

# Universities as Hubs for SDGs Innovation and Networking for Sustainable Future

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*1) Abstract— The world has changed significantly since the implementation of Sustainable Development goals and the higher education landscape has evolved as never before with disruptive innovation. This article refers to universities as hubs for Sustainable development goals innovation and networking for Sustainable Future. The formation of Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in Thailand is driving the work of both academic and practical experts to solve sustainability problems by integrating work, sharing knowledge and experiences from both Thai experts and international delegates from abroad. Universities working under SDSN are shown to be drivers, mediators, and critical observers of startups and innovative projects of SDGs at this era. It is shared understanding of university that all the research contributions and universities strategic plans are the key objectives towards achieving SDGs by 2030.*

*2) Keywords—Sustainable future; Universities; SDGs; SDSN; Innovation*

## II. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

Higher education for the most part in the recent decade has been shaped and outlined by sustainable development goals and ranking exercises of various types. This article outlines the sustainable development goal and the management process for institutions committed to creating a trajectory towards a sustainable campus. The mission and the vision of each institution is committed to sustainability and is concerned with and respond to its impact on environmental and human health, locally to globally. Long standing issues such as climate action, child poverty, aging population and growing inequalities remain challenges for governments and communities and universities across Asia. New challenges have also emerged over the last few decades such as wars through which refugees and migration are aroused and needs proper management. This is putting pressure on community cohesion and building up peace in certain communities and countries. Additional demands abiding occurred with rapidly aging population such as Thailand and Japan which has dramatically increase the demands on health and care services as well as public and personal budgets, a new lifestyle have brought up with these problems of cancer; heart attacks an increase in chronic disease such as diabetics and blood pressure and mental issues are witnessed.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) aimed at addressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change, inequality, and health disparities. Universities, as centers of knowledge, research, and collaboration, are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in advancing these goals. This proposal highlights the potential of universities to act as hubs for SDGs innovation and community welfare by leveraging academic research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement to address global challenges. Quality Education has been recognized as vital for sustainable development in Thailand, enabling learners and communities to acquire the right skills, knowledge, and competencies to co-create a more sustainable and equitable future.

Target 4.7 by 2030 is vital to ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including among higher education institutions through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The objective of this paper is to establish universities as pivotal hubs for sustainable development innovation and community welfare by fostering academic research, partnerships, and practical solutions that contribute to achieving the SDGs.

The problem statement is turning goals into actions: How are universities in Thailand advancing the SDGs for sustainable future? With the models of Sustainability: How are campuses creating an environment for innovation and co-production of sustainability knowledge and practices? Youth empowerment: How are we preparing learners for the complexity of issues and challenges related to sustainability? Partnership for progress: How national, international, and cross-sector collaboration is driving forward sustainable development for Thailand under SDG 17?

This can be achieved by cohesion and collaboration between Higher Education institutions and organizations need to involve the Societal stakeholders, politicians, the public and private sector, and civil society. One of the stakeholders are Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), Thailand. The objective of Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is to shape the multi-stakeholder dialogue by achieving sustainable development. And nurturing the thematic networks to solve

sustainable development challenges. Including to advise decision makers by providing substantial policy recommendations and fact-based research and knowledge. Also, to strengthen the sustainability research and education by empowering Thai universities in research and education on sustainable development.

There have been certain initiatives with the research and support plan for cross sectoral implementation system to accelerate the achievement of sustainable development goals for the 2030 development agenda and with the sustainable university study tour it was an excellent example of studying the best practice of the universities under this network.

Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Thailand mobilizes universities, research centers, civil society organizations, business, and other knowledge centers to create and implement transformative solutions to achieve the agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals in Thailand and beyond.

From the Asia and the Pacific, SDG progress report showcasing Transformative Actions 2024; the average progress towards achieving all SDGs has increased slowly from 4% in 2017 to 17% in 2023. The six key transitions that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs are first is the food system; second is the energy access and affordability third is the digital connectivity; fourth is the education and fifth is the job and social protection and sixth is climate change biodiversity loss and pollution.

SDG 4 is specifically aimed at education – “Good education for all – Ensuring an inclusive and equal education of good quality and promoting lifelong learning for all”. This requires extensive involvement of research and awareness building by teaching for fulfilling each and all the SDGs, this is the reason why the United Nations have underlined the key role of universities.

