

Universities' Community-Based Initiatives, Sustainability Strategies and Challenges in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCS) in Panay

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Abstract

This study examined the community-based initiatives, sustainability strategies, and challenges encountered by State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Panay. It specifically assessed the extent to which SUCs implement community-based initiatives and sustainability strategies, determined the challenges encountered in their implementation, and examined the relationships among the major study variables. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed. Data were gathered from selected respondents representing SUCs in Panay using a researcher-developed questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the level of community-based initiatives, sustainability strategies, and challenges, while appropriate inferential statistics were employed to determine the significant relationships among the variables. The findings revealed that SUCs demonstrated strong community-based initiatives, particularly in education, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, gender and development advocacy, and community development. Sustainability strategies were likewise strongly implemented, particularly in terms of strategic alignment, stakeholder participation, community involvement, and expert engagement. However, relatively lower assessments were observed in initiatives related to peace, safety, and social responsibility and in the diversification of funding and resource sources. The results further showed a significant positive relationship between community-based initiatives and sustainability strategies, indicating that stronger community engagement is associated with stronger sustainability practices. However, the challenges encountered were not significantly related to either community-based initiatives or sustainability strategies. The study concludes that sustained stakeholder engagement, stronger partnerships, diversified resource mobilization, and enhanced institutional support are essential for strengthening sustainable university-community initiatives.

Keywords: Community-Based Initiatives; Sustainability Strategies; University-Community Engagement; Stakeholder Participation; Sustainable Development Goals; State Universities and Colleges; Panay.

Introduction

State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) play an important role in meeting community needs through education, research, outreach, innovation, and sustainable development. Currently, universities are expected to build close partnerships with communities and other stakeholders and develop programs that address social, economic, environmental, and educational issues. By carrying out community-centered

initiatives and adopting sustainability strategies, universities can have a greater impact on community development. This study examined the community-oriented initiatives carried out by universities, the strategies they employ to keep these programs active, and the difficulties SUCs in Panay encounter in keeping them. The range of initiatives included advancing equity and the quality of education, disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change, advocacy on gender and development, building up human capacity, encouraging community participation and including stakeholders, promoting health and wellness, supporting livelihoods and entrepreneurship, teaching computer literacy and information technology, developing economic growth and enterprise, protecting the environment, advancing technology, guaranteeing food security and nutrition, promoting culture and heritage, and supporting peace, safety, and social responsibility.

The study also examined sustainability strategies such as including stakeholders, encouraging community participation, consulting expert support, identifying resources, selecting sustainable programs, matching with the Sustainable Development Goals, and obtaining funding. The findings indicated that the most effective strategy was linking university programs to the Sustainable Development Goals and UNESCO's SDG 4; by contrast, obtaining funding from multiple sources was rated lowest.

The study intended to measure the extent of universities' community-focused initiatives, sustainability strategies, and challenges; examine whether these factors differed by respondent profile; and investigate the relationships among community-oriented initiatives, sustainability strategies, and challenges.

METHODS

The study employed a quantitative method based on a descriptive-correlational design. A total of 307 faculty members from selected State Universities and Colleges in Panay took part in it, and the respondents were divided according to the length of their service, their location, and the level of their SUC. Of them, 108 were from urban areas and 199 from rural areas. In terms of SUC level, 135 were affiliated with Level II institutions, 168 with Level III, and 4 with Level IV.

The data were obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire, which was designed to assess the universities' community-based initiatives and their sustainability strategies as well as the difficulties they faced. The data analysis involved the application of both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, with the use of means and ranks showing how extensive the community-based initiatives and sustainability strategies were. Spearman's Rho was employed in order to identify significant relationships between the three main variables. The study evaluated its hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance, and the source mentions that Spearman's Rho was specifically used to look at the relationships among community-based initiatives, sustainability strategies, and the challenges.

RESULTS

Respondents of the Study

The study involved 1,507 personnel from six SUCs in Panay, with 307 selected as respondents. The University of Antique had the largest group, with 683 personnel (45.60% of the total) and contributed 140 respondents (45.60% of the sample). Iloilo Science and Technology University followed, with 280 personnel and 57 respondents (18.57%).

Capiz State University had 150 personnel, with 30 respondents (9.77%). Northwitho State University had 14 personnel and 29 respondents (9.45%). Aklan State University had 132 personnel and 27

respondents (8.79%). Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology, the smallest, had 120 personnel and 24 respondents (7.82%).

The 307 respondents were distributed in proportion to each SUC's size within the total population of 1,507. This approach ensures that institutions with more personnel have more respondents, while those with fewer have fewer. As a result, the sample reflects the population structure and provides more representative estimates for the SUCs in the study.

