Practices and Challenges on the Relationship to Support the Goals of Impact Ranked Universities in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study investigated the collaborative efforts of Philippine Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) with NGOs, government agencies, and other stakeholders in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By leveraging their academic capabilities, PHEIs ranked by the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking played a crucial role in addressing global challenges through a multi-sectoral approach. This study emphasized the importance of collaborating with regional NGOs and government agencies for policy-making and multi-sectoral dialogue in promoting participatory decision-making. It also highlighted the significance of international collaborations in standardizing data gathering and sharing best practices, thus enhancing the quality and impact of research related to public policy and sustainable development. PHEIs' engagement with NGOs was pivotal in mobilizing resources for community-targeted projects, including disaster risk reduction, health and well-being, educational outreach, and environmental conservation. These initiatives contributed to immediate community needs and built long-term resilience and sustainability. Findings revealed that PHEIs were not only centers of learning but also key players in the global sustainable development agenda. Their ability to bridge knowledge gaps, coupled with the operational reach of NGOs and the policy influence of government bodies, formed a powerful force for societal transformation. As the world progressed towards the 2030 Agenda, it was essential for PHEIs to strengthen partnerships, expand research scope, and enhance community engagement practices. This would not only advance the SDGs but also shape an inclusive and resilient sustainable future. The study called for continued innovation in partnership models and inclusive strategies that engaged all societal sectors, ensuring substantial and measurable progress towards the SDGs. The ongoing commitment of PHEIs would be crucial in achieving a sustainable world for future generations.

Keywords: *sustainability, partnerships, higher education, Philippines, relationship*

Introduction

Achieving sustainable development remains a global imperative that necessitates a comprehensive strategy to address the interwoven economic, social, and environmental challenges. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a holistic blueprint for this, emphasizing the essential role of partnerships in realizing these objectives. SDG17 underscores the importance of collaborative endeavors that transcend traditional boundaries to confront these multifaceted global challenges (United Nations, 2015). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are uniquely positioned to foster these partnerships through their research, education, and community engagement roles. In the context of Asian universities, it is still unclear how they incorporate the theory or practice of sustainable development in their research and education programs. To address this gap, a recent study reported on how universities in Asian countries handle and address matters related to SD. This study used a bibliometric analysis and an online survey method, with the survey data analyzed. The findings indicate that there is considerable variation among Asian countries regarding sustainability practices in higher education institutions (HEIs). Specifically, HEIs in far eastern countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, are perceived to demonstrate more sustainability practices. In the Philippine Higher Education scenario, universities are being urged to extend their roles beyond typical academic tasks and directly contribute to sustainable development (Milla, 2019; Horan, 2022). One significant mechanism for this is through effective partnership practices. HEIs can leverage their extensive networks and resources to form strategic partnerships with NGOs, government bodies, and other stakeholders, facilitating collaborative efforts that align with SDG17. These partnerships enable HEIs to contribute to policy development, foster cross-sectoral dialogues, and engage in international collaborations that enhance data gathering and best practice sharing. However, research on the partnership practices of higher education institutions in the Philippines depicts a varied landscape across different regions (Picardal, 2023; Serrano & Almero, 2021; Crisostomo & Mendoza, 2021). These studies indicate that while institutions are actively engaged in partnership practices such as academic collaborations, they confront challenges, including financial limitations and language barriers (Agapito, 2020; Delos Santos & Garcia, 2021). Moreover, potential negative outcomes of these partnerships, like cultural tensions or challenges in assimilating international students, remain insufficiently explored (Mawonde & Togo, 2019). Despite the recognized importance of partnerships in promoting sustainable development within the higher

education landscape, there remains a limited understanding of how Philippine Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), especially those ranked by THE Impact, operationalize these partnerships (Thompson et al., 2020). While some PHEIs have begun to integrate SDG-focused partnership practices into their institutional strategies and offer training to staff and faculty, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the effectiveness and outcomes of these initiatives (Garcia & Cruz, 2022). Furthermore, while there are insights into some partnership practices, such as academic collaborations, there is a dearth of detailed knowledge on best partnership practices derived from successful THE Impact Ranked PHEIs, especially on Relationship to Support the Goals (Hernandez & Lee, 2021). Committing to the SDGs can provide a reflection of the significant impact of higher education institutions, most especially in the Philippines. SDG17, or Partnership for the Goals, is the umbrella of all SDGs through integrated collaboration with international and local institutions such as NGOs and government and its agencies to advance the SDGs vis-à-vis policymaking (United Nations, 2023). The SDG Report published on its official website revealed that the Philippines scored 67.14 out of 100 in all SDGs in 2022 (Philippines SDG Report, 2023). A moderate or slight improvement of the score was recorded in 2021 with an overall score of 67.08 and an overall score of 66.41 in 2020. Since 2000, the Philippines has to be stagnant or does not show significant improvement in relation to an overall score of 59.27. This meant that, as compared to other countries, the Philippines' effort towards attaining the goals is still insufficient (World Bank, 2022). On one hand, significant challenges remain an issue in the Philippines in terms of attaining the objectives of Partnerships for the Goals (Bautista et al., 2022). Although this seems to be a bit challenging, this study revealed only the efforts of PHEIs, which exclude other organizations and agencies of our country. This study is significant to the field of sustainable development within higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines by examining metrics for Relationship to Support the Goals. By identifying specific barriers and enablers in these collaborations and applying institutional theory, the research provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of multisectoral partnerships. It highlighted best practices and innovative solutions that could be replicated in other contexts, informed policy development by identifying regulatory barriers and recommending supportive frameworks, and underscored the critical role of PHEIs in promoting sustainability. This study offered valuable insights and practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and development practitioners, enhancing the implementation and impact of SDG initiatives in higher education.

