rarely or never engage). Awareness of Nawa's specific pillars remains weak (62–72% unfamiliar), indicating a conceptual gap, not resistance. Strikingly, 94.8% express willingness to participate if a structured framework exists.

Conclusion: The University of Tripoli possesses latent human capital and ethical readiness for sustainability, but lacks an institutional mechanism to channel it. The Nawa Initiative is not only viable but necessary, transforming spontaneous prosocial behaviour into a coordinated, scalable model for university-led social responsibility. Our findings mandate the immediate adoption of Nawa as an institutional framework, including activation of student ambassadors, targeted awareness campaigns, and continuous impact assessment. These positions place the University of Tripoli as a regional benchmark for evidence-based sustainability initiatives.

Keywords: Sustainability Awareness; Institutional Readiness; Sustainable Development; Community Engagement; Youth Empowerment; Nawa Initiative

الملخص:

الخلفية: تتزايد الاعترافات بدور الجامعات كمحفزات للتنمية المستدامة، إلا أن الأدلة التجريبية المتوفرة حول مدى جاهزية المجتمعات الأكاديمية، معرفياً ومؤسسياً، للمشاركة في مبادرات الاستدامة المنظمة، لا تزال محدودة. الهدف: تبحث هذه الدراسة في الوعي بالاستدامة، والممارسات السلوكية، والجاهزية المؤسسية داخل جامعة طرابلس، لتقييم الجدوى الاستراتيجية لمبادرة "نوى"، وهي برنامج متعدد المحاور يدمج التمكين الرقمي، والقيادة، والصحة النفسية، والاستدامة البيئية، وإدارة المياه، وإدماج ذوي الإعاقة، وإدارة الأزمات. المنهجية: استُخدم تصميم وصفي تحليلي، حيث تم استطلاع آراء 200 مشارك تم اختيارهم عشوائياً (طلاب، وأعضاء هيئة تدريس، وموظفين) من مختلف الكليات. جُمعت البيانات من خلال استبيان منظم يقيس الوعي، والممارسات، والإمام بمبادئ مبادرة "نوا"، والاستعداد للمشاركة. النتائج: على الرغم من ارتفاع معدلات السلوكيات المستدامة الفردية (95.4% يحافظون على النظافة؛ 47.7% يحرسون على ترشيد الموارد باستمرار)، إلا أن المشاركة المؤسسية المنظمة منخفضة جداً (64.4% نادراً ما يشاركون أو لا يشاركون أبداً). لا يزال الوعي بأركان مبادرة "نوا" المحددة ضعيفاً (62-72% غير ملمين بها)، مما يشير إلى فجوة مفاهيمية، لا إلى مقاومة. ومن اللافت للنظر أن 94.8% أعربوا عن استعدادهم للمشاركة في حال وجود إطار عمل منظم. الخلاصة: تمتلك جامعة طرابلس رأس مال بشري كامن واستعداداً أخلاقياً للاستدامة، لكنها تفتقر إلى آلية مؤسسية لتوجيهه. إن مبادرة "نوا" ليست قابلة للتطبيق فحسب، بل ضرورية أيضاً، إذ تحوّل السلوك الاجتماعي الإيجابي التلقائي إلى نموذج منسق وقابل للتوسع للمسؤولية الاجتماعية التي تقودها الجامعة. وتؤكد نتائجنا على ضرورة التبنّي الفوري لمبادرة "نوا" كإطار عمل مؤسسي، بما في ذلك تفعيل سفراء الطلاب، وحملات التوعية الموجهة، والتقييم المستمر للأثر. هذه المواقف تجعل جامعة طرابلس مرجعاً إقليمياً لمبادرات الاستدامة القائمة على الأدلة. الكلمات المفتاحية: الوعي بالاستدامة؛ الاستعداد المؤسسي؛ التنمية المستدامة؛ المشاركة المجتمعية؛ تمكين الشباب؛ مبادرة "نوى"

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary societies in the twenty-first century are facing increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, including climate change, water scarcity, environmental degradation, digital inequality, mental health concerns, and social exclusion. These multidimensional issues have elevated sustainability and social responsibility to the forefront of global development agendas. The adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has further emphasised the need for integrated approaches that balance environmental protection, social well-being, and economic development [1].

