

Integrating Sustainable Development Goals into Strategic Planning at Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions

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Objectives

On Jan. 1st 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders at a United Nations summit, officially came into force. These goals aim to mobilize globally efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

This study aims to reflect the important roles of higher education in supporting countries to achieve the SDGs, to identify which goals within the SDGs are popularly related to higher education missions, and then to suggest related activities should be integrated into strategic planning at Vietnamese HEIs.

Introduction

- In 2000, 189 nations made a pledge at a United Nations summit to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations through the **8 Millennium Development Goals** to be achieved by 2015. Built on the success of these goals, the **17 SDGs** of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by world leaders and officially came into force from January 1st 2016. The new goals recognize that “ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.”



Introduction

- Several universities in Vietnam have incorporated the SDGs into their strategies, both in management and in teaching and research. Based on a Google search of the author in September 2021 (with the keywords “sustainable development goals of United Nations” and “university” in Vietnamese), however, just around 20 HEIs (among around 240 institutions) shown information related to the SDGs on their websites. This data may also reflect the status that **the strategic plans of many HEIs in Vietnam have not integrated the SDGs into their goals or activities.**

Overview of the 17 SDGs



Overview of the 17 SDGs

- The 17 SDGs, with their **169 specific targets and 232 indicators**, form the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They balance the economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development.
- The 17 SDGs are based on 6 themes including **human dignity, people, planet, partnership, justice and prosperity**. Many goals require cooperation and support between countries for successful implementation (especially the goals from 13 to 17); and success in one goal can contribute to the achievement of other goals.


Overview of the 17 SDGs

- The 17 SDGs can also be grouped into five elements: **People, Planet, Partnership, Peace and Prosperity.**



Roles of higher education in implementing the SDGs

- Among the 17 SDGs, **Goal 4** (Quality Education) calls for equal access to tertiary education, including university, as part of the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Besides, universities have another important role in other SDGs, as a driver for the achievement of the full set of goals, through their role knowledge production, innovation, and social services.
- Based on the analyses of several studies and reports, the author summarizes the key roles and reasons for the participation of HEIs in the SDGs.



Roles of higher education in implementing the SDGs

1. The SDGs can contribute to **orienting research and education activities** at HEIs on contemporary global issues.
2. The SDGs provide a “**global language**” for political activities and social reforms. As the centers of knowledge sharing and creation, HEIs can and need to participate and contribute to these activities.
3. Societies are expecting HEIs to demonstrate their capacities in **solving current problems** through research and education activities.

Roles of higher education in implementing the SDGs

4. Researchers at HEIs are expected to be a **source of advice and solutions** for governments and businesses; to help public media interpret complex events; and to participate in contemporary scientific, economic, social and cultural issues.

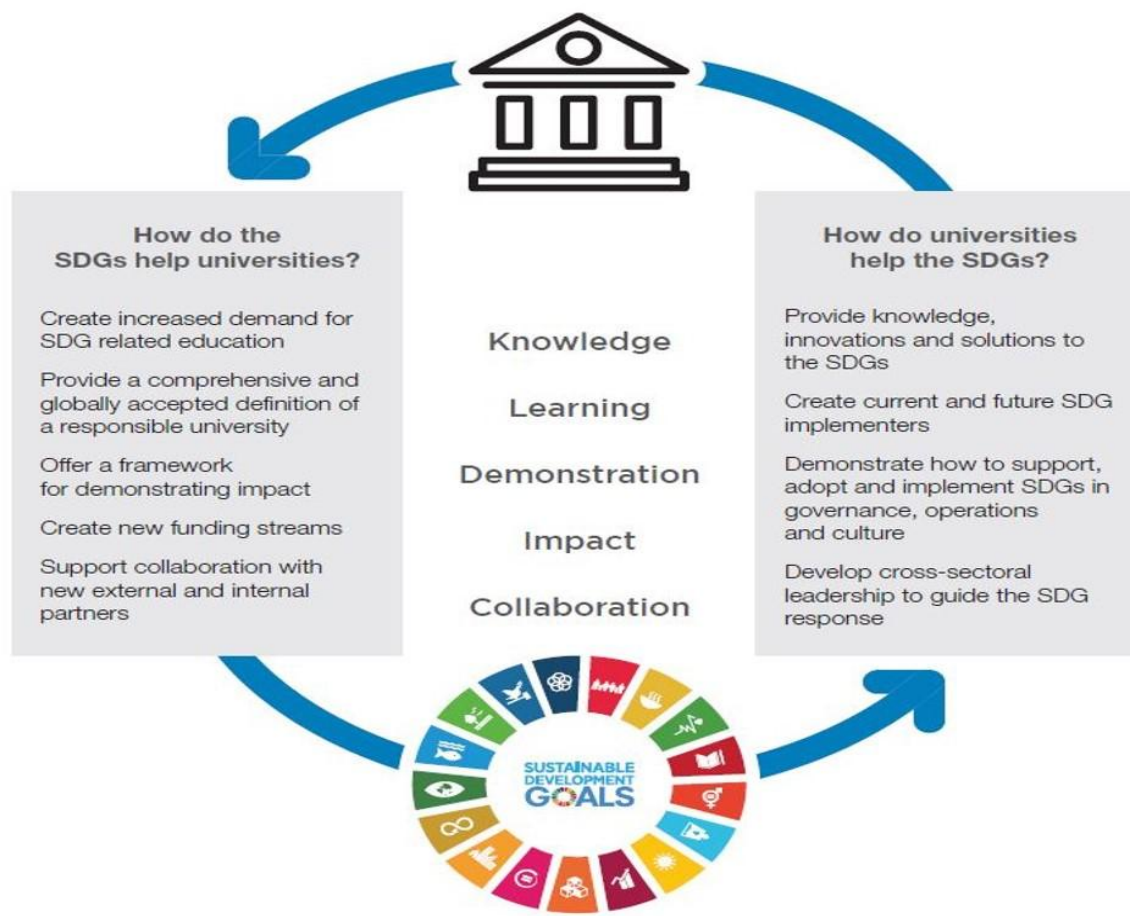
5. **The SDGs are investment priorities** for Research and Development (R&D) activities from global, regional and national funds, from international cooperation projects. HEIs actively participating in the implementation of the SDGs will have more opportunities to receive investment from these funds.