Relationship to Support the Goals

Universities played a pivotal role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through strategic partnerships. Tallontire et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of collaborative research between academic institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting best practices and fostering mutual benefits. Such collaborations are instrumental in engaging with regional NGOs and governments for SDG policy development, ensuring that academic insights directly influence policy strategies and interventions (Tewksbury & Wagner, 2014). Furthermore, universities are uniquely positioned to initiate and participate in cross-sectoral dialogues about the SDGs, such as conferences involving government or NGOs, as emphasized by Stroupe (2014). This not only fostered a shared understanding of the goals but also promoted international collaboration on data gathering for the SDGs. By reviewing comparative approaches through international research collaborations, universities can develop and share best practices for tackling the SDGs, ensuring that strategies are both effective and adaptable (Tallontire et al., 2019). Moreover, collaborations with NGOs are vital, as they offer avenues for practical engagement, such as student volunteering programs, research initiatives, and the development of educational resources (Murphy & Stott, 2021). These collaborations, rooted in trust, transparency, mutual benefit, and commitment, amplify the impact of partnerships, making them essential tools for achieving the SDGs. Under the Relationships to Support the Goals metrics, five distinct subthemes were presented, each representing a different facet of partnership-building for SDGs: *Relationships with Regional NGOs and Government for SDG Policy, Cross-Sectoral Dialogue about SDGs, International Collaboration Data Gathering for SDG, Collaboration for SDG Best Practice, and Collaboration with NGOs for SDGs.*

Statement of the Research Problem and Objectives

Based on the metric of SDG17 under Relationship to Support the Goals, the researcher answered the question: *"What significant enablers and barriers influence the practices supporting the goals of impact ranked universities in the Philippines?"* More specifically, the researcher aimed to: *1)* Identify the partnerships practices on the Relationship to Support the Goals of THE Impact Ranked Philippine Universities in terms of relationships with regional NGOs and government for SDG policy, cross sectoral dialogue about SDGs; international collaboration data gathering for SDG; collaboration for SDG best practice; and collaboration with NGOs for

SDGs; and 2) Identify the barriers and enablers on the Relationship to Support the Goals of THE Impact Ranked Philippine Higher Education Institutions.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory provides a robust framework to understand how universities, especially those focused on creating a significant impact, adapt and evolve within their specific environments in the Philippines. Your study on the practices and challenges faced by universities in supporting sustainable development goals can draw from this theory to examine how external factors—such as changes in educational policies, societal expectations, and global standards—shape their operations and strategies. In this context, institutional theory can help explain the dynamics between the evolving norms and standards and how universities respond to these changes. For instance, the adoption of new sustainability practices could be seen as universities aligning with broader societal shifts towards environmental responsibility. The challenges, such as resistance to change within the institution or from external stakeholders, can also be analyzed through the lens of institutional pressures and the need to maintain legitimacy in a competitive educational landscape.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1:

The Partnership Accelerator as the Conceptual Framework of the Study

The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator is a joint initiative by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the Partnering Initiative (TPI), in association with several UN offices, including the UN Office for Partnerships and the UN Global Compact. This accelerator is designed to enhance the partnership-enabling ecosystem, promoting business engagement in sustainable development, and bolstering the effectiveness of partnerships for the 2030 Agenda. Its primary goals include enhancing partnership understanding and skills among UN, government agencies, NGO, and business personnel; facilitating organizational adaptations for optimized partnering; and establishing efficient SDG partnership platforms globally to foster systematic collaboration between governments, the UN, businesses, and other development stakeholders. The underlying principles of the UN SDG Partnership Accelerators is explained.

Operational Framework

The operational framework is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the practices and challenges related to the relationship to support the goals of THE 2023 Impact Ranked Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in the Philippines. Anchored on the UN SDG Partnership Accelerator and the metrics of SDG17: Partnerships for the Goals, this framework outlines the specific challenges and enablers for effective partnerships in the context of sustainable development. The framework is structured around five key subgoals, each addressing a critical aspect of partnership-building. First, the relationship with regional NGOs and government for SDG policy faces challenges such as regulatory constraints and misaligned policies, which can hinder effective collaboration. However, these can be mitigated by enablers like government support and policy incentives, which foster a conducive environment for partnerships aimed at sustainable development (Picardal, 2023; Serrano & Almero, 2021; Milla, 2019; Horan, 2022). Second, cross-sectoral dialogue about SDGs is essential for aligning diverse sector priorities towards common SDG goals. Challenges in this area include communication barriers and differing sector priorities, which can impede productive discussions. Facilitated forums and the establishment of shared goals and agendas act as enablers to overcome these barriers, promoting effective cross-sectoral collaboration (Agapito, 2020; Delos Santos & Garcia, 2021). Third, international collaboration for data gathering related to SDGs is crucial for comprehensive monitoring and assessment of progress. Challenges such as data compatibility issues and logistical barriers can disrupt these efforts. However, standardized data protocols and

