

Challenges and Concerns in Attaining Sustainable Development Goals: Basis for SDG Advocacy Framework in South Cotabato

Ava Clare Marie O. Robles, Ph.D

Farnzovitz Arsula Atillen

Mindanao State University-General Santos City Campus

Abstract - Just like any other provinces, one of the growing concerns and challenges in Mindanao, is the attainment of sustainable development, particularly in South Cotabato. The limited understanding of the Philippine Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) leads to the deterioration of the people for social tolerance, environmental stewardship, and participation in community-based decision-making. Such regression has been rooted in various factors. One of which is the poor realization of the Philippine Agenda 21. Another hurdle is brought by the lack of competencies of teachers to educate and empower them to address sustainability issues. This gap calls for state colleges, universities, government leaders, and business sectors to increase their level of awareness on the dynamics of sustainable development. This study was conducted to 1,828 people in South Cotabato. It determined the level of awareness, concerns, and issues relative to sustainable development. It employed a descriptive survey design. Findings of the study revealed that majority of the people "strongly agree" that every person must be taught with knowledge, values, and skills relative to sustainable development. This implies that state colleges and universities must be the prime movers in advocating their SDGs. To further, the crafting of the ESD framework was made as a proactive approach that may increase people's abilities, empowering them to seize action on transformation heading towards sustainable development.

Keywords – Sustainable Development, awareness, Issues and Concerns, Advocacy, ESD

INTRODUCTION

In Mindanao, particularly in South Cotabato province, over-exploitation of natural resources and human-made anthropogenic activities has been the leading cause of the changes in the ecosystems. For one, the declining natural resource in South Cotabato area due to rapid urbanization is considered a big challenge. Infrastructural development in the region resulted in the conversion of agricultural lands into residential, commercial, and industrial purpose. As a natural consequence, people experienced pollution, flooding, as well as inadequate or unsustainable waste disposal, house construction, and health services. To further, these challenges and concerns may be attributed to people's lack of awareness of environmental protection and conservation

initiatives that are sustainable. Concurrently, Gilbert, and Nelson (2018) posited that governments need to create not just the policy priorities but also frameworks that bring together all sectors and incentivize action and collaboration.

Philippine Agenda 21 (PA 21) is country's blueprint for sustainable development that envisions having a better quality of life for all through the development of a just, moral, creative, spiritual, economically vibrant, caring, diverse yet cohesive society. It lays down the mixture of strategies that subscribe to the harmonious integration of a sound and viable economy, responsible governance, social cohesion or harmony, and ecological integrity. The main purpose is to ensure that development is for the current and future generation."

Likewise, PA 21 is the This notion is characterized by people's appropriate productivity, participation, democratic processes, and living in harmony within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature and the integrity of creation (<http://emb.gov.ph/eedid/philagenda.htm>).

It must be noted, however, that the present task of reducing possible environmental degradation has now become synonymous with preserving people and securing the future of the people in South Cotabato. Since it affects the physical well-being of the people, it is, therefore, an undertaking that no individual can afford to overlook. Environmental problems are becoming more complicated today than in the past. Hence, providing solutions to these problems is imperative and calls for a sensible and crucial feat.

Alongside the setting of these challenges, insufficient advocacy or dissemination of updated scientific and technical information are glaring evidence to the constraints in the achievement of sustainable development initiatives, making it weak and ineffective. Accordingly, Secretary Roy A. Cimatu of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR, 2019) mentioned that advocacy and effective communication are vital in the protection of the environment. It was the Brundtland Commission, which first coined the term sustainable development. Its heritage and landmark report, "Our Common Future" was considered prominent in the formation of environmental policy and the advancement of sustainable development as a concept. Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development (SD) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (MacNeill, 2013).

Based on the recent findings of the Foundation for the Philippine Environment (2019), the status of the Philippine ecosystems had not reached even half of the desired sustainability level. Specifically, the forest, biodiversity, mining, and freshwater were

heavily prone to abuse and exploitation; while the lowland agriculture and coastal and marine were found to be least unsustainable (<https://fpe.ph>). This finding should warn the people in South Cotabato to give this focus in arresting socio-economic and political forces which threaten their very survival. Modifications in thinking and lifestyles to reduce problems on global warming, increased population, toxic pollution, over-exploitation of resources, and poor governance through diverse approaches and priorities, must be adopted.