In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have emerged as key actors in advancing sustainable development. Universities are no longer viewed solely as centres for teaching and research; rather, they are increasingly recognised as catalysts for societal transformation, innovation, and community engagement. Through education, research, capacity building, and outreach activities, universities contribute significantly to developing future leaders equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address contemporary global and local challenges [2] [3].

Despite the growing international emphasis on sustainable universities and socially responsible institutions, many higher education systems in developing countries continue to face challenges in translating sustainability principles into practical actions and institutional culture. One of the primary obstacles is the limited availability of empirical data regarding sustainability awareness, attitudes, and engagement among university communities. Without evidence-

based assessments, institutions may struggle to design effective interventions and initiatives capable of generating long-term societal impact [4]

In Libya, the need for innovative and community-driven approaches to sustainable development has become increasingly important. Social, environmental, and technological challenges require collaborative efforts that bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical implementation. Within this framework, the Nawa Initiative was established as a multidisciplinary, community-based platform to promote sustainable development through youth empowerment, knowledge transfer, innovation, and civic engagement. The initiative is founded on the belief that sustainable change begins with awareness and that universities provide ideal environments for cultivating future leaders and generating impactful solutions [5].

The Nawa Initiative operates through six interconnected strategic pillars: digital empowerment, youth leadership development, mental health and well-being, environmental sustainability and water resource management, disability inclusion and accessibility, and crisis and risk management. These pillars were selected to address pressing developmental priorities while aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals and contemporary societal needs [1] [2].

The vision of the Nawa Initiative is to contribute to building a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient Libyan society through knowledge-driven action and cross-sector collaboration. Its mission focuses on empowering individuals and institutions to actively participate in sustainable development by implementing innovative programs and evidence-based interventions that respond to real community needs. Furthermore, the initiative promotes partnerships among universities, governmental institutions, the private sector, and civil society organisations to maximize developmental impact and ensure long-term sustainability [3]; [6].

Given the strategic role of universities in fostering social innovation and sustainable development, the University of Tripoli was selected as the first pilot site for implementing the Nawa Initiative. As one of Libya's largest academic institutions, the university represents a diverse community of students, faculty members, researchers, and administrators, making it an appropriate setting for evaluating sustainability awareness and community readiness[5] [7].

Therefore, this study aims to assess the level of sustainability and social responsibility awareness within the University of Tripoli community and to explore participants' attitudes toward engagement in sustainable development initiatives. Additionally, the study seeks to examine the extent to which the priorities of the university community align with the strategic objectives of the Nawa Initiative. The findings are expected to provide an evidence-based foundation for designing future programs and interventions while supporting the broader goal of promoting sustainable development in Libya.

## 2. Problem Statement

Although sustainability has become an increasingly prominent topic in academic and development discourse, empirical evidence regarding the actual readiness of university communities to engage in sustainability initiatives remains limited. Furthermore, many sustainability programs and community initiatives fail to achieve their intended impact because they are implemented without first assessing baseline levels of awareness, engagement, and institutional preparedness. In this context, the present study seeks to address a critical question: Is the University of Tripoli ready for a structured sustainability initiative such as Nawa?

### **Objectives**

This study aims to:

- 1– Assess sustainability and social responsibility awareness among the University of Tripoli community.
- 2– Identify gaps between sustainability knowledge and everyday practices.
- 3– Evaluate awareness of the six strategic pillars of the Nawa Initiative.
- 4– Examine willingness to participate in community–based development efforts.
- 5– Generate baseline data to inform the design and expansion of the Nawa Initiative.

