

Contribution of Universities in the Implementation of SDGs: Perspective Bangladesh

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Abstract: *The ultimate target of the 17 SDGs is to ensure peaceful, secure, prosperous and equitable life for human in everywhere on the earth. Achievement of SDGs will need institutional contribution. As large institution, universities have the capacity to generate, translate and disseminate knowledge relevant to achieving the SDGs. They can work with policy-makers and other stakeholders to identify problems/policy priorities, assess policy options, implement solutions and evaluate policies relating to SDGs. The present study reveals the contribution which universities can make to the implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh. Descriptive research method was employed and mainly secondary data were considered to conduct the study. It was found that universities can make a significant contribution in SDGs implementation through teaching and learning; research; organizational governance and leadership. For the SDGs to be truly successful at national and global scale, universities need to become champions of sustainable development and play a leading role in the implementation of SDGs. Along with other recommendations, the study recommend that Bangladeshi universities should give essential effort on ESD that help to change the mindsets of university community - students, faculty and staff towards SDGs. Necessary assistance from authoritative body – Government, UGC and internal management also required by the universities to strengthen their contribution towards SDGs. Furthermore, in the present study I don't consider the challenges that Bangladeshi universities will face in integrating the ESD in their curricula. This may be studied more comprehensively in future.*

Keywords: *SDGs, University, Contribution and Bangladesh*

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I. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) sponsored by the United Nations (UN), also known the Global Goals or Agenda 2030, are a universal call of action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people, irrespective of their country of origin, enjoy peace and prosperity^[1]. The SDGs built on the success of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) includes new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities. SDGs work in the spirit of partnership and pragmatism to make the right choices now to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations of the world countries. They provide clear guidelines and targets for all countries of the world to adopt in accordance with their own priorities and environmental challenges^[2].

The government of Bangladesh is politically committed to meet the UN-Sponsored SDGs. After the terminal year (2015) of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SDGs represent a bold new agenda with 17 goals and 169 targets to end poverty, fight inequality, tackle the adverse effects of climate change and ensure a sustainable future for all. During the period of MDGs Bangladesh achieved “remarkable progress in the areas of poverty alleviation, ensuring food security, primary school enrollment, gender parity in primary and secondary level education, lowering the infant and under five mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio, improving immunization coverage and reducing the incidence of communicable diseases” (UNDP, 2015)^[3]. As like as MDGs, Bangladesh takes pride as one of the early starters by completing all groundwork for implementing the SDGs as well as embedding the Global Development Agenda into the 7th Five Year Plan (SFYP) - Mapping the Ministries by goals and targets, Data gap analysis, SDGs Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, SDGs Financing Strategy, Preparation of Ministry/Division Action Plan, Preparation of Sector Strategy Action Plan. It has also submitted Bangladesh Voluntary National Review in HLPF in July, 2017 (SDGs Progress Report 2018)^[4]. Comparing to MDGs the SDGs are more ambitious and will be more challenging to achieve. Achievement of these agenda would require a strong and effective institutional mechanism involving all stakeholders including public representative across the country, government and the bureaucracy, private sector, civil society, knowledge community and development partners. The government of Bangladesh has adopted ‘Whole Society’ approach to ensure wider participation of all stakeholders in the formulation of action plan and implementation of the SDGs. In line with government approach, universities can play a vital role in achieving SDGs. As a large entity of higher education institutions (HEIs), universities have a

significant role to play in shaping and providing knowledge and learning for today and tomorrow. Through continuous efforts they can help to rethink and redesign systems of knowledge that accelerating environmental, demographic, and geographical changes together with associated risks and disasters as well as new social dynamics and technological advancements that are fundamentally reshaping the ways in which we create and relate to knowledge. Universities have broader contribution to the SDGs, they can support the implementation of every SDGs through learning and teaching, research, organizational governance & culture and operations and external leadership.

II. Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to show the contribution that universities can make in the implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh. Thus the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To highlight the major areas where universities can contribute significantly in achieving the SDGs in Bangladesh
- To give a clear view on how universities engaged with SDGs
- To recommend on how Bangladeshi universities can boost up their contribution in achieving the SDGs within the prescribed period

III. Methodology

Descriptive research method is used to attain the objectives. The study is based on secondary data. Data were derived from the publications of Ministry/Division; published statistical data from reliable and recognized sources were also used in this regard. Several books, articles, website and some news papers have been reviewed to get clear idea about the topic of the study with respect to objectives mentioned above.

