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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Goals, are a set of 17 integrated and interrelated goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that humanity enjoys peace and prosperity by 2030.

Over the past year, we have intensified our efforts to integrate the SDGs into our business strategy and operations. We have adopted a holistic approach, focusing on areas where we can make the most significant impact. Our initiatives are designed to address key SDGs through innovation, collaboration, and sustainable practices. This report provides a comprehensive overview of our initiatives, their progress, and the tangible outcomes we have achieved.

While we have made significant advancements in many areas, we acknowledge that challenges are inevitable.

This report celebrates our successes but also candidly addresses the obstacles we face and the lessons we have learned along the way. Transparency and accountability are fundamental to our approach, and we are committed to continuously improving our sustainability practices on this long journey.

As we look to the future, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the SDGs and will continue to leverage our resources, expertise, and partnerships to drive sustainable development and create positive, lasting impact. Our journey is ongoing, and we invite you to join us as we contribute to building a more sustainable and equitable world.

Message from our CEO

We have made important advancements in our sustainability journey during 2023. Our initiatives have not only contributed to our business growth but have also generated positive impact within our community, and hopefully beyond. This report encapsulates our achievements, the challenges we faced, and the lessons learned as we continue to be a responsible and innovative leader in our industry.

While we celebrate these achievements, we recognise that there is still much work to be done. The global challenges we face require continuous effort, collaboration, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. As a way of aiding that, we have allocated a full week off, specifically to devote to our colleagues' volunteering efforts. This time away from their regular responsibilities is intended to encourage them to engage in meaningful community service, fostering both personal growth and a sense of social responsibility.

As we move forward, we remain dedicated to integrating sustainability into every facet of our business strategy.



The global challenges we face require continuous effort, collaboration, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

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Kamran Kardan - Chief Executive Officer

Measuring progress:

A review of our 2023 goals

Goal	Activity / Project
Further reduce our CO ₂ footprint	In 2023, Knowledge E actively measured its CO ₂ footprint and strove towards reaching net zero, balancing the budget and the requirement for travel with its targets. More information is available on page 17.
Continue to support democratisation of knowledge	Through a range of new initiatives, Knowledge E has continued to support the democratisation of knowledge, removing barriers to scholarly discovery and making academic literature affordable and accessible to everyone. This is expanded upon on page 10.
Increase our efforts in reducing poverty	Throughout 2023, Knowledge E has sought to contribute to ending poverty and reducing inequalities worldwide. Through a range of activities, both commercial and philanthropic, Knowledge E continues to extend its reach to countries and communities that require the most help. More information available on page 7.
Continue to promote gender equality	Gender equality lies at the heart of the work Knowledge E carries out at its own offices as well as through its commercial activities. Data on this is presented on page 9.

Priority SDGs

As a signatory to the Publishers' SDG Compact, Knowledge E recognises that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education and reduce inequality – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. As part of our mission to even the publish and research playing field worldwide, we have focused our efforts on the below SDGs in 2023:



The Knowledge E Foundation:

Contributing to reduce poverty

Throughout 2023, Knowledge E has sought to contribute to ending poverty and reducing inequalities worldwide. Through a range of activities, both commercial and philanthropic, Knowledge E continues to extend its reach to countries and communities that require the most help.

Founded in 2018, the Knowledge E Foundation was created to directly impact people's lives with a focus on improving conditions for research and education worldwide. In 2023, the Foundation contributed to a range of disaster relief funds and initiatives to build schools in remote areas, alongside regularly contributing a proportion of its profits to worthwhile causes across countries like Cambodia, Egypt, Malawi, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, and the UAF.

The Svay Rieng school in Cambodia was sponsored by the Knowledge E Foundation in 2019 through the <u>Dubai Cares</u> 'Adopt a School' initiative that enables individuals and organizations to build or renovate schools in remote communities around the world where access to education remains a challenge. <u>Dubai Cares</u>, through its various programs and initiatives, has reached over 24 million beneficiaries in 60 developing countries, to date.

The school was built in 2020 by United World Schools; however, the building of the school and enrolment of the students was affected by COVID-19 at the time. To read more about this long-awaited visit please check our <u>blog</u>.

"For the time being, knowing that we have been a catalyst in making the children of a community happy and offering better chances for their future made the whole journey worthwhile."