### **Methodology**

The study adopts a descriptive–analytical approach, which is suitable for examining levels of awareness and analysing attitudes without manipulating variables.

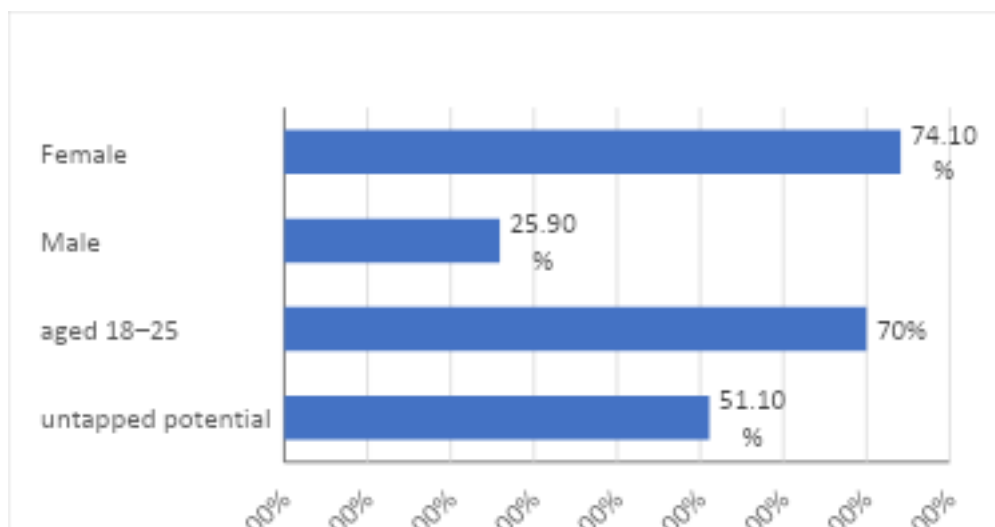
The target population consists of the entire academic community at the University of Tripoli, including students, faculty members, and administrative staff. A simple random sample of 200 participants was selected from various scientific and humanities faculties to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Data were collected using a custom–designed electronic questionnaire, which included sections on demographic characteristics, cognitive awareness of sustainability and social responsibility, behavioural practices, familiarity with the Nawa Initiative, and readiness for future engagement. In addition, structured focus group discussions (dialogue sessions) were conducted with members of the academic community, both in person and via Google Meet, to complement and deepen the quantitative findings. Specifically, these qualitative dialogue sessions focused on identifying the structural and systemic barriers that impede sustainability engagement on campus.

The questionnaire used a 5–point Likert scale to measure attitudes and perceptions with precision.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies, percentages, and cross–tabulations, to identify patterns and relationships within the dataset.

## Results



**Figure 1:** Demographic Snapshot.

### Demographic Profile

The demographic analysis revealed that females constituted 74.1% of the study sample. This predominance may reflect the higher participation of female students and staff in voluntary, educational, and community-oriented activities within the university environment. Moreover, it suggests that women could play a significant role in promoting sustainability awareness and supporting future sustainability initiatives at the University of Tripoli. Regarding age distribution, 70% of respondents belonged to the 18–25 age group. This finding is particularly important because this category represents the primary target audience of the Nawa Initiative. Young adults are generally more receptive to innovation, social engagement, and sustainability-oriented programs. Therefore, the strong representation of this age group increases the relevance of the study findings to future implementation efforts. The results further indicated that 51.1% of participants had never participated in university activities or campus-based initiatives. While this may initially appear as a challenge, it also reveals a substantial untapped potential within the university community. The presence of such a large unengaged population suggests that many students and staff remain outside existing participation channels and could become valuable contributors if provided with accessible and well-structured opportunities. This finding supports the need for initiatives such as Nawa that focus on engagement, inclusion, and community participation.