Given the above problems, timely advocacy framework on education for sustainable development to raise community participation is needed to address these socio-economic and environmental issues. With this premise, it is imperative that leaders are responsive to find solutions to these challenges to attain sustainable development. Requisite to

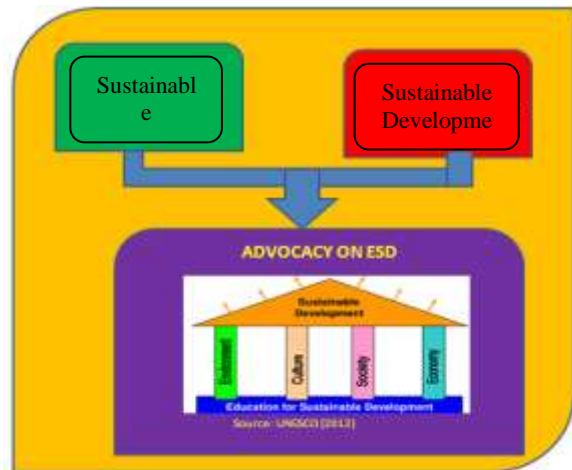


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

this is citizens' empowerment of essential knowledge, skills, and information on socio-economic and environmental sustainability.

Sandell et al., (2003) argued that ESD is vital for achieving environmental and ethical awareness of the people with attitudes, skills, and behavior consistent with sustainable development and for successful public participation in decision-making. For these reasons, it is only through ESD whereby people can address adequately the socio-economic and

environmental issues experienced in South Cotabato. Relevant to the attainment of development may serve as an avenue to greater awakening. In the realization of the potential to meet this need, this study aimed to determine the level of challenges of the people in South Cotabato towards sustainable development and identified the concerns of the people regarding sustainable development. To the same end, it crafted an advocacy campaign framework as a discourse call intended for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The formulation of advocacy campaign framework aspires to equip the people in South Cotabato with knowledge, skills, and

sustainable development, the conduct of studies to determine the concerns underlying sustainable values that ascertain the foundation for lifelong learning, and responsible citizenship. Establishing baseline data and promotion of sustainable development awareness is the study's main drive, which is in consonance to the Philippine Agenda 21 (PA 21). By raising awareness on sustainable development, it can create a paradigm shift to people, which will enable them to institute a culture of prevention, preservation, and conservation of resources towards sustainable development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study intends to address the abovementioned gaps or challenges. Thus, the study aimed to find out the extent of their concerns relative to the attainment of SD goals. Likewise, it identified the level of challenges

they experience in South Cotabato. More importantly, this study is considered an essential initiative since SDG is part of the mantra of the Philippine government under the administration of President Duterte.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study employed a descriptive research design. A survey questionnaire was used to find out the peoples' level of awareness, concerns, and issues toward sustainable development. The first part of the questionnaire asked the level of awareness on sustainable development, while the second part raised questions on the different concerns and challenges relative to sustainable development. A self-made questionnaire was used in the study, which was validated by three experts in the SDS program. The said instrument was subjected to a reliability test. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.872 showed that the instrument was considered reliable.

The study lasted for 2years. It started from December 2016 to December 2018. Utilizing stratified random sampling, the instrument was administered to 61 barangays in South Cotabato with a total of 1,828 respondents. To come up with the intended result, weighted mean was carried out by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Based on the results gathered, the researcher solved for the weighted mean, and the corresponding grand mean. A five-point Likert scale with its equivalent verbal interpretation was used as follows: 1.00 – 1.49 for Least; 1.5 – 2.49 for Less; 2.5 – 3.49 for Moderate; 3.5 – 4.49 for Great; and 4.5 – 5.00 for Very Great.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Level of Challenges experienced relative to Sustainable Development

INDICATORS	WM	Description
1. the incompetence of the businesses in ensuring responsibly on the balance of economic development, social development, and environmental protection	4.21	Greatest

2. scarce budget in maintaining biodiversity and in carrying out SD plans.	3.87	Great
3. lack of consistency of schools in integrating SD goal that promotes gender equality.	3.66	Great
4. limited understanding of sustainable consumption, particularly in reducing waste and using goods, resources and services appropriately.	3.45	Great
5. inability to realize that development must be for the current and future generation	3.30	Moderate
6. inadequate conservation as one of the means to increase its resources.	3.29	Moderate
7. limited programs that promote cultural diversity.	3.18	Moderate
8. overexploitation of resources and other environmental services	3.01	Moderate
9. inability to realize the interconnectivity of social development, economic development, social development, and environmental protection as requisite for sustainable development.	2.59	Less
10. limited understanding of people on SD requisite to the diminishing effect of climate change.	1.80	Least
Overall Mean	3.24	Moderate

Legend: 4.21-5.00 Greatest (Gt); 3.41-4.20 Great (G); 2.61-3.40 Moderate (M), 1.81-2.60 Less (L), 1.00-1.80 Least (Lt)

Table 1 presents the level of challenges experienced relative to Sustainable Development. Data reveal that the people in South Cotabato are **least** challenged on the limited understanding of people on SD requisite to the diminishing effect of climate change (wm=1.8); while **less** challenged on the inability of the people to realize the interconnectivity of social development, economic development, social development, and environmental protection as requisite for sustainable development (wm=4.21).