international funding serve as significant enablers, facilitating smoother and more effective international collaborations (Mawonde & Togo, 2019; Garcia & Cruz, 2022). Fourth, collaboration for SDG best practices involves sharing and implementing successful strategies to enhance sustainability efforts. The lack of best practice examples and contextual differences between institutions can pose significant challenges. To address these, access to repositories of case studies and mentorship programs are vital enablers, providing the necessary knowledge transfer and support to implement these best practices effectively (Crisostomo & Mendoza, 2021; Hernandez & Lee, 2021). Fifth, collaboration with NGOs for SDGs leverages the specialized expertise and community networks of NGOs to advance sustainable development goals. Challenges in this domain include cultural differences and resource constraints, which can hinder effective collaboration. Trust-building activities and joint resource mobilization are crucial enablers that help bridge cultural gaps and pool resources effectively to support SDG initiatives (Bautista et al., 2022; Garett & Liu, 2019).

Figure 2.

Operational Framework of the Study

Propositions of the Study:

Building on the related literature on the Relationship to Support the Goals under SDG17, the conceptual underpinnings of the study, and the specific research objectives, this study aims to address a critical gap in understanding how Philippine Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) operationalize their partnerships for sustainable development. Despite the recognized importance of these partnerships, there is limited comprehensive research on the specific practices and challenges faced by PHEIs in fostering effective collaborations for SDG implementation. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining current practices in the Relationship to Support the Goals in terms of 1) Relationship with regional NGOs and government for SDG policy; 2) Cross-sectoral dialogue about SDGs; 3) International collaboration data gathering for SDG; 4) Collaboration for SDG best practices; and 5) Collaboration with NGOs for SDGs. By identifying both the enablers and barriers within these partnerships, this research aims to provide actionable insights that can enhance the effectiveness of PHEIs' contributions to sustainable development.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This research adopted a descriptive research design to investigate the partnership dynamics and potential challenges faced by schools, colleges, and universities of Philippine Higher Education Institutions in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as depicted in their 2022 Sustainability Reports. By conducting a thematic analysis of these reports, this study identified recurring themes, patterns, and inferred challenges in the absence of explicit benchmarks or targets.

Research Procedures of Data Collection and Sources of Data

This research utilized a secondary source of data through document analysis. This approach entails meticulously examining existing documents, specifically focusing on the publicly available 2022 Sustainability Reports based on the result of the 2023 THE Impact Ranking. In the recent THE Impact Ranking 2023, there were twenty-nine (29) higher education institutions from the Philippines. Out of this total number of THE IR PHEIs, there were nineteen (19) SDG reports available online that qualified as samples of the study. These include Ateneo de Manila University, University of the Philippines, De La Salle University, Batangas State

University, Leyte Normal University, Mariano Marcos State University, and University of Sto. Tomas, Tarlac Agricultural University, Central Luzon State University, Mapua University, Bulacan State University, Central Bicol State University of Agriculture, Central Philippine University, Isabela State University, Mindanao State University, San Beda University, University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines, Southern Leyte State University, and Visayas State University. The selection process was based on the following criteria: 1) Qualified as one of the Philippine Higher Education Institutions that were ranked in the 2023 THE Impact Rankings; and 2) The 2022 Sustainability Reports of 2023 Times Higher Education Impact Ranked Philippine Higher Education Institutions is available online and is publicly disseminated.

Research Ethics Considerations

Since the sustainability reports were publicly available, the researchers can ethically use them as the data source without any privacy concerns or the need for participant consent. Additionally, the researcher sought the review of the protocol of this study and approval of the San Beda University Research Ethics Board (SBU-REB). Upon the review of SBU-REB the board has decided that this study falls within the exempt category for lack of involvement with human participants. To support this claim, Dellinger (2007) discusses various sources of document-based data and their implications for research. She notes that publicly available documents, like sustainability reports, annual reports, or policy documents, can be used ethically in research, as they do not involve issues related to privacy or the need for individual consent. Such documents are intended for public consumption and dissemination, and hence their usage in academic studies doesn't breach any ethical guidelines, provided the analysis and interpretation remain truthful to the source content.

Data Analysis/Analytical Tool

The data analysis process involved a systematic and rigorous approach to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Initially, all 19 sustainability reports were read thoroughly to gain an overall understanding of the content and context. This initial reading helped to identify recurring themes and key areas of interest. Following this, open coding was conducted, wherein passages relevant to partnership practices were highlighted and assigned initial codes. Open coding involved breaking down the text into discrete parts and examining each part for its meaning

and significance. This step was conducted using qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS.ti. Example codes included terms such as government collaboration, NGO partnerships, policy development, resource sharing, and community engagement. The next stage involved axial coding, where the initial codes were reviewed and grouped into categories based on similarities and relationships using the predetermined subcategories of Relationship to Support the Goal, as presented in the operational framework of the study. This ensures that they were organized into coherent categories that accurately reflected the data. This was done using ATLAS.ti. Following this, the process of translating group codes into themes began by examining the relationships and patterns among the categories. This selective coding helped identify overarching themes that captured the essence of the data. Key themes were derived by synthesizing the core concepts found across the categories.

Results and Discussion

1. Practices on the Relationship to Support the Goals of THE Impact Ranked Universities in the Philippines

1.1 Practices on Relationship with Regional NGO and Government for SDG Policy

Figure 3.