### Trends in Sustainability Awareness

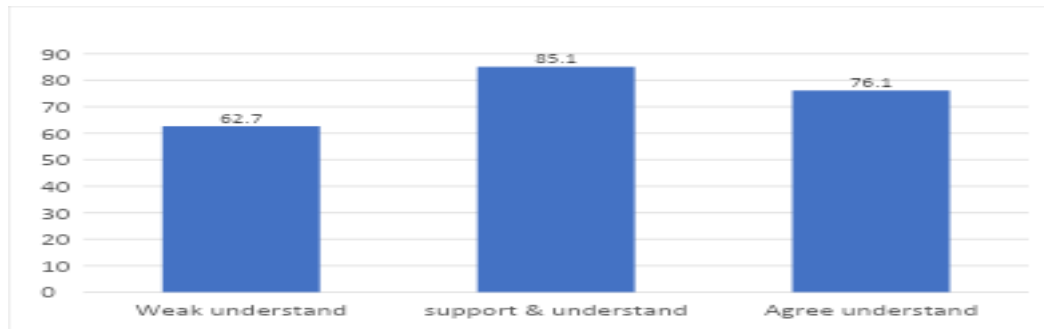
The findings demonstrated a generally positive attitude toward sustainability among respondents. A total of 76.4% agreed that universities should serve as the primary drivers for promoting sustainability culture within society. This reflects a growing recognition of the university's role beyond traditional education and research functions. Participants appear to view higher education institutions as key actors in shaping responsible citizenship and addressing contemporary environmental and social challenges.

Despite this positive perception, significant knowledge gaps were identified. Approximately 62.7% of respondents reported a limited understanding of the concept of a "Green University" (**Figure 2**). This result highlights a discrepancy between general support for sustainability and understanding of its practical frameworks and institutional applications. While participants recognise the importance of sustainability, many are unfamiliar with the specific policies, infrastructure, governance mechanisms, and operational practices that characterise sustainable universities. Consequently, awareness appears to be largely conceptual rather than operational.

This finding aligns with the broader sustainability literature, which frequently identifies a gap between sustainability values and sustainability literacy. Universities may promote sustainability in principle, yet students and staff often lack exposure to the practical dimensions required for implementation. Therefore, specialised awareness programs, workshops, and curricular integration are needed to strengthen the understanding of sustainability concepts within the university context.

In contrast, respondents demonstrated strong awareness regarding intergenerational responsibility. A high percentage (85.1%) agreed that university facilities and resources should be preserved for future generations. This result reflects an encouraging level of environmental and social responsibility and suggests that sustainability values are already present within the university culture. The challenge, therefore, is not the absence of positive attitudes but rather the translation of those attitudes into structured knowledge and coordinated action.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the University of Tripoli possesses a favourable foundation for sustainable development. Participants generally support sustainability principles and recognise the university's responsibility in promoting them. However, the limited understanding of Green University concepts suggests that awareness remains incomplete and requires institutional reinforcement. This gap provides a strong justification for implementing the Nawa Initiative, which seeks to transform general awareness into practical engagement, capacity building, and measurable impact.



**Figure 2:** Green University” concept

#### Behavioural Practices: The Knowledge–Action Gap

The analysis of sustainability–related behaviours revealed an interesting contrast between individual responsibility and institutional engagement. Respondents demonstrated strong personal commitment to environmentally responsible practices, with 95.4% reporting that they actively maintain public cleanliness. This finding suggests that sustainability–related values are already embedded within the daily behaviour of a large proportion of the university community.

Similarly, 47.7% of respondents reported consistently practising resource conservation through actions such as reducing unnecessary consumption of water, electricity, and other resources. These findings indicate that sustainability awareness is reflected, at least partially, in individual behaviour.

However, a different pattern emerged regarding participation in organised sustainability activities. The results showed that 64.4% of respondents rarely or never participate in workshops, campaigns, seminars, or organised sustainability initiatives. This discrepancy highlights what may be described as a "Knowledge–Action Gap" or, more specifically, an "Engagement Gap." While participants demonstrate positive attitudes and responsible behaviours individually, these attitudes are not being translated into active participation within institutional sustainability programs.