IV. Literature Review

The ultimate goal of the SDGs is the most important that of “Transforming the World”. Lesson from history in the development of countries and societies has shown realistically that education is central to achieving this goal. We cannot transform our world and achieve the SDGs without achieving its goal 4 on education viz ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.’ The SDGs provide a framework for shared action “for people, planet and prosperity,” to be implemented by “all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership”^[5]. Tertiary or higher education institutions hold a remarkable position in every country. As a major stakeholder of education system, universities play a vital role in SDG implementation as locally and globally. Education and research are explicitly recognized in most of the SDGs and their targets with universities able to directly address them^[6].

First ‘International Conference on Higher Education for Sustainable Development’ hosted by Nagoya University and organized by the United Nations University with the support of the government of Japan and various organizations, including UNESCO, UNEP and IAU felt that there was a need for higher education institutions to adopt a ‘whole-institution approach’, including transformative leadership, encouraging capacity development and undertaking an assessment of the institution for sustainability^[7].

International Association of Universities, or IAU, has been active in encouraging universities to promote sustainable development since the 1990s and in 1993 adopted a policy statement known as the Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Development. IAU has continued to maintain sustainable development as one of its key function areas and has developed an online portal on Higher Education for Sustainable Development in order to encourage higher education institutions around the world to network and display their activities through the portal^[8].

UN declared the period 2005 to 2014 the ‘Decade of Education for Sustainable Development’ (DESD), with the target of integrating and practicing of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. The DESD has focused on the changes in behavior of people, especially in the areas of the environment, economy and society^[9].

ESD helps the people to take proper decision for environmental balance, economic well-beings and social justice for present and future generations. This education can help to reduce the negative impacts due to developments through creating the sustainability competencies among the learners. It makes interactive, learning outcome settings and learner-centered teaching experiences for the learners as well as includes the issues as climate change, poverty and sustainable consumption practices in the curricula. It assists to the individuals for achieving SDGs through their competencies and necessary knowledge on transformational and understandable perception on sustainable development.

SDSN Networks in Action describes five roles universities play in achieving the SDGs viz helping to design SDG based policies, encouraging SDG oriented research and development, incubating new sustainable development businesses such as hosting startup high-tech companies locating near university research programs,

SDG based training of future sustainable leaders through cross-disciplinary and practical learning and fostering multi-stakeholder engagement.

United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), created the Global Universities Partnership on Environment for Sustainability (GUPES) – a network of 370 universities across the world to implement environment and sustainability practices into the curricula [7].

In 2014, after broad consultations with and inputs from a wide range of stakeholders, UNESCO came up with the post-Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Global Action Program, or GAP on education for sustainable development, and a roadmap for implementing it.

To boost up the likelihood of success of 17 SDGs, higher education institutions worldwide must teach and train today’s students – tomorrow’s decision-makers – to think both critically and ethically, to learn to cope with ethical dilemmas and apply systems-thinking approaches to serious and complex societal problems [10].

From the above literature it has been summarized that universities can play a significant role for successful implementation of SDGs in every country. As a major stakeholder of education system of the country, Bangladeshi universities can play a leading role to attain the SDGs targets for the country. Like developed countries, Bangladeshi universities can contribute broadly in achieving SDGs through changing the policies and curricula; widening research involvement on SDGs, rearranging teaching-learning methods, and strengthening inter university communication at home and abroad. The following figure help to understand the supports which universities can provide in implementing the SDGs in Bangladesh:



Figure 1: Supports of Universities to SDGs [11]

For successful implementation of SDGs universities can help to knowledge creation and dissemination; rearrange the teaching learning methods; widen the research involvement; help to innovation and technology transfer; change the attitude of the youth ; help to develop environment friendly business establishment and entrepreneurship development; create network within and abroad. With the help of these activities, universities can accelerate the implementation of SDGs of the country.

We have many universities in our country. So they can include a mass generation with SDGs through their activities. Willingness and positive attitude of universities management towards SDGs also play a crucial role in this regard. Following figure shows the pathway through which universities cover wide range of stakeholder involvement with SDGs implementation in Bangladesh.