Roles of higher education in implementing the SDGs

6. The world is facing global epidemics, such as COVID-19, which requires transnational cooperation in epidemic prevention, in finding effective drugs and vaccines, and in dealing with the consequences of the epidemic in all areas of society. HEIs can be models for such collaborative efforts.

7. The SDGs help establish and develop a culture of cooperation among HEIs, government, business and the public to solve common problems, for long-term benefits for each country and for the world.

Roles of higher education in implementing the SDGs



(Sustainable Development Solutions Network)

Integrating the SDGs into HEIs' strategic planning

- Based on the specificity of education and research expertise, capacity of resources and national context, each HEI can make different contributions to the 17 SDGs. To assist HEIs in the Asia-Pacific region to easily study and develop a plan to implement the SDGs, Sustainable Development Solutions Network developed the document “**Getting started with the SDGs in universities - A guide for universities, higher education institutions, and the academic sector**”. Based on this document and the requirements of the SDGs, a number of core activities and policies in the key areas of institutional management that HEIs can refer in their strategic planning are suggested.

Integrating the SDGs into HEIs' strategic planning

- **Education:** Education area is directly related to Goal 4: Quality Education. To adapt to this goal, HEIs can explore the following activities and policies:
 - Integrating (selectively) the SDGs into the objectives and learning outcomes of academic programs.
 - Developing subjects or integrating activities related to the SDGs in academic programs.
 - Enhancing learners' awareness and attitudes towards sustainable development requirements for economic, social and technological activities.
 - Increasing college education opportunities for disadvantaged students.



Integrating the SDGs into HEIs' strategic planning

- **Research:** There are many SDGs that can become HEIs' orientations in research such as 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 14, 17 with the following exemplary activities and policies:
 - Giving priorities to support studies related to the SDGs.
 - Building interdisciplinary research groups in line with the SDGs. Integration of sustainability in disciplinary and interdisciplinary research activities.
 - Cooperating with businesses and communities to research and transfer technology, and to provide policy advice.
 - Expanding domestic and international cooperation in research under the SDGs.



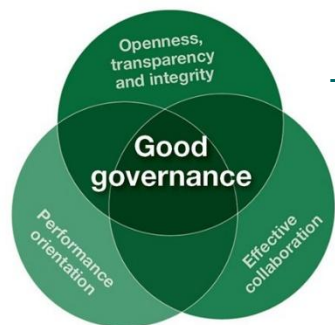
Integrating the SDGs into HEIs' strategic planning

- **Cooperation and community services:** This area directly related to Goal 17: Partnering to Realize Goals with the following activities and policies:
 - Expanding cooperation with all stakeholders (local and international) to achieve the SDGs through programs and projects.
 - Enhancing the position and capacity of institutions to participate in social issues.
 - Sharing knowledge, supporting human resource development for communities and businesses.
 - Participating and supporting national action plans towards 17 SDGs.



Integrating the SDGs into HEIs' strategic planning

- **Institutional governance and operations:** Each HEI can be considered as a miniature society and should be considered as a model towards the SDGs:
 - Developing and effectively implementing policies on protection and improvement of living environment quality, saving resources, gender equality.
 - Being a 'green' campus: promoting and leading campus initiatives such as solar panel installation, bike sharing, recycle shops for textbooks, etc.
 - Timely responding to academic, medical, and health services. Providing clean water for everyone; ensuring food safety in the school. Well serving the needs of physically disadvantaged people.



Integrating the SDGs into HEIs' strategic planning

HEIs' strategic plans also require targets or **key performance indicators** within each key areas. In addition to the above activities and policies, HEIs can refer to the targets and indicators set by UN and also by each government to identify such requirements.



Conclusions

The 17 SDGs of the UN have come into force for more than 05 years but these goals have not been reflected popularly in strategic planning at HEIs in Vietnam. To overcome such gap, each HEI needs to **identify its strengths and weaknesses related to the SDGs and then select priorities when designing its strategies**. The forementioned activities and policies in key areas of higher education can be axamined by each institution when developing its strategies. The implementation of the SDGs is **not only the obligation of HEIs but this focus also brings benefits and advantages** to them in key areas of higher education.



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