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents

Identified SUCs	N	n	%
Aklan State University	132	27	8.79
Capiz State University	150	30	9.77
Iloio Science and Technology University	280	57	18.57
Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology	120	24	7.82
Northern Iloilo State University	142	29	9.45
University of Antique	683	140	45.60
Total	1507	307	100%

Universities' Sustainability Strategies

The results showed that universities' sustainability strategies received positive feedback. The top-rated approach was aligning university programs with sustainability goals and UNESCO's SDG 4, with a mean score of 4.56. Next was maintaining open dialogue among stakeholders in decisions about sustainable activities (mean of 4.46), followed by involving local communities in developing sustainable development policies (mean of 4.42). These results suggest that sustainability in Panay's SUCs is closely linked to aligning programs with goals, involving stakeholders, and engaging the community. The strong focus on SDG 4 highlights efforts to connect university programs with wider sustainable development aims. Studies on SDG implementation in higher education also stress the need to embed sustainability in planning, governance, teaching, research, and outreach, not treat it as a separate activity. Serafini et al. (2022) noted that aligning strategies at all institutional levels is key to fully integrating the SDGs in higher education.

The positive feedback on open dialogue and community participation shows that universities see sustainability as a shared responsibility, not just an internal one. By involving local communities in shaping sustainability policies, universities can better address real community needs. Recent research also highlights that working closely with communities makes higher education more relevant and boosts its role in sustainable development.

The study also found positive ratings for expert support, experts' ability to secure resources, clear ways to identify sustainable programs, and the involvement of community members and stakeholders. However, getting funding from different sources had the lowest mean score (4.22) among the strategies. While still positive, this suggests that universities could improve in finding diverse funding and resources. Sustainability efforts often need ongoing financial, human, technical, and organizational support. Recent studies point out that financial sustainability and resource mobilization are key, especially for universities with limited resources. SUCs could benefit from building more partnerships and sharing resources with government agencies, local governments, private groups, civil society, and other partners.

Differences According to SUC Level

The results showed differences in how SUCs rated sustainability strategies by level. For Level II SUCs, aligning university programs with sustainable goals and UNESCO's SDG 4 received the highest rating, with a mean of 4.59. Level III SUCs also rated this strategy highest, with a mean of 4.54. This similarity suggests that aligning with sustainable development goals is a top priority for all SUC levels. This supports the idea that sustainability should be part of planning and program implementation. Recent studies show that more universities are including SDGs in teaching, research, governance, operations, and community work, though the depth of integration can vary.

The slightly higher mean for Level II SUCs does not prove they have much stronger sustainability strategies than Level III SUCs unless a statistical test confirms it. The data shows that Level II respondents rated the strategy higher in this study. Both SUC levels clearly focus on aligning with SDG goals.

Significant Relationships among the Variables

A strong positive link emerged between universities' community-based initiatives and their sustainability strategies ($r = .732$, $p = .000$). Because the p-value was below .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that universities with more community-based initiatives also tended to have stronger sustainability strategies. The results show that community engagement and sustainability go hand in hand. Community-based initiatives help universities put sustainability ideas into real programs, partnerships, and services, while sustainability strategies guide and support these efforts. Recent studies also highlight community engagement, participation, and university-community partnerships as key ways to promote sustainable development in higher education.

However, there was no significant link between sustainability strategies and challenges ($r = -.056$, $p = .332$). The weak negative correlation and high p-value mean that the strength of sustainability strategies was not clearly related to the challenges universities faced. So, the study did not reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that having stronger sustainability strategies does not always mean universities face fewer challenges. Other factors, such as resources, organizational capacity, leadership, stakeholder involvement, and external conditions, may also play a role. Recent research also points out that resource mobilization, governance, and institutional capacity are ongoing issues for universities working on sustainability.

Similarly, there was no significant link between community-based initiatives and challenges ($r = -.101$, $p = .077$). Because the p-value was above .05, we did not reject the null hypothesis. The weak negative correlation was not statistically significant. This means that community-based initiatives alone do not explain the challenges universities face. Universities can have strong community programs but still struggle with funding, staffing, coordination, processes, partnership sustainability, and other issues. Recent studies also note that resource constraints, institutional structure, faculty workload, and a lack of coordination can limit community-focused sustainability efforts.

DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Panay have substantial community engagement, particularly in the areas of equity and quality education, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and gender and development advocacy. These findings suggest that universities are actively responding to pressing community and societal concerns through educational,

extension, and development-oriented programs. This role is consistent with the broader mandate of higher education institutions to contribute to social and community development and with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality. UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that higher education institutions have an important role in advancing sustainable development by integrating social responsibility, inclusion, and community engagement into their core functions. Similarly, the United Nations (2015) recognizes education and institutional partnerships as important mechanisms for addressing social, environmental, and development challenges. However, the relatively lower assessment of peace, safety, and social responsibility initiatives indicates an opportunity for SUCs to further strengthen programs that promote peace-building, community safety, conflict prevention, civic responsibility, and inclusive social development. Such initiatives are particularly relevant to the whole-of-community approach promoted under the SDGs, where educational institutions are expected to contribute beyond academic instruction and participate actively in addressing societal concerns.

The findings on sustainability strategies further demonstrate that sustainable university initiatives are strongly associated with strategic alignment, stakeholder participation, community involvement, and expert support. The high assessment of alignment with university sustainability goals and UNESCO's SDG 4 indicates that sustainability efforts are increasingly connected with institutional priorities and broader educational and development objectives. This supports the view of UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes that higher education institutions should integrate sustainability into institutional policies, teaching, research, community engagement, and governance. Likewise, the United Nations (2015) highlights the importance of partnerships and coordinated institutional action in achieving sustainable development. Stakeholder participation is particularly important because sustainability initiatives are more likely to become responsive and enduring when universities work collaboratively with communities, government agencies, civil society organizations, and other development partners. At the same time, the relatively lower assessment of diversified funding suggests that financial sustainability remains a significant concern. Limited and undiversified funding sources may constrain the continuity, expansion, and institutionalization of university-community programs, particularly those requiring long-term resources and technical support.

The significant relationship between community-based initiatives and sustainability strategies indicates that stronger community engagement is associated with stronger sustainability practices among SUCs in Panay. This finding suggests that active partnerships, stakeholder participation, and community involvement can provide an institutional foundation for sustaining university programs and extending their benefits to communities. The finding is consistent with UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes partnerships and societal engagement as essential components of transforming higher education toward sustainable development. It also supports the SDG framework, particularly SDG 17, which emphasizes partnerships as a means of strengthening implementation and achieving sustainable development outcomes (United Nations, 2015). Thus, community engagement should not be viewed merely as an extension activity but as an institutional strategy that can reinforce the sustainability, relevance, and continuity of university initiatives.

However, the absence of significant relationships between challenges and the other two variables suggests that the challenges encountered by SUCs may be influenced by factors beyond the extent of community-based initiatives or sustainability strategies. These challenges may include limitations in financial and material resources, institutional capacity, leadership support, human resources, policy

implementation, and external environmental conditions. UNESCO (2021) notes that transforming higher education for sustainable development requires institutional commitment, adequate resources, capacity development, effective governance, and collaboration across sectors. Similarly, the United Nations (2015) recognizes that sustainable development implementation is affected by institutional and resource-related conditions that cannot be addressed through individual programs alone. Consequently, while strengthening community engagement and sustainability strategies remains important, SUCs may also need comprehensive institutional mechanisms addressing resource mobilization, leadership, organizational capacity, partnership development, and long-term program financing to ensure that community-based initiatives are sustained and expanded.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that higher education institutions demonstrate strong engagement in community-based initiatives and sustainability strategies, particularly through programs that address educational development, environmental and disaster-related concerns, stakeholder participation, and sustainable development priorities. The findings indicate that stronger community-based initiatives are significantly associated with stronger sustainability strategies, suggesting that meaningful community engagement and collaborative partnerships contribute to the sustainability of institutional programs and initiatives. However, the challenges encountered by higher education institutions are not significantly associated with either community-based initiatives or sustainability strategies. This suggests that institutional challenges may be influenced by broader organizational, financial, leadership, resource, and external factors. The findings highlight the importance of sustaining community participation and stakeholder partnerships while strengthening resource mobilization, funding diversification, institutional capacity, and initiatives that promote peace, safety, social responsibility, and inclusive sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Higher education administrators may strengthen community-based initiatives by sustaining effective programs in education, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, gender and development, and community development, while expanding initiatives that promote peace, safety, social responsibility, inclusion, and community resilience.

Higher education institutions may further enhance sustainability strategies by strengthening stakeholder participation, community involvement, expert engagement, inter-agency collaboration, and alignment of institutional programs with relevant sustainable development goals. These strategies may help ensure that community-based initiatives remain responsive, relevant, and sustainable.

Institutions may also strengthen resource mobilization and develop diversified funding mechanisms through partnerships, grants, external support, income-generating activities, and other sustainable resource strategies. Such mechanisms may contribute to the continuity, expansion, and institutionalization of community-based programs.

Future researchers may investigate additional institutional, organizational, financial, leadership, and external factors that may influence the challenges encountered in implementing and sustaining community-based initiatives and sustainability strategies. Further studies may also consider other higher education institutions and broader geographical areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable university-community engagement.

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