Summary of Practices on Relationship with Regional NGO and Government for SDG Policy

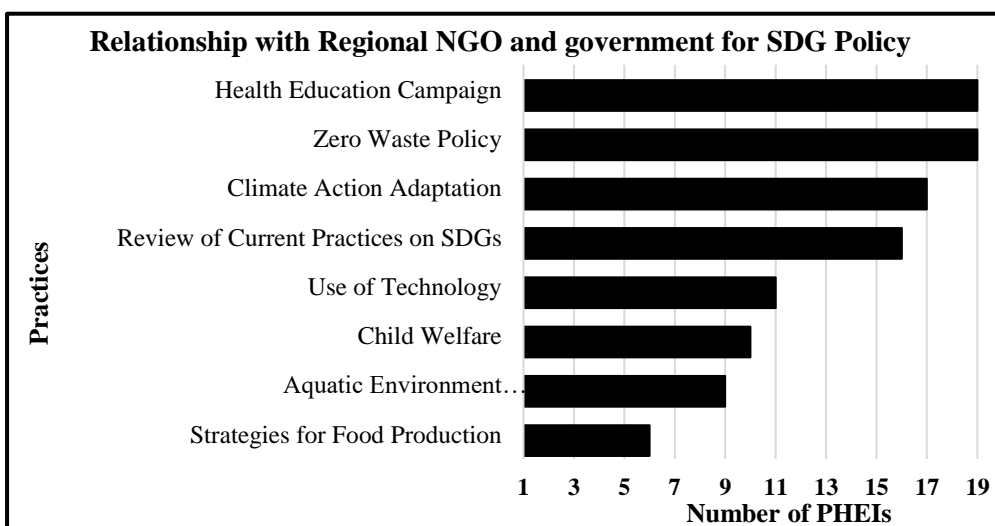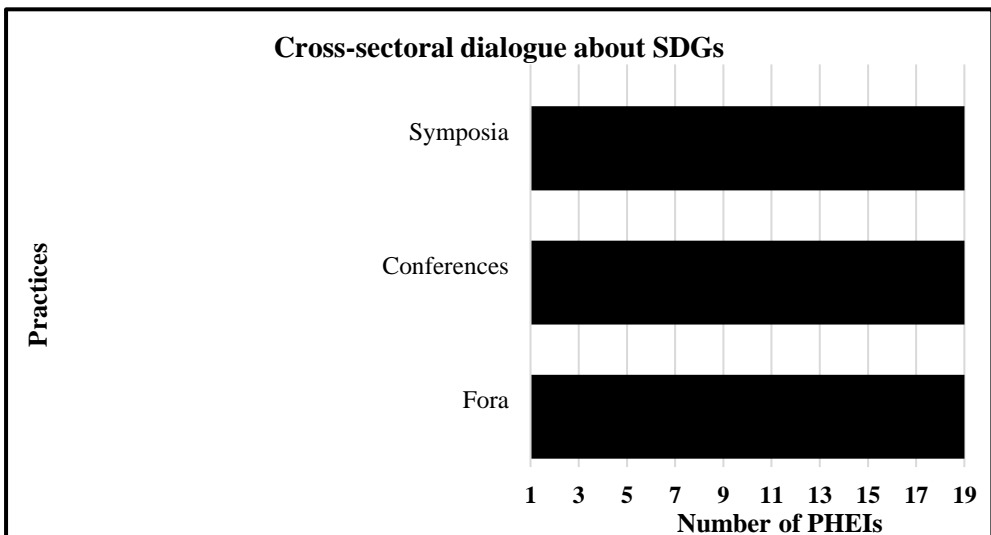Relationship with Regional NGO and government for SDG Policy

Figure 3 presents an overview of the practices of PHEIs on relationships with regional NGO and government for SDG Policy. Eight themes have emerged relative to the practices of THE Impact Ranked PHEIs for 2023 THE Impact Ranking, namely: health education campaign, zero waste policy, climate action adaptation, review of current practices on SDGs, use of technology, child welfare, aquatic environment assessment/reef assessment, and strategies for food production. It should be noted that these practices of PHEIs are in collaboration with regional NGOs and government towards creating SDG policy to tackle the issues as presented above. All 19 Sustainability Reports partner with NGOs and government agencies in promoting health and education and zero waste policy. These efforts exemplify how PHEIs respond to coercive pressures from regulatory bodies mandating public health initiatives and waste management standards. Normative pressures also play a role as PHEIs seek to meet societal expectations for environmental stewardship and community well-being. The collaborations emphasize integrated efforts to advance knowledge and create effective policies (Scott, 2008). This emphasizes that educational institutions partner with NGOs and government bodies to incorporate SDG in advancing knowledge towards policy creation and implementation. To support this claim, PHEIs provided avenues for integrated collaboration with NGOs, LGUs, international researchers to address gaps in climate action in line with the government's action to mitigate the effects of climate change (Dela Cruz, et al. 2022).   In light of this, THE-IR PHEIs have various affiliations with other academic institutions and other educational organizations, the United Nations, and global partnerships, provides community interventions with government agencies and citizen engagements in crafting policy advocacy and development. While NGOs often work on the ground, they provide insights to the higher education sector about the needs of the community and the challenges that need to be addressed. As such, direct interventions in communities were effectively implemented, ranging from health information campaigns and educational programs towards sustainable projects, which require collaboration across various sectors. Seventeen out of nineteen PHEIs partnered with NGOs and government agencies towards SDG policy, focusing on climate action adaptation, while 16 are reviewing current SDG practices. These partnerships are driven by successful climate action strategies observed in leading universities globally. This proactive review, supported by Reyes et al. (2019), Nelles (2021), and Encenzo (2023), enables universities to identify gaps and areas for improvement, fostering resilience against environmental, economic, and social stresses. Ten out of nineteen universities collaborate with NGOs and LGUs to