Kamran Kardan





In 2022, we contributed to building a school in the Lakhnawar village of Nepal, and the ground breaking began in 2023.

Nepal's small villages and remote communities such as Lakhnawar often lack access to quality school structures and classrooms, and a disproportionately large number of those living in poverty are women. The village of Lakhnawar is a rural community located in the Banke region.

More than 4 million people in Nepal are living below the poverty line of \$1.90 a day, and more than 11 million people over the age of 15 (40% of the total population) have had no formal education. Via this partnership with <u>Dubai Cares</u> and buildOn, the Knowledge Foundation aims to reach out and support rural communities across Nepal to ensure they have access to quality classrooms and education.

Following the adoption, the Lakhnawar school will be able to welcome an increasing number of students from the area and will include more structurally sound classrooms, especially in light of the earthquake-prone region. The three-classroom primary school will be equipped with furniture and separate ventilated improved pit latrines for girls and boys.

Significantly, the school will accommodate up to 328 students including 172 girls. SDG 5 with its focus on gender equality is at the heart of the Foundation's objectives.



Twelve-year-old Angad is a passionate third grade student and one of 328 children in Lakhnawar who can't wait to have a new school to learn at.



Like many parents in Lakhnawar, Phul hopes for a better future for her two daughters so that they can help to lift themselves and their family out of poverty.



Nine-year-old Rasmi is a passionate third grader and one of 173 girls in Lakhnawar whose education will help bring about meaningful change and inspire others.

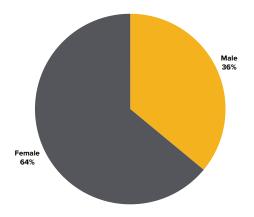
Gender equality at Knowledge E

Gender equality lies at the heart of the work Knowledge E carries out in its own offices as well as in its commercial activities.

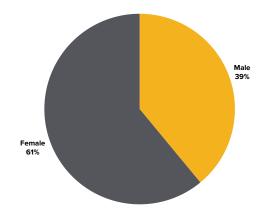
At the end of 2023, Knowledge E's workforce consisted of 70 full-time employees spread across 13 different countries, with 70% of total employees based out of UAE. Across both headquarters and global teams, the data on gender distribution highlighted a strong female presence, 62%, significantly over the overall figure of 25% of positions in edtech.

However, at senior levels, the data is not representative given the small size of the company.

Gender distribution - Global



Gender distribution - HQ



Zendy and KnE Learn:

Empowering knowledge, bridging inequalities

Developed by Knowledge E, Zendy is an innovative Al-powered research library dedicated to making academic literature accessible and affordable to a global audience. Launched in 2019, Zendy offers a comprehensive platform where users can access millions of journals, articles, and e-books from leading publishers. Zendy's mission is to democratise access to knowledge, thereby reducing the barriers that traditionally hinder the dissemination of research. By providing both Open Access and subscription-based content, Zendy ensures that everyone, regardless of their institutional affiliation or financial status, can engage in scholarly activities.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are crucial for fostering global development that is inclusive and equitable. For Zendy, SDGs are not just a commitment but a core aspect of the mission. Specifically, Zendy focuses on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Quality education is foundational to societal progress, and by ensuring access to high-quality academic resources, Zendy supports lifelong learning and educational advancement. Moreover, reducing inequalities is at the heart of Zendy's initiatives, as the platform aims to bridge the digital divide and provide equitable access to knowledge across different regions and communities.

In 2023, Zendy started integrating advanced AI technologies to enhance the user's research experience and promote equitable access to knowledge. Zendy currently uses AI to offer summarisation and keyword highlighting. These capabilities significantly reduce the time and effort researchers spend on literature reviews, allowing them to focus on generating new insights and knowledge.

Plans are underway to develop more Al tools and integrate them with Zendy, which will represent a step towards reduced inequalities as well as a testament to the positive potential of technology in fostering an inclusive and knowledgeable society.

Building a sustainable future with KnE Learn

From 2021, we have started introducing a new course format that is fully online and self-paced. Aimed at academics and researchers, these on-demand courses can be accessed at any time, removing constraints and making knowledge more available and accessible. Each course is broken down into bite-sized modules for ease of use and flexibility for the learner. As a result of our focus on the MENA region, we have also ensured that we offer several courses in Arabic. This initiative aligns with SDG 4 - Quality Education by providing inclusive and equitable access to education, as well as SDG 10 - Reducing Inequalities by ensuring learning opportunities are available to a wider audience without the barriers of time, place, language, and money.

