



POLICY BRIEF

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Enhancing the Role of Higher Education Institutions in the Local Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

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Highlights

- Localising SDGs offers opportunities for higher education institutions to collect and generate new knowledge with sustainability visions.
- Connecting international and local SDGs requires the re-evaluation of the local community in a close partnership with the local government.
- Addressing gaps between local practices and national policies is required for the implementation of SDGs at the local level.
- Participatory and integrated approaches are necessary for the empowerment of citizens to become the owners of the shared visions of sustainability.
- To facilitate the local implementation of SDGs, higher education institutions need to bring together social capital from various entities within and outside communities.

To build sustainable societies, higher education institutions (HEIs), such as universities and graduate schools, are expected to be transformative leaders by integrating the visions of sustainability into their curricula. In reality, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a local context faces major challenges (UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2018; Allen C., Metternicht G., and Wiedmann T., 2018; Jiménez-Aceituno A. et al, 2019). It requires the expansion of knowledge boundaries, and in this respect, HEIs have a significant role to play as a knowledge generator through their education and research activities and mechanisms (Reed et al., 2015; Stephens et al., 2018). To create curricula for the implementation of SDGs in a local context, HEIs have to explore and investigate sustainability challenges and essential skills.

In this policy brief, we illustrate the outcome of a joint research project undertaken in India, Japan, Philippines, and Thailand. The project was launched to examine the local implementation of SDGs and develop guiding principles for HEIs. The joint implementation approach was adopted to nurture collective leadership and shared sustainability visions among the participating HEIs.

With an understanding that local contexts are infinitely diverse, the project sought to empower people and community at the local level to address sustainability challenges rather than seeking an instant solution or a single model to fit all. To enhance our knowledge and understandings, research was conducted in the lived realities of community residents, and the experiences were shared and examined together.

In this policy brief, we describe key findings from the four case studies in India, Japan, Philippines, and Thailand undertaken under our joint research framework. The first case study addresses decentralisation and a need-based approach to empower people in New Delhi, India, to forge partnership with the local government to achieve sustainable development outcomes. The second case study emphasises a participatory approach to integrate the community in Toyooka city, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, in visioning their sustainable urban future through tackling the community's depopulation problem. The third case study focuses on the role of HEIs as a key facilitator in the localisation of SDGs in Quezon City, National Capital Region, Philippines. The fourth case study attempts to translate sustainability practices in a local context in Pua District, Nan Province, Thailand, to international SDGs.

Decentralisation and Need-Based Approach to Empower People in New Delhi, India

TERI SAS, India, focused on urban villages and slums in the South Delhi Municipal Corporation area of Delhi. The primary issues studied were health (SDG 3), water and sanitation (SDG 6), and solid waste management (SDG 11). Here are key empirical findings:

Health – Affordability issues, high out-of-pocket expenses, and inadequate financial assistance. Preference of private healthcare facilities owing to the poor quality of public health infrastructure.

Water and Sanitation – Supply shortages and high groundwater extraction. Water contamination due to maintenance issues and overflowing sewage. Due to unreliable water supply, the urban poor buy water from the market. Despite policies in place, some communities did not have access to toilets and other basic facilities.

Solid Waste Management – Waste segregation and collection ineffective, particularly in the slums.

Based on the localised study and review of governance framework, the study findings identified the need for decentralised planning – multi-stakeholder engagement and strategised partnerships. It also identified the need for capacity building to implement SDGs.

For capacity building for SDG implementation among students and executive agencies, the study proposed a curriculum framework that included the following elements: the localisation of SDGs, understanding the implementation framework and processes, identifying implementation challenges, addressing gaps in implementation, and re-evaluating goals.

A Participatory Approach to Integrate a Community in Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, in Visioning Their Sustainable Urban Future through Tackling the Depopulation Problem

Research involving the practice of SDGs in Japan was conducted to empirically study goal-based governance and implementation through an integrated approach. The target site for this case study was a district (Takahashi) in Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture. Keio University held a workshop with the residents, who, after discussion, set a goal to reach a population of 1,600 by 2030 from the population of 784 in 2015. In order to reach this goal, they decided to take action to inspire children in the community to stay in or come back to the community when they grow up.

Keio University developed two tools about SDGs that can be used for Furusato (hometown) education and applied them as a pilot at Tanto Junior High School in Toyooka City.

The team developed and implemented the following curriculum with the aim of having the children foster personal opinions about the future of Toyooka and how they would like to be connected with it.

1. Understand the local or personal relevance of SDGs using SDGs stickers.
2. Analyse Toyooka products from the perspective of SDGs.
3. Think about how to raise people's interest in Toyooka.
4. Spread the word about the positive qualities of Toyooka.
5. Continue spreading the word about the positive qualities of Toyooka.
6. Think about the future of Toyooka and one's own way of living.

Role of the HEI as a Key Facilitator in the Localisation of SDGs in Quezon City, National Capital Region, Philippines

The University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman collaborated with the local government of Barangay UP Campus in Quezon City for the implementation of the case study in the Philippines. Through a consultative process, the village officials and local community members agreed on the need to attain SDGs in their particular locality. In the case study, greater emphasis was placed on the first four SDGs: 1) no poverty, 2) no hunger, 3) good health and well-being, and 4) quality education.

Through participatory workshops, three Filipino values have been identified as facilitating mechanisms to attain these SDGs, namely *Bayanihan* (cooperation), *Pagtitipid* (prudence), and *Malasakit* (empathy).

A sample learning module on SDGs, together with a teacher's guide, was developed that aimed for basic level education. This module has been pre-tested with elementary and high school students and was eventually approved by the country's Department of Education.

Translation of SDGs Practices in the Local Context of Pua District, Nan Province, Thailand to International SDGs

Pua District in Nan Province is in the North of Thailand. The population in this remote area consists of elder farmers with limited education and young low-paid workers. Although they have heard about

sustainability, there is a lack of understanding of SDGs. By collecting their practices and experiences with development policies, Chulalongkorn University's researchers have found various local values that support SDGs. The findings showed that SDGs are technical jargon reflecting the top-down advocacy approach. To implement bottom-up SDGs, value investigation in local practices is required to support the local residents to understand SDGs from their own worldviews. However, while SDGs emphasise future visions, the economic struggle experienced by the local residents inhibit their ability to imagine their life goals on a long-term basis. To improve their ability to see a better future for themselves and their younger generations, their livelihood needs must be taken into account as an integral element of the implementation of SDGs at both national and local levels.

Conclusion

The localisation of SDGs provides research opportunities for HEIs to expand the body of knowledge for a new generation with sustainable visions. The significant role that HEIs can play in this endeavour is to connect the international and local implementation of SDGs by supporting local communities to forge partnership with government agencies (Stephenson, 2013). Sustainable challenges in the local context could be addressed by identifying gaps between local sustainability practices and national SDG policies (Smith et al. 2018). Participatory and integrated approaches are essential for the empowerment of civil society to become owners of the shared visions of sustainability. It is crucial for HEIs to network with each other, and bring together social capital from various entities within and outside communities.

Recommendations

- Network HEIs as strategical knowledge generators to tackle sustainability challenges.
- Encourage HEIs to bring together social capital outside and within local communities to facilitate the local implementation of SDGs.
- Broaden the range of case studies to improve guiding principles for HEIs to enhance its role in local communities.
- Emphasise participatory and integrated approaches to empower people and community for the implementation of SDGs.

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