enhance child welfare, driven by legal mandates such as Republic Act No. 11908 to support vulnerable populations. These partnerships aim to build capacity and develop strategic initiatives that protect and empower children, reflecting the universities' commitment to social responsibility and community engagement. Recent studies highlight the importance of multi-sectoral collaborations in addressing child welfare issues. For example, De Los Reyes and Abulon (2019) found that partnerships between educational institutions, NGOs, and local governments significantly improve the delivery of child protection services and programs. Additionally, Molina et al. (2021) emphasize the role of educational institutions in promoting child welfare through community outreach and advocacy efforts. The practices of aquatic environment assessment/reef assessment and food production strategies, reported by nine and six universities, respectively, highlight the role of PHEIs in promoting ecological sustainability. These collaborations with NGOs and LGUs create balanced partnerships that maintain ecological well-being while advancing educational objectives.

1.2 Cross-sectoral dialogue about SDGs

Figure 4.

*Summary of Practices on Cross-sectoral dialogue about SDGs*

While relationships with regional NGOs and government for SDG Policy involve direct involvement of an institution in regional and national government and non-government organizations, cross-sectoral dialogue facilitates the exchange of information and knowledge among various

sectors of society, which include NGOs and government and its agencies (Arbeiter & Bučar, 2024; Kelly & Lange, 2019; Wiedemann & Ingold, 2021). The summary provided in Figure 4 outlines the practices of PHEIs in terms of cross-sectoral dialogue that were identified by the researcher in the 2022 Sustainability Reports. These practices highlighted three themes to dialogues that are considered essential for responsive, participatory, and representative decision-making about the programs and activities for the SDGs. It is important to note that while PHEIs do their best to combat the issues pertaining to SDGs, the level of participation across all sectors should increase to create measures that are responsive to ensuring that accountability is operationalized in the projects of PHEIs. And as our participation grows more collaborative, we cannot ignore other sectors of society, thus making dialogues an open arena for discussions of various concerns and challenges towards enduring integration of the SDGs (Nemeti et al., 2021; Koff et al., 2022; Nakamura et al., 2023). By inviting organizations for an inclusive dialogue, it serves as a platform for PHEIs for comprehensive discussion on tackling the SDGs regardless of one's status and ethnicity. In this connection, all universities conducted forums, symposia, and conferences tackling the SDGs for societal and economic betterment while enhancing civic participation and addressing issues like anti-human trafficking, sustainable agriculture, climate change, research, health, water, energy, tree planting, and economic development through their curricular and co-curricular programs.

1.3 International collaboration data gathering for SDGs

Figure 5.

Summary of Practices on International Collaboration Data Gathering for SDGs
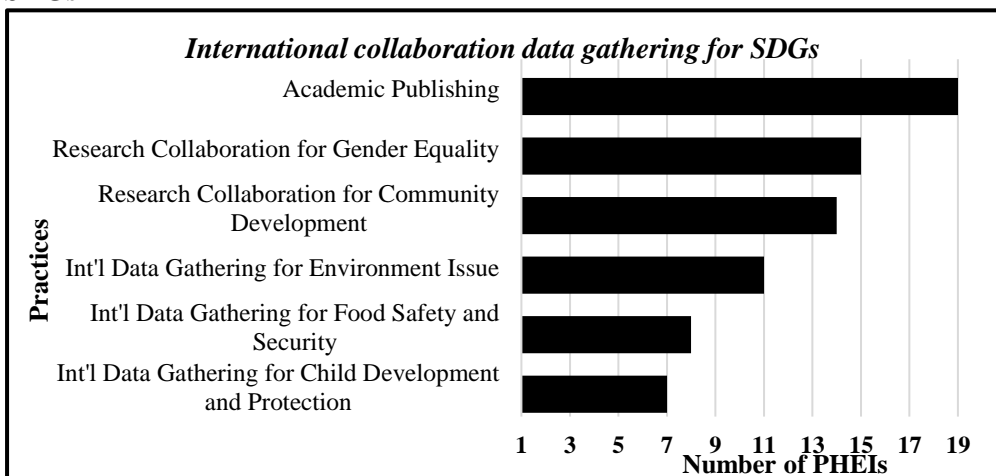
PHEIs are encouraged to participate in international collaboration on gathering or measuring data for the SDGs for a more integrated approach to implementing sustainable programs and activities (Horan, 2019). Likewise, measuring progress towards sustainable development needs a reliable source of data (Masselot et al., 2023). All 19 PHEIs efforts towards international collaboration data gathering for SDGs aim for academic publishing. This step is important, especially in the dissemination of knowledge, where experts from different countries share their findings, methodologies, and insights with a global audience. Viloria (2022) emphasized this in her study, stating that higher education institutions have local or international publication. Research published in academic journals can have a significant influence on policy development and implementation at the national and international levels. Policymakers often rely on evidence-based research to inform their decisions and prioritize actions to achieve SDGs. Looking at research collaboration for gender equality, 15 out of 19 PHEIs gender equality are pivotal means to equality and for the advancement of the people and its society. They also received funding for the implementation of such projects. In the same manner, 14 out of 19 PHEIs provided importance to research collaboration for community development that expresses its planned behavior through its intent to come up with actionable strategies towards empowering its community with various industry sectors. Moreover, certain practices were implemented by PHEIs for the environment, food safety and security, and child development and protection. As such, 11 out of 19 PHEIs utilize the power of research to address environmental issues on the use of zooplankton and macroinvertebrate communities as a bioindicator to evaluate and monitor the ecological integrity or health of freshwater ecosystems, which are significant subjects covered. In addition, they include tree planting in their various campuses to capture and store carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere through the process of sequestration. Furthermore, local challenges such as recurrent flooding, soil erosion, and sedimentation have significantly diminished agricultural yields for farmers in the regions of the country. The projects conducted by PHEIs and their partners through data gathering were further enhanced by addressing threats to food security that have dominantly affected the country during the pandemic through research collaboration with international agencies for agriculture, forestry, and fisheries of Asian countries. Together with Filipinos and Asian's bright minds, they were able to address the supply chain issues and create strategies for the storage, processing, packaging, and product distribution. The inclusion of food networks, food security, and ecotourism emphasizes the relationship between environmental health and sustainable food