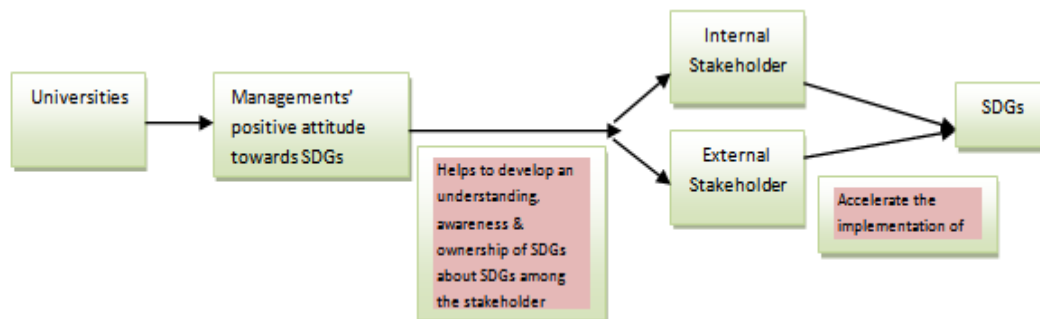


Figure 2: Flow chart of SDGs implementation.

V. Contribution of Universities in SDGs Implementation

Universities can act as an active driver to include the mass generation in the SDGs agenda by increasing participation through disseminating knowledge. They devote to knowledge creation and teaching for the benefit of society and occupied a unique position in society that makes them particularly suitable to provide leadership on SDG implementation.

The universities in Bangladesh are mainly categorized into three different types:

- Public (government owned and subsidized),
- Private (private sector owned universities) and
- International(operated and funded by international organizations)

At present there are 45 public universities, 103 approved private universities, 3 international universities and 3 special universities in Bangladesh^[12]. These institutions hold a position of neutral and trusted stakeholders within the society. They have extended up their contribution to support sustainable development. As large institution, universities have made significant efforts to address sustainability in campus operation, have introduced new programs and courses related to education for sustainable development, and are extending the value and impact of their teaching and research to their respective communities.

Contribution of universities is needed much more widely to achieve the SDGs. By unique functions and expertise, universities demonstrate a crucial role for overcoming the wide range of interrelated social, economic and environmental challenges which is covered by the SDGs agenda. The major areas^[6] by which universities can contribute more for implementing SDGs are:

• **Learning and Teaching:** Education is one of the strong bases of the SDG. Quality education leads to significant sustainable development which is beneficial for individuals, communities and countries. Universities in Bangladesh, through their extensive learning and teaching activities can contribute more in implementing SDGs. Providing students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to understand and address the SDGs; offering in-depth academic or vocational training on SDGs; introducing online learning; providing capacity building for students and professionals; empowering and mobilizing young people; engaging with co-curricular activities, students clubs and societies universities have played a key role on SDGs implementation. By giving essential efforts on ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) they have demonstrate an active role for achieving the SDGs so that the learners' can understand and gather necessary knowledge regarding this burning issue. These efforts help develop positive behavioral learning outcomes and increase the competencies of them on sustainability to achieve the SDGs. Ensuring ESD, universities provide professional and personal skills and capabilities to create future leaders, decision-makers, innovators, entrepreneurs and society with the knowledge and inspiration who can contribute to achieve SDGs. Universities take pride for training and shaping the future leaders for sustainable development. By integrating the SDGs into curricula, they can provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to address them. Moreover, they can establish educational programs that emphasize interdisciplinary learning and promote multidisciplinary system approaches and collaboration to solving the increasingly complex challenges facing by the country now and onward.

• **Research:** Research is the basis for understanding the key sustainable development challenges represented by SDGs and for providing the evidence-based solutions, techniques, pathways and innovations for addressing them. Researchers at universities have a privileged to look at the different SDGs, understand what approaches are more helpful to analyze the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Some of the target of SDGs, will require new conceptual frameworks for better understanding the inter-linkages and correlations among different goals. Research will help us to understand better the costs of implementing the SDGs, but also the opportunity costs of not investing sufficiently in the SDGs. University teachers, researchers and students are participating practical research relating to SDGs projects with their expertise, time and financial resources. They can contribute to knowledge transfer and build the tools that the SDGs will require. With their extensive research capabilities, universities will need to play a leading role for the goals are to be successfully implemented.