Internationalization in universities and research equates to strong collaborations between research active universities around the world. In certain least developed countries (LDCs), all the SDGs are difficult to be achieved with some universities in these countries not spreading awareness and not even teaching about SDGs. Certain world news is being aired and broadcasted with violence against the woman, where SDG 5 gender equality is a big gap. With the SDG 6 quality of drinking water and surface waters is seen as a huge problem in certain LDCs. The unemployment issues of decent work and the pay gap and not good social security under SDG 8. All SDGs are interrelated where SDG 1 No poverty and SDG 10 Reduced inequality has been challenging with wealth inequality which provides the inequality gap not to be reduced.

Universities are uniquely positioned to accelerate progress on SDG 12 through education, research, innovation, and collaboration. By leveraging their intellectual capital, fostering sustainable practices, and connecting stakeholders, universities can become pivotal

hubs for a sustainable future while inspiring the next generation of sustainability leaders.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life Below Water), and 15 (Life on Land) emphasize protecting the planet's ecosystems, addressing climate change, and safeguarding biodiversity. Universities play a critical role as hubs of innovation and collaboration to advance these goals and ensure a sustainable future.

SDG 13 (Climate Action) involves robust indicators for climate adaptation, coupled with increased awareness of reducing plastic use to mitigate environmental damage. For the marine ecosystem, efforts to maximize sustainable fisheries yields must consider the complexities of high-seas and cross-border fishing practices. In the terrestrial ecosystem, the focus is on improving ecosystem health indicators and combatting trade in endangered species. Meanwhile, challenges in achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) arise from violence against women, children, and family injustices, which undermine peace and equity. Finally, under SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), addressing trade practices' developmental impacts and tracking international policy coherence is essential for fostering sustainable development on a global scale.

Youth are the main catalyst of transformation, having the most to gain or lose, from the success or failure, of SDGs agenda 2030. It is important to involve students an integral part of research, teaching, and study at Higher Education Institutions.

In accordance with students, Siam University supported staff and students' projects on carbon neutrality in accordance with their university policy “Carbon Neutrality 2045.” The year 2024, two student projects won awards in Sustainable University Network (SUN) Thailand Annual Conference 2024 at King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok on 15 February 2024. The first runner-up went to the project of Faculty of Nursing on zero waste project to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and utilize black soldier fly larvae into a protein-based pet food product. A project of members of Students' Union on Forestation of economic woods in community won a consolidation prize.

In 2023, Current Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Mohammed Yunus has shared his experience, there should be Social Business fund which should be spread among all the countries under sustainability, and not rigid to one community or one country. So, the impact should be to all the countries around the globe. With this method it is assured that corporation can apply their core competencies to some of the greatest human challenges. The latest Yunus book is, “A World of Three Zeros: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions.”

Siam University Sustainability Literacy Test (Siam-U SULI Test) have initiated a self-report test on sustainability literacy among students since February 5-6, 2022. The latest survey was done in June 2023 when collected data from 235 undergraduate students registered in General Education

courses in Semester 2 of academic year 2022. The results revealed that top five SDGs the students perceived they have achieved the most were goal 5-Gender Equality, goal 4-Quality Education, goal 3-Good Health and Well-being, goal 16- Peace and Justice, and goal 12-Responsible Consumption and Production. The SDG which the students perceived as having the least knowledge was goal 13-Climate Action. As for key sustainability competences, it showed that intra-personal competence had the highest rating, followed by futures-thinking, systems-thinking, interpersonal competence, implementation, strategies-thinking, values- thinking, and integration competence.

In conclusion, the intricate connections between geopolitics and global health equity present significant both future challenges and opportunities. It is possible to guide these complexities effectively through a collective approach emphasizing equity and collaboration. The ongoing discussions around geopolitical dynamics, educational colonialism, and the need for more equitable global health governance are crucial for advancing health equity and sustainability. The experiences and challenges faced by countries like Thailand highlight the critical role of both local action and global collaboration in building a healthier, more equitable world amidst the complexities of our modern era.

The success can only be if we integrate between government agencies which is still the main challenge to address complex sustainable city issues. More policy is recommended for civil societies and academia collaboration is required. Regional and international collaboration is critical to national level sustainability and lastly the political support where all the goals and the mission should move towards the creating sustainable country together.

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