systems. Out of 19 PHEIs, 7 universities revealed that child development and protection are pivotal means to the advancement of the people and its society. Focusing on data gathering for SDGs, PHEIs are taking significant strides in enhancing skills and knowledge essential for SDG-oriented interventions. These initiatives extend beyond the institutional level to community engagement, emphasizing research collaboration with multi-sectoral agencies. These efforts resonate with the Partnership Accelerator's focus on fostering Organizations that are Fit for Partnering.

1.4 Collaboration for SDG best practice

Figure 6.

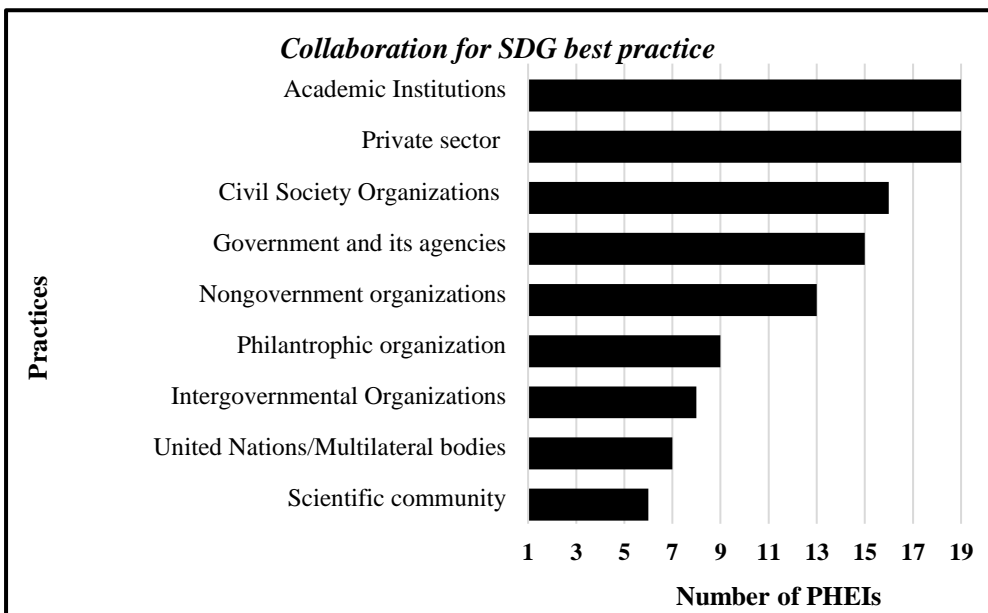*Summary of Practices on Collaboration for SDG Best Practice*

Figure 6 presented an overview of the practices of PHEIs on collaboration for SDG practice. All PHEIs involved in this study collaborate with other academic institutions and private sectors spanning from academic research, including conferences and publications, to practical applications in agriculture, ecology, and environmental management. They provide assessment and improvement in the resilience of universities in Asia. Working jointly with local and international speakers from other academic institutions to share best practices on research on genetically modified (GM) crops. A similar project was participated in by their International Relations Officer (IRO) with different PHEIs to come up with