• **Organizational Governance, Culture and Operations:** Align university governance structures, culture and operational policies with the aims of attaining the SDGs, universities will directly contribute. They can implement the philosophy of the SDGs through governance structures and operational procedures and decisions. As major employers, consumers, investors, and real estate holders universities have addressed the impacts of important decisions relating to – recruitment; finance; campus operations; support services; facilities; procurement; human resources; and student admission within each area, can make a significant contribution to achieving the SDGs. By expanding corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ensuring sustainable campus activities universities are actively engaged with the SDGs.

• **External Leadership:** By acting responsibly universities can act as a key driver and make significant contribution in achieving SDGs. Success in achieving the SDGs will depend on action and collaboration by all actors. As a unique and trusted stakeholder within the society, universities have the ability and responsibility to guide and lead the local, national, and international response to the SDGs. As places devoted to knowledge creation and teaching for the benefit of society, universities have traditionally occupied a unique position in society that makes them particularly suited to provide leadership on SDG implementation individually and collectively through cross-sectoral dialogues, actions and partnerships. They also have a key role in educating and creating awareness among the public and other sectors on the SDGs and in advocating for the importance of the SDGs. Universities can made broader contribution in achieving SDGs through strengthening public

engagement and participation in addressing the SDGs; helping to design SDGs based policies; and demonstrating sector commitment to the SDGs.

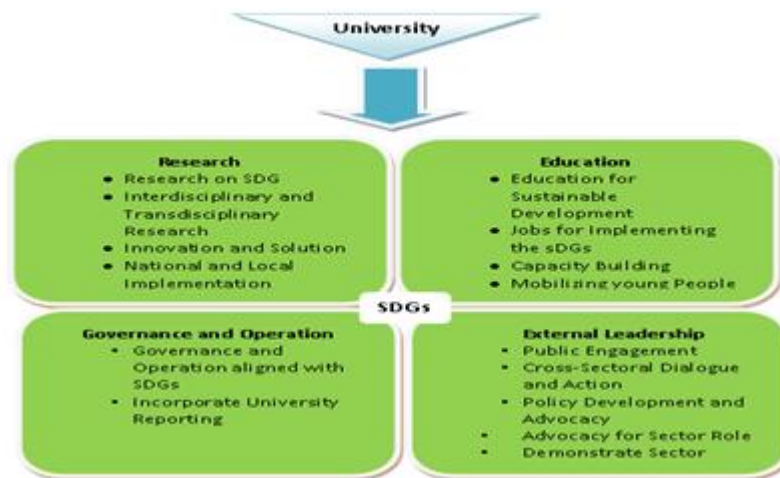


Figure 3: Summarizes the key contributions that universities can make to support the implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh ^[6].

VI. How Universities Engaged with the Implementation of SDGs

SDGs provide a unique opportunity to develop a whole-of-university approach to solving the major challenges facing by the country. The SDGs are comprehensive and diverse enough to be able to speak the language of the majority, providing a common language and platform for building partnership. Universities differ from each other in many ways, including in size, structure and availability of funding, existing work in sustainable development, values, priorities, and the needs of the communities they serve. Considering these factors, universities can engage with the SDGs accordingly. Different levels and steps ^[6] through which universities can integrate the SDGs into their activities are:

Recognition: Identify and acknowledge what every university is already doing to contribute to the SDGs which provide a powerful description about impact and a strong force for further action.

Opportunities: Recognize the usefulness and importance of the SDGs framework and find opportunities to use it to outline the activities and programs at different areas across the university.

Organizing principle: Assess the ongoing and far reaching impact will come if the SDGs become part of ‘business-as-usual’ for the university, by recognizing and integrating the SDGs agenda into university governance structures and frameworks.

Following figure shows the levels and steps by which universities can expand their engagement with the implementation of SDGs.



Figure 4: Overview of step-by-step integration of SDGs by Universities ^[11].

VII. Findings

As a large entity university cover a wide range of stakeholders in supporting the implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh by integrating the environment and sustainability concerns into teaching, research, community engagement and the management process.