This finding suggests that the challenge is not a lack of awareness or willingness, but rather the absence of accessible structures, opportunities, and organised channels through which individuals can engage. Consequently, sustainability within the university remains largely an individual practice rather than a coordinated collective movement.

**Qualitative Insights on Institutional Barriers.** The quantitative finding regarding the 'Engagement Gap' was further contextualised and enriched through the qualitative focus group discussions. When participants were asked to identify the primary factors limiting their active involvement, three systemic barriers consistently emerged:

1. Absence of Communication Channels: Participants highlighted a critical disconnect between the administration and the campus community, noting that information regarding volunteer opportunities, environmental initiatives, and sustainability programs is rarely accessible or visibly promoted.
2. Administrative Bureaucracy: Stakeholders expressed frustration with rigid institutional bureaucracy, noting that launching student-led initiatives or obtaining approvals for community projects involves protracted, discouraging procedures.
3. Conceptual Unawareness: Confirming the quantitative data, the dialogue sessions revealed that a general lack of understanding regarding practical sustainability concepts acts as a psychological barrier, where individuals feel unqualified to participate due to a perceived lack of specialised literacy

#### Familiarity with the Nawa Initiative Pillars

The study assessed participants' familiarity with the Nawa Initiative's major thematic pillars: Digital Empowerment, Mental Health, Crisis Management, Sustainability, Leadership Development, and Social Responsibility.

Results revealed relatively low awareness across all pillars, with familiarity rates ranging from 62% to 72%. The lowest awareness levels were associated with Crisis Management and Mental Health, despite the increasing importance of these areas in contemporary higher education and community development.

Rather than indicating resistance or lack of interest, these findings are interpreted as evidence of a "Vacuum of Supply." In other words, the low awareness levels appear to result from limited exposure, insufficient educational opportunities, and the absence of specialised programs addressing these topics within the university environment.

This interpretation is particularly significant because it shifts the focus from individual shortcomings to institutional opportunities. The findings suggest that students are not rejecting these concepts; rather, they have not been systematically introduced to them. Therefore, the Nawa Initiative addresses a genuine institutional need by providing structured platforms through which these neglected areas can be explored and developed.

One of the most encouraging findings of the study relates to future engagement potential. An overwhelming 94.8% of respondents expressed willingness or potential willingness to participate in activities associated with the Nawa Initiative. This exceptionally high percentage indicates the presence of strong social capital and a substantial reservoir of untapped human potential within the University of Tripoli community. Such findings suggest that the primary challenge is not motivating participation, but creating effective mechanisms through which

participation can occur.

Furthermore, 70.7% of respondents described the current university environment as supportive of sustainability-related projects and initiatives. Although this figure does not indicate complete institutional readiness, it reflects a favourable climate capable of supporting new programs and reforms.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the University of Tripoli possesses both the human willingness and the environmental conditions necessary for the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives. What remains necessary is the provision of an organised framework capable of coordinating these resources and transforming potential into measurable outcomes.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal several strategic implications for sustainable development within Libyan higher education institutions.

First, the predominance of respondents within the 18–25 age category confirms that universities represent ideal environments for long-term behavioural transformation [8]. Young adults are at a critical stage of personal and professional development, making university-based interventions particularly effective in shaping future attitudes and behaviours. Consequently, initiatives targeting this demographic are likely to generate sustainable long-term impact.

Second, the results highlight a significant organisational gap within the university environment. Although 94.8% of respondents expressed willingness to participate in sustainability initiatives, more than half reported no previous engagement in university activities [9]. This contradiction suggests that participation barriers are organisational rather than motivational. Individuals appear willing to contribute, yet institutional mechanisms facilitating participation remain insufficient. In this context, the Nawa Initiative provides the missing organisational infrastructure required to connect motivation with action. This aligns with (10), who found that institutional mechanisms often fail to harness existing sustainability values. [10]. Furthermore, the low awareness of crisis management and mental health pillars underscores the strategic relevance of Nawa, as these are emerging global priorities yet underrepresented in many HEIs [11]. The perception of a supportive environment supports the conclusion that Nawa is an evidence-based response to identified needs [12].