Our training programmes have also made contributions to other SDGs by focusing on enhancing the skills and competencies of higher education professionals and researchers. In 2023, we delivered a diverse array of expert-led training programmes designed to foster innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and teaching excellence among others:

- We organised a bootcamp for promising projects in research centres, aimed at accelerating the commercialisation of innovative research. This initiative supports SDG 9

 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure by enhancing scientific research and fostering innovation.
- Our training in interdisciplinary educational design has encouraged the creation of curricula that apply knowledge from different disciplines to address complex real-world challenges. In addition to that, it has also supported the creation of a national network for inter- and transdisciplinary research and education in Egypt. This programme aligns with SDG 4 - Quality Education, by supporting the development of innovative curricula and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for faculty members.
- We have delivered training focused on enhancing teaching practices and developing curricula that can equip graduates with the right skills for the current job market. This effort supports SDG 4 – Quality Education and SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth by ensuring productive employment and decent work throughout an individual's life, including professors.

Forum For Open Research in MENA:

A catalyst for positive action

The Forum for Open Research in MENA (FORM) is a non-profit membership organisation supporting the advancement of Open Science policies and practices in research communities and institutions across the Arab region.

FORM is an independent project of the <u>Knowledge E Foundation</u>, (a community interest company). We believe that increasing the accessibility and visibility of research is key to ensuring the sustainability of scholarly ecosystems.

We focus on empowering libraries, higher education institutions (HEIs), research councils, and policymakers to collaborate on creating activities, projects, and resources that promote engagement with, and the generation of, Open Research – enabling them to better serve the needs of local research communities. We are keen on supporting all stakeholder groups in the journey towards a more 'open' world by facilitating the exchange of actionable insights and the development of practical policies, and by encouraging the evolution of a strong cross-regional collaborative community.

We have 6 objectives for the 2022-2025 period:

- Establishing Open Science terminologies in Arabic, and demonstrating the value and benefits to the community
- Encouraging cross-regional dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaborative partnership opportunities
- Developing supportive national and institutional policies, and incentivisation strategies
- Ensuring necessary human and digital capacity needs are identified and developed
- Empowering stakeholders via the development of tools and resources suitable for the region, including Arab language documentation and right-to-left digital functionality
- Building and maintaining trust in Open Science, and encouraging stakeholder use and generation of open resources

Over the course of 2023, we made great strides towards achieving many of these objectives.

We are grateful to all the interest we are receiving and are proud to now have 6 member organisations from across the region. In addition to that, we are thankful to organisations from the global Open Science community that have also partnered with us to help bring about this change. Our network now includes over 3,000 from 74 countries (with Arab States making up 61%).

One of the highlights of 2023 was forming a pan-regional working group to develop a robust Arabic Open Science glossary. This was important to ensure all relevant terms for each stakeholder group were captured. Therefore, we needed input from different specialists across the region in order to achieve a regionally sustainable and practically applicable consensus. We published the first edition of our pan-regional Open Science vocabulary last year and will provide new editions on an annual basis to encompass the rapid evolution and expansion of the Open Science ecosystem. This will ensure Arab research communities can address and engage with each new topic of debate immediately. We are particularly delighted that it is already being used by non-profit organisations and Open Science advocates across the world, and we will continue to expand and update it to encompass new terminologies and developments within the field of Open Science.

We have also provided Arabic translations of websites and solutions for organisations such as ORCID, Crossref, the Directory of Open Access Journals, the Public Knowledge Project, SPARC, and many more. This ensures that the Arab region is visibly represented and publicly involved with the Open Science movement on a global level. We feel that this is an important incentivisation for the region, to encourage the perception of Open Science as an inclusive movement that actively embraces the Arab states and wants their participation.