Universities have the ability and potential to map, track and systematically document efforts to link research with the policy and practice relating to SDGs. They can establish meaningful frameworks for identifying, measuring and reporting on the right indicators in a suitable way.

Universities have the potential to make multi-stakeholder partnerships for SDGs. From a role of observers, universities are increasingly becoming actors in multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs.

For the SDGs to be truly successful at home and abroad, universities need to become the champion for sustainable development and play a leading role.

Students with SDGs skills and literacy will be a growing expectation from employers. As well as an understanding of the subject areas of the SDGs, students will need skills such as systems thinking, integrated problem solving and entrepreneurship. Universities have the opportunities to be a large platform that can support the students to integrate these qualities in their profile.

Universities can play a key role in engaging youth as a force for change, and in helping to generate the knowledge, analysis and expertise needed to understand and implement the SDGs as a universal and interlinked agenda.

Universities have the responsibility to equip the future leaders, innovators and thinkers to understand the global challenges facing by the country and the role they can play to meet these challenges. Through their own operations universities can pioneer one and can set an example to other sectors and businesses.

VIII. Recommendation

Universities should give essential effort on ESD for achieving the SDGs so that the learners' can understand and gather necessary knowledge regarding these issues. This efforts help develop positive behavioral learning outcomes and increase their competencies on sustainability to achieve the SDGs.

According to their size, research and educational strengths, funding arrangements, the needs of the communities, universities have engaged with action based research giving priority to SDGs as a new field of study for academia. Opening new avenue for research relating to SDGs, universities provide the necessary knowledge, evidence-base solutions, technologies, pathways and innovations to strengthen and support the implementation of the SDGs at local as well as global scale.

Universities can make a much broader contribution to the SDGs than just research and education. They also have a role as hubs of innovation to support and host businesses such as high-tech companies which provide technologies and services for sustainable development.

As a key change driver universities can change the learners' mindset towards building the learning process for achieving emotional intelligence (e.g. ethics, honesty, transparency, accountability etc) in the career path rather than the result based education system. This effort unlocks the creativity and brainstorming activities in learning process.

Introduce a cross-faculty approach to widen the curricula to develop components of critical -ethical analysis and systems thinking.

Necessary assistance from authoritative bodies – Government, UGC and Internal Management also required by the universities to strengthen their contribution towards SDGs. Government and University Grants Commission (UGC) can play a strong role for introducing ESD curricula among the universities of the country.

Organize workshop, training, and conferences to exchange good practice as regards the implementation of SDGs and also increase the community awareness towards the success of achieving SDGs.

Develop partnerships with other universities, networks, national authorities for higher education and civil society organizations to accelerate the implementation of SDGs.

Develop an information hub in every university to disseminate the information, discussion topics, case studies, e-learning tools etc related to SDGs.

Emphasize the ethical obligations among university community - current students, faculty and staff - to understand and defeat the forces that lead to hinder the sustainability through environmental degradation.

Encourage voluntary associations and participation of stakeholders in SDGs implementation and enhance commitment toward the society for the long run.

Ensure impartiality in teaching, student assessment and research and that matters regarding awards of degrees, employment and promotions are based on legal, transparent and objective criteria.

IX. Conclusion

The SDGs provide a unique opportunity to universities to demonstrate their willingness and capabilities of playing active and meaningful role in the development of the country and their contribution towards global

sustainable development. They also provide an opportunity for collaboration and partnerships. Universities now have the responsibility, more than ever before, to integrate sustainable development into all their teaching, research, community engagement and campus operations. It is high time for Bangladeshi universities to get started and to accelerate action on the 17 SDGs. Engaging with the SDGs will also greatly benefit to universities by helping them to demonstrate the impact, capture demand for SDG-related education, build new partnerships, access new funding streams, and define a university that is responsible and aware as locally and globally. The implementation of SDGs will require substantial inputs from higher education. This must be recognized by the universities themselves. Achieving the SDGs is a big task, and given the critical roles universities have in supporting and delivering on this, can accelerate the country's progress. Universities can act as a key agent of change. They take the responsibility to develop the moral contours of society for the better future and enhance the societal benefits by adding social capital.

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