Moreover, among the indicators, their **greatest** challenge is on the incompetence of the businesses in ensuring responsibly on the balance of economic development, social development, and environmental protection

On the other hand, Table 2 shows the concerns of the people towards SDG. The results of the study reveal that among the indicators, they **strongly agree** that every person should be taught with knowledge, values, and skills for sustainable development, which got the highest mean of 4.62. This is followed by their concern of the commitment of the schools in integrating

(wm=1.8). Likewise, they experience great challenge on the **scarce** budget in maintaining biodiversity and in carrying out SD plans (wm=3.87).

To summarize, the overall mean of 3.24 revealed that people in South Cotabato were **moderately** challenged relative to the attainment of SD goals and its applications. This implies that the people in South Cotabato have not thoroughly imbibed sustainable mechanisms that ensure practical interventions, strategies & action towards sustainable development. The above results conformed to the findings of the PCSD (2012) who found out that one of the PA 21 limitations is the lack of possible intervention activities, strategies & action agenda requisite towards sustainability.

sustainable development principles in the curriculum (wm=4.46); and that people should understand that the next generation inherits a community at least as healthy, diverse and productive as it is today (wm=4.44). These findings imply that state colleges, universities, business sectors, and government officials must

be the chief advocates for sustainable development.

Table 2
Sustainable Development Concerns

INDICATORS	WM	Description
Sustainable Development concerns (I agree that)		
1. Laws and rules to protect the environment need to be stricter than they are now.	3.23	Undecided
2. The government should initiate programs that encourage companies to make products that are designed to be thrown away after one use.	3.64	Agree
3. The government should encourage greater use of fuel-efficient vehicles	3.73	Agree
4. Sustainable development in South Cotabato will not be possible until wealthier people stop exploiting the workers and the natural resources of poorer countries.	3.99	Agree
5. Emphasis should be given to environmentally responsible companies are more likely to make a profit over the long run.	3.99	Agree
6. Researches should focus on how to maintaining biodiversity (the number and variety of living organisms) for it is considered essential to the health of ecosystems are essential to the health of ecosystems.	4.18	Agree
7. The practical teaching of living sustainably should be included in all subjects in all grades.	4.28	Strongly Agree
8. People should understand that the next generation inherits a community at least as healthy, diverse, and productive as it is today.	4.44	Strongly Agree
9. The schools need to be committed to integrating sustainable development principles in the curriculum.	4.46	Strongly Agree
10. Every person must be taught with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary for sustainable development.	4.62	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	4.06	Agree

Legend: 4.21-5.00 Strongly Agree (SA), 3.41-4.20 Agree (A), 2.61-3.40 Undecided (U), 1.81-2.60 Disagree (D), and 1.00-1.80 Strongly Disagree (SD)

On the contrary, they were **undecided** if laws and rules to protect the environment need to be stricter than they are now (wm=3.23). Table 3 also revealed that the government should initiate programs that are responsive to the current need of their constituents (wm=3.64). For them, an ESD advocacy framework is a commendable initiative to effectively address development issues experienced in South Cotabato. Once established, it increases people's abilities and empowers people to seize action for

transformation. Likewise, it subsumes social accountability and ensures that political commitments are translated from national goals to local actions.

The findings above conform to the study of Gentle et al. (2007), who posited that "advocacy has been applied as a major tool that aims to hold development agencies responsible for actions and in the process encourages and assists them to meet their responsibilities." They

further argued that the outcomes of the advocacy campaign should contribute to the effective implementation of existing policies. Secondly, current policies and rules have to be amended to cater to the emerging development issues that

could not be dealt with by existing policies. With advocacy, voiceless, and powerless people were empowered and become active agents for the improvement of government service.

ESD Advocacy Framework: A Discourse Call Intended for HEIs

To have a good grip on the mechanics of sustainable development, an advocacy framework for ESD is critical for HEIs to be responsive to the needs and demands of the people. Realizing the effectiveness of ESD in safeguarding the future of the "commons," educational leaders and curriculum specialists in South Cotabato must review and revise the existing courses to determine how ESD be infused in education courses.

The increase in people's awareness on the dynamics of sustainable development, as well as the inter-linked concerns to raise social responsibility and accountability of the students, teachers, and other relevant organizations are essential for more effective implementation. The

purpose of this paradigm is to outline the steps needed to execute the framework successfully. It also endeavors to indicate possible future directions for integrated evaluation based on present trends and initiatives.

The seven (7) phases outlined in the framework are the following: Identifying, Planning, Prioritizing, Reconstructing, Implementing, Assessing, and Enhancing for sustainability. Phases 1, 2, and 3 require the identification, construction, and planning of targeting sustainable development programs to be initiated for ESD fusion. This also entails establishing active collaboration among the concerned people to create new initiatives that are timely and responsive to the current need.