Developing the glossary was also crucial to enable us to proceed with capacity building support for our regional communities, by producing accessible, localised resources – including guidelines, training materials and benchmarking evaluation frameworks. We are producing these resources in consultation with our network, based on the results from a survey conducted earlier this year in which participants were asked to identify their key priorities and identify the areas where they felt additional support was needed (because the resources produced in other regions were not suitable). By involving the community at this early stage, we are encouraging longer-term engagement with (and propagation of) the resources, and establishing ourselves as a collaborative hub for the wider region. We have now started on this programme and hope to produce a core collection by the end of 2024.

We are also in the final stages of developing and launching a new bilingual diamond Open Access journal, focusing on the role, implementation, and impact of Open Science policies and practises in higher education and research institutions across the Arab region. We hope that by establishing a journal for the region's Open Science advocates and practitioners to share their challenges and successes; we will further encourage their commitment to the development and implementation of Open Science policies and practises. We also hope that providing an avenue for formal publication and citation will encourage institutional investment in these goals.

These resources are complemented by our monthly programme of Community Development Activities (free online workshops and webinars offering practical guidance on key aspects of Open Science). A catalyst for positive action, one of our key missions is to facilitate the advancement of Open Science by providing capacity building support in key areas related to: funding and policy making, Open Access policies and practises, open infrastructures and supporting solutions, and providing relevant foundational knowledge for researchers, librarians and institutions.

Starting with a highly successful collaboration with the International Science Council back in February 2023, we've delivered 12 community development events so far. 96% of attendees found the events valuable and would like to have more of them, and 97% of attendees have found the events effective, applying what they have learnt in their workplace.

Community building is another key objective, as we understand the value of a community when building a movement that affects the professional and personal lives of so many. We believe that the implementation of Open Science infrastructures and policies in HEI across the Arab region can only truly be successful if those who engage with it are part of the solution too. Many of our members have expressed the need for increased interaction during our Community Development Activities, asking for direct contact with us and other members to ask questions, participate in discussions, and work together to tackle challenges aiding the Arab Open Science movement.

Therefore we developed and launched a Slack Community to provide a safe, intellectually stimulating, and inclusive space for researchers, academics, policymakers, Open Science advocates, and students with a passion for Arab higher education to engage in. The Slack channel has already proved successful in cementing our network, and various organisations now use it as a main communication channel for their activities.

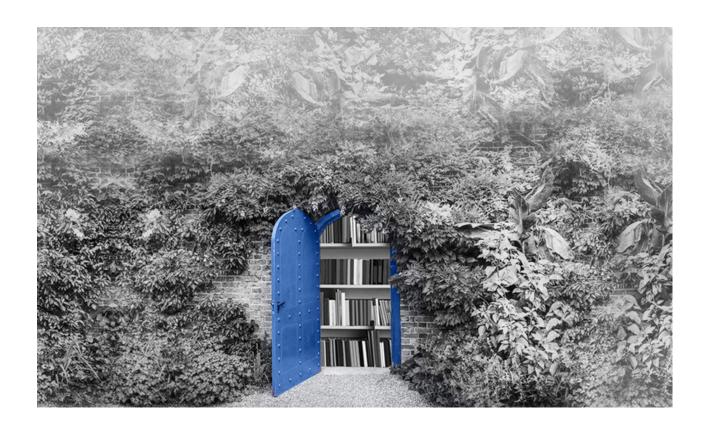
Finally, our Annual Forum for Open Research continues to go from strength to strength. Bringing together leading international experts and key regional stakeholders, the Annual Forum facilitates the exchange of ideas and new solutions relating to the Arab world's transition to more accessible, sustainable and inclusive research and education models. The first event had over 1000 online and in-person delegates and took place in partnership with the Egyptian Knowledge Bank. The 2nd event was held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in partnership with Khalifa University, the UAE Ministries of Education and Culture, and UNESCO, with delegates from 70+ countries and 400+ institutions. We very much look forward to similar success at the 2024 event, which is being organised in partnership with the Qatar National Library.

Our hope is that by focusing on capacity and community building we can help to support the advancement of Open Science in research and education communities and support the development of a more Open Arab region and a more knowledgeable world.