the management guidelines to tackle issues pertaining to quality education and climate change. It is noteworthy that 16 out of 19 Sustainability Reports include civil society organizations to collaborate with for SDG best practices, which in turn is mutually beneficial for both parties. Universities contribute research expertise, resources, and educational programs, while civil society organizations offer practical insights, community connections, and on-the-ground experience. Together, they engage in joint research, capacity building, advocacy, and community service initiatives, enhancing the impact of their efforts on SDG issues by combining academic rigor with practical implementation of the program, projects, and activities of the institution, which will ultimately lead to more effective and impactful solutions on the problems. The same was emphasized by the United Nations report on good practices, success stories, and lessons learned in the implementation of 2030 agenda. Among the 19 Sustainability Reports, 15 PHEIs collaborate with government and its agencies while 13 of them partner with nongovernment organizations as a practice that can be replicated or scaled-up by others across the globe. The practices illustrate methods to identify and bridge gaps, mitigate constraints, and outline actionable steps to expedite the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Universities collaborate with government and NGOs to leverage their combined expertise, resources, and networks to address complex societal challenges, enhance the relevance and impact of their research and educational programs, and contribute effectively to public policy and community development, thereby advancing shared SDGs. Examples of which are the Open Government Partnership Steering Committee of the Philippines (PH-OGP), Open Government Partnership National Action Plan (OGP NAP), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Youth Centrists Union, Young Economists' Convention (YEC), Angelo King Institute for Economic and Business Studies (AKI), University of Wolverhampton, UK, Local Government Units, and Integrated Flood and Water Resources Management (IFWARM) among others. Likewise, 9 Sustainability Reports revealed that PHEIs collaborate with philanthropic organizations, which are primarily focused on funding and grant-making to program, projects, and activities for SDGs of PHEIs. Collaborating with philanthropic organizations is essential to fueling the implementation of SDG-related initiatives. Philanthropic organizations bring not only funding but also strategic guidance, networking opportunities, and credibility, enabling PHEIs to launch innovative projects, conduct impactful research, and engage in community service that drives progress towards achieving the SDGs. This partnership helps bridge the resource gap, allowing PHEIs to focus on their core mission of education and research while significantly

contributing to global sustainability efforts. Among the 19 Sustainability Reports, 8 PHEIs have collaborations with intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, Asian Development Bank, Association of Southeast Asian Nation, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Labor Organization in increasing their attention to determinants of success through their devoted considerable effort. Davis and Reber (2016) in their study, posited that industry-university partnership can advance human rights in the context of socio-economic empowerment through social engagement in today's knowledge-based societies. Such practice ensures the interconnectedness of various sectors of society to mainstream public accountability. Through these efforts, institutions exemplify key aspects of the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator by fostering an ecosystem conducive to partnerships, catalyzing cooperation, and establishing best practice standards, all pivotal for progressing towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

1.5 Collaboration with NGOs for SDGs

Figure 7

Summary of Practices on Collaboration with NGOs for SDGs

Figure 7 summarizes the practices of PHEIs on collaboration with NGOs for SDGs. Seven main themes have emerged as practice on how THE Impact Ranked Philippine universities are implementing the SDGs. On one

hand, NGOs are required to mobilize and localize the implementation of the SDGs while strengthening the functionality of the LGUs (NGOs-SDGs-Philippines, 2019). Thus, the need to generate data to further analyze and assess the possible use of a community-based monitoring system to feed local data into the national monitoring and reporting system (Roldan, 2018). Following these arguments, collaboration with NGOs is characterized by long-term shared responsibility (Baimenov & Liverakos, 2019), joint decision making (Information for Integrated Decision-Making and Participation, n.d.), knowledge management (Accelerating the Progress Towards the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), n.d.), and helping one another to alleviate human suffering. PHEIs efforts are a perfect example of how NGO-university partnerships can maximize their resources to gain the desirable outcome of the collaboration for SDGs. All 19 PHEIs have commitment to health and well-being and educational outreach and literacy campaigns. These activities dedicated to the program aim to equip marginalized and vulnerable communities and sectors with the skills needed for maintaining healthy lifestyle and literacy skills. Other projects include technical-vocational training in areas such as bookkeeping, food and beverage services, electrical wiring, and welding. The same findings were supported by Edralin (2022) stating that institutions should maintain partnerships with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for technical-vocational courses. Additionally, the program offers entrepreneurial skills development, financial literacy training, and assistance in accessing social protection services. Notably, 17 out of 19 sustainability reports collaborate with NGOs for disaster risk reduction and response. Practices in disaster risk reduction and response involve a multi-faceted approach that includes preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. Preparedness involves educating and training communities to recognize and respond to disaster risks effectively through regular drills, public awareness campaigns, and integrating disaster risk education into school curricula. Mitigation efforts focus on reducing the impact of disasters through infrastructure improvements, such as building flood defenses, earthquake-resistant buildings, and implementing land-use planning that avoids high-risk areas. It is also important to note that 11 out of 19 sustainability reports collaborate with NGOs for joint research projects. This collaboration is viewed as highly significant since NGOs have mechanism to provide on-the-ground data and expertise which can provide invaluable insights for research projects. Their grassroots presence ensures that research is grounded in real-world conditions and addresses practical issues faced by communities. NGOs typically have established trust and rapport with communities, facilitating smoother and more

effective engagement in research activities. With the previous discussions on environment conservation initiatives, 10 out of 19 Sustainability Reports revealed practice for SDGs in terms of this. NGOs play a pivotal role in conservation efforts by bringing local knowledge, community engagement, and practical implementation skills to the table. Out of all the Sustainability Reports included in this study, 9 have reported that they conduct capacity building and training programs towards SDGs. NGOs have deep community connections and practical knowledge, which makes them ideal partners for designing and implementing effective training programs. These programs aimed to enhance the skills, knowledge, and competencies of individuals and communities, empowering them to actively participate in sustainable development efforts. Lastly, 6 out of 19 PHEIs reported community development programs as a practice for SDGs. Community development programs and collaboration with NGOs helped PHEIs advance the SDGs because they combine local insights and community engagement with strategic resources and expertise.