Third, the findings demonstrate that sustainability-related behaviours already exist within the university community. Practices such as maintaining public cleanliness and conserving resources indicate that sustainability values are present at an individual level. However, these behaviours remain largely spontaneous and fragmented. The role of Nawa is therefore not to

create sustainability awareness from scratch, but rather to formalise existing positive behaviours into a coherent sustainability culture supported by institutional structures and collective action.

Moreover, the limited awareness observed regarding Crisis Management and Mental Health confirms the strategic relevance of the Nawa Initiative. These areas represent emerging priorities globally, yet remain underrepresented within many academic environments. By addressing these neglected topics, Nawa responds directly to unmet needs identified through empirical evidence rather than assumptions.

Finally, respondents' perception of the university environment as generally supportive suggests the existence of fertile ground for innovation and change. The combination of high willingness, positive attitudes, and institutional openness creates favourable conditions for implementation. Accordingly, the findings support the conclusion that Nawa is not merely a proposed initiative but an evidence-based response to clearly identified institutional and societal needs [1],[3, 7].

### **Conclusion**

The University of Tripoli community demonstrates strong individual sustainability values and a high willingness to engage, but lacks structured institutional mechanisms to transform these assets into coordinated action. The Nawa Initiative is not merely a proposal but an evidence-based solution to bridge the engagement gap. By formalising existing prosocial behaviours into a coherent framework, Nawa can convert latent human capital into measurable societal impact. Immediate adoption of Nawa, including student ambassadors, awareness campaigns, and impact assessment, is recommended to position the University of Tripoli as a regional benchmark for evidence-based sustainability initiatives.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen sustainability awareness, enhance community engagement, and support the long-term implementation of the Nawa Initiative:

1. Institutionalising Sustainability within University Policies: The University of Tripoli should progressively integrate sustainability principles into its strategic plans, academic activities, research priorities, and extracurricular programs. Institutional commitment is essential for transforming sustainability from a concept into a sustained practice.
2. Adopting the Nawa Initiative as a Coordinating Framework: The Nawa Initiative should be established as a structured institutional platform that coordinates sustainability, social responsibility, youth empowerment, digital transformation, mental health, and community engagement efforts across the university.

3. Addressing Knowledge Gaps through Targeted Awareness Programs: Specialised awareness campaigns, workshops, and training activities should be developed to address the identified gaps in understanding, particularly regarding Green University concepts, crisis management, mental health, and digital empowerment.
4. Activating the Nawa Ambassadors Network: A university-wide network of Nawa Ambassadors should be created to empower students as peer leaders who promote sustainability awareness, encourage participation, and serve as links between the initiative and the wider academic community.
5. Expanding Opportunities for Student Participation: Given the high willingness to engage identified by the study, additional volunteer programs, dialogue sessions, project-based learning opportunities, and interdisciplinary initiatives should be established to convert readiness into active participation
- Strengthening Strategic Partnerships: Partnerships should be developed between the university, government institutions, civil society organisations, the private sector, and international stakeholders to enhance resource mobilisation, knowledge exchange, and long-term sustainability.
6. Establishing a Monitoring and Evaluation System: A continuous monitoring and evaluation framework should be adopted to assess progress, measure impact, identify emerging needs, and support evidence-based decision-making. The use of indicators such as the Social Progress Index (SPI) may contribute to evaluating real societal outcomes.
7. Promoting the Replication of the Nawa Model: Following successful implementation, the Nawa Initiative could be adapted and replicated across other Libyan higher education institutions as a scalable model for sustainability, social responsibility, and youth-led development.

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