Knowledge E Publishing

Knowledge E Publishing operates as a diamond Open Access publisher and provides a comprehensive and flexible portfolio of infrastructure, production, hosting, promotion, and consultancy solutions and services designed to empower researchers and research communities across the Global South. In the past year, the department's efforts have been focused on:

- supporting the International Science Council by participating as a diamond Open Access representative for the region in a working group to discuss science publishing reform
- supporting SPARC and Diamond Open Access conference organisers with regional insights and advice
- launching new diamond Open Access journals and providing guidance and support for journals in multiple global southern states



Climate action:

In our office and beyond

In 2023, Knowledge E actively measured its CO2 footprint and strove towards reaching net zero, balancing the budget and the requirement for travel with its targets.

Throughout 2023, Knowledge E continued to work towards reducing the carbon footprint of its main offices in Dubai. Targeting consumption of electricity in 2023 to promote responsible consumption within an office environment, Knowledge E worked towards reducing consumption due to air conditioning (because of the location of the office in the UAE) and indoor lighting, resulting in a decrease in consumption per head in our main offices.

The Knowledge E Foundation made a hardware donation in line with its mission to empower communities through responsible actions. The donation reflects Knowledge E's continuous commitment to protecting the environment by promoting the reuse and recycling of electronic devices. The Knowledge E Foundation has donated a number of electronic devices to Fasila, a Dubai-based social enterprise that stands at the forefront of environmental sustainability by ensuring that a tree is planted for every device donated. Fasila's mission is to reduce e- waste and preserve the environment by offering to plant a tree for every device donated, in collaboration with its partner One Tree Planted.

"The negative impact of e-waste is a grave concern that we cannot ignore. At Knowledge E, we are dedicated to endorsing sustainability and taking action to address ecological concerns. We hope that through our various initiatives, including our collaborative efforts with Fasila, we can contribute to creating meaningful social and environmental change." Kamran Kardan

We have also helped raise awareness about the world's biggest environmental issues by sponsoring a large-scale climate change mural that was unveiled in Alexandria, Egypt, ahead of COP27. The artwork was commissioned to Rana Hemdan, an Egyptian artist and architect, for The Earth Turns, a climate-inspired bilingual (Arabic and English) performance that sought to highlight the human stories behind climate change.

Installed at the Jesuit Cultural Centre in Alexandria, the mural shows grey buildings, polluted waters, sprawling mountains, and dead fish. On either side of the painting, two large cubistic hands hold all the elements together with the help of a winding green thread. The colourful mural depicts everything from marine pollution to environmental degradation, but at its core, it is a tribute to young people's tireless fight against climate change.

Hemdan, who has long been fascinated by cubism, said she was inspired by the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, which is also depicted in her artwork. "I made sure to give the mountains faces so they're alive and they're telling us, 'We're here, we can feel you polluting us. Please take care of us'."

The mural and theatrical performance are creative responses to the University of Exeter's Green Futures project We Still Have a Chance — 12 Stories for 12 Days of COP27. The anthology featured micro-stories created by climate activists, scientists, health professionals, students, and artists from the University of Exeter, Met Office, Ain Shams University, Banlastic, the American University in Cairo, and other organisations.

"The climate crisis is one of the biggest threats to humanity and it's affecting every single one of us. While it can be easy to feel disheartened or cynical, it's important to remember that our efforts, however big or small, can make a positive difference, which is exactly what Rana's mural achieves. Her artwork beautifully shows the impact that climate change has had, but also conveys the need to preserve our land before it's too late." Kamran Kardan



As part of our ongoing commitment to sustainable development, the Knowledge E training department has made significant progress in aligning our actions with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The department has had a transformative journey in regard to our training activities since 2020, contributing to a positive environmental impact and wider contributions to global sustainability goals.

Transition to Online and Blended Learning

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, our training delivery initially moved from a fully on-site model to a fully online format. This adaptation not only ensured the continuity of our training services during this challenging period, but also paved the way for more sustainable practices. By 2022, as travel restrictions began to ease, we adopted a blended learning approach. Today, our expert-led training programmes typically include a two-day on-site workshop complemented by extensive online components. This hybrid model has proven effective in reducing our carbon footprint while maintaining the quality of our training and allowing for more specific programme content with greater flexibility in delivery.