2. Enablers and Barriers on the Relationship to Support the Goals of THE Impact Ranked Philippine Higher Education Institutions

Developing relationships with regional NGOs and government for SDG policy faces significant barriers, including regulatory constraints such as stringent government policies that require extensive documentation and approval processes, delaying project implementation. Financial and human resource limitations restrict long-term sustainability, as both PHEIs and NGOs often struggle with insufficient funding and staffing to sustain projects. Complex administrative procedures within government agencies can slow down decision-making and resource allocation. Cross-sectoral dialogues about SDGs are impeded by divergent priorities between sectors, such as academia, government, and private industry, which result in conflicting agendas. Cultural differences and varied organizational terminologies can create misunderstandings, and historical mistrust between sectors can impede open dialogues, with previous failed collaborations making stakeholders wary of new partnerships. International collaboration for SDG data gathering encounters challenges from stringent compliance requirements with international data collection standards, variations in data collection methods across countries leading to inconsistencies, funding constraints that restrict the scope of collaborations, and technological disparities that hinder effective data sharing and analysis. Collaboration for SDG best practices is hindered by contextual differences, as practices successful in one region may not be applicable in another due to different socio-economic and cultural contexts. Resistance to change

slows down the implementation of new practices, and resource constraints present significant challenges, as implementing best practices typically requires substantial financial and human resources. Knowledge gaps due to a lack of awareness or understanding of best practices also prevent their adoption. Finally, collaboration with NGOs for SDGs is obstructed by regulatory challenges such as strict laws governing NGO activities, resource disparities between well-funded universities and smaller NGOs, differing organizational cultures between academia and NGOs, and sustainability issues due to short-term project funding, preventing the continuation of successful initiatives after initial grants are exhausted. These barriers collectively hinder the ability of PHEIs to innovate, adapt, and effectively implement SDG initiatives across various contexts.

Despite these barriers, several enablers can enhance the effectiveness of these collaborations. Supportive university-wide policies that encourage collaboration and provide clear guidelines can facilitate partnerships for SDG policy development, with collaborators creating policies that prioritize SDG projects for approvals. Access to grants and funding from both governmental and non-governmental sources, such as specific SDG-focused funding programs from international organizations like the United Nations, can support implementation. Facilitative leadership that encourages inclusivity and respect can bridge gaps between different sectors in cross-sectoral dialogues, and establishing common platforms or forums for regular interaction, such as SDG roundtables or annual conferences, can promote continuous dialogue. Training programs that enhance understanding and communication skills across sectors can improve dialogue effectiveness, and highlighting mutual benefits can foster collaboration. For international collaboration in data gathering for SDGs, harmonized standards for data collection, international grants and funding programs from the World Bank or the Global Environment Facility, technology sharing, and regular knowledge exchanges through international workshops can improve processes and outcomes. Tailoring best practices to local contexts, capacity-building initiatives, mobilizing diverse funding sources, including international grants and private sector investments, and creating platforms for knowledge sharing, such as online repositories, can facilitate the adoption of SDG best practices. Flexible policies that accommodate NGO collaborations, joint funding initiatives that combine resources from multiple donors, cultural integration programs that promote mutual understanding, and long-term partnership models with continuous funding streams can enhance collaboration with NGOs for SDGs. For example, joint grant applications to international donors can pool resources from PHEIs and NGOs, and exchange programs where NGO staff and

academic researchers work together can improve collaboration. These enablers collectively support the innovation, adaptability, and sustainability of SDG initiatives, promoting effective and impactful outcomes across various contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has explored the extensive collaboration efforts of Philippine Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) with NGOs, government agencies, and other stakeholders towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings of this study illustrate a multi-sectoral approach where PHEIs can leverage their academic capabilities in partnership with various sectors to address global challenges comprehensively. To begin with, this research highlighted the critical role of multi-sectoral dialogue in enhancing participatory decision-making and fostering a deeper understanding of the SDGs across different segments of society. Through forums, symposia, and conferences, PHEIs have not only broadened the scope of discussions around sustainable practices but have also integrated actionable insights into their curricula and community outreach programs. Moreover, international collaborations have proven pivotal in standardizing data gathering and sharing best practices on a global scale, enhancing the quality and impact of research directed towards the public policy and sustainable development. These efforts are supported by the academic community's commitment to publishing and disseminating findings that inform and influence global policy. This study also underscored the significance of PHEIs' engagement with NGOs in mobilizing local and international resources for community-targeted projects. This includes disaster risk reduction, health and well-being, educational outreach, and environmental conservation. These initiatives not only contribute to immediate community needs but also build long-term resilience and sustainability.

Considering these findings, it is evident that PHEIs are not just centers of learning but also crucial actors in the global agenda for sustainable development. Their ability to bridge knowledge gaps, combined with the operational reach of NGOs and the policy influence of governmental bodies, creates a potent force for societal transformation. As we move towards the 2030 Agenda, it is imperative for PHEIs to continue strengthening these partnerships, expanding their research scope, and enhancing community engagement practices. By doing so, they will not

only contribute to the SDGs but also shape a sustainable future that is inclusive and resilient.

This research calls for continued innovation in partnership models and more inclusive strategies that engage all sectors of society, ensuring that the progress towards the SDGs is both substantial and measurable. In addition, future researchers may consider triangulation to determine the internal challenges faced by impact-ranked universities in the Philippines in pursuing collaboration to promote sustainable development initiatives. The ongoing commitment of PHEIs to these efforts will be crucial in realizing the vision of a sustainable world for future generations.

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