Environmental Impact and SDG 13: Climate Action

We have calculated the positive environmental impact of our shift towards online and blended training formats. From 2020 to 2023, our actions have resulted in a significant reduction of 1,785 tons of CO_2 emissions. This figure accounts for the savings from fewer flight trips by our course leaders and reduced car travel by participants. In calculating this number, we used a flight emissions calculator to quantify the CO_2 savings based on the distance of planned return flights. Additionally, we estimated the reduced carbon footprint from participants' commuting by converting average commuting distances into CO_2 savings per kilometre. These efforts directly support SDG 13 — Climate Action by significantly lowering our greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusion

Our work at the heart of the knowledge industry has enabled us to make an impact across many different areas during recent years, and 2023 was no different. This year, our priority SDGs have been SDG 1: No Poverty, SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG 13: Climate Action.

Firstly, we had the pleasure of finally visiting the Svay Rieng school that The Knowledge E Foundation adopted through the Dubai Cares' 'Adopt a School' initiative. Located in Cambodia, the school has the ability to accommodate up to 328 young boys and girls. Additionally, the Knowledge E Foundation donated a number of electronic devices to a Dubai-based social enterprise that stands at the forefront of environmental sustainability by ensuring that a tree is planted for every device donated, reducing CO2 emission by recycling electronics and making the world greener – one tree at a time.

We have also helped raise awareness about the world's biggest environmental issues by sponsoring a large-scale climate change mural that was unveiled in Alexandria, Egypt, ahead of COP27.

The Knowledge E workforce is a direct reflection of our belief in the significance of gender diversity and inclusion, with women making up 64% of the total workforce and 61% of the headquarter's workforce.

Yet another exciting development took place within Zendy in 2023. The Zendy team began integrating advanced AI technologies to enhance all users' research experience on the platform and promote more equitable access to knowledge.

In the past year we were proud to launch 'KnE Learn', a digital learning platform, fully self-paced. Aimed at academics and researchers, these on-demand courses can be accessed at any time, removing constraints and making knowledge more available and accessible. Furthermore, this past year, we delivered a diverse array of expert-led training programmes designed to drive innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and teaching excellence, among others.

Our Training programmes have also made recent contributions to the SDGs. In 2023, we delivered a diverse array of expert-led training programmes designed to drive innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and teaching excellence among others.

Conclusion

Once again, we have organised the Annual Forum for Open Research. This time, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in partnership with Khalifa University, the UAE Ministries of Education and Culture, and UNESCO, with delegates joining from 70+ countries and 400+ institutions. Moreover, a pan-regional working group was formed, through the Forum for Open Research in MENA (FORM), to develop a robust Arabic Open Science glossary. Furthermore, the FORM organisation has continued to offer more community development activities which have received great feedback from participants.

Yet another new FORM initiative was the launch of a Slack Community to provide a safe, intellectually stimulating and inclusive space for researchers, academics, policymakers, Open Science advocates, and students with a passion for Arab higher education to engage, exchange experiences, and widen their professional networks.

Lastly, Knowledge E's publishing division has supported and become affiliated with a number of organisations that operate within the Open Science sphere, such as the International Science Council, SPARC and Diamond Open Access conference organisers. As we enter a new year, we look forward to fostering a more inclusive and informed community, within and outside the research space.

Next steps

This year has been a journey of growth and learning, bringing us closer to the Sustainable Development Goals that are central to our mission. As we build on the knowledge, efforts, and practices of the past, we know that every action—no matter how small—is like a ripple in water, expanding outward and creating waves of lasting impact.

We are also dedicated to transparency, which is why we share these reports to provide an honest reflection of our progress and challenges. In that spirit, we are pleased to share the goals we have already set for the coming year, as we strive for even greater impact:



Establish a DEI group

In 2024, we plan to establish a DEI group which will help create a sustainable, inclusive, and fair environment, contributing meaningfully to the global sustainability agenda.



Continue to support democratisation of knowledge

Breaking down barriers to scholarly discovery and ensuring academic literature is both affordable and accessible for everyone will continue to be a primary focus for us in 2024.



Strive to reduce our net CO₂

We are committed to minimising our net CO_2 emissions by reducing our carbon footprint and supporting carbon offset initiatives.



Offer free courses with KnF Learn

By providing accessible learning opportunities, we aim to remove financial barriers to education, empower diverse communities, and promote lifelong learning.



Develop Al tools

Focusing on SDGs 4 and 10, the Zendy team plans to develop advanced Al technologies to enhance the user's research experience and promote equitable access to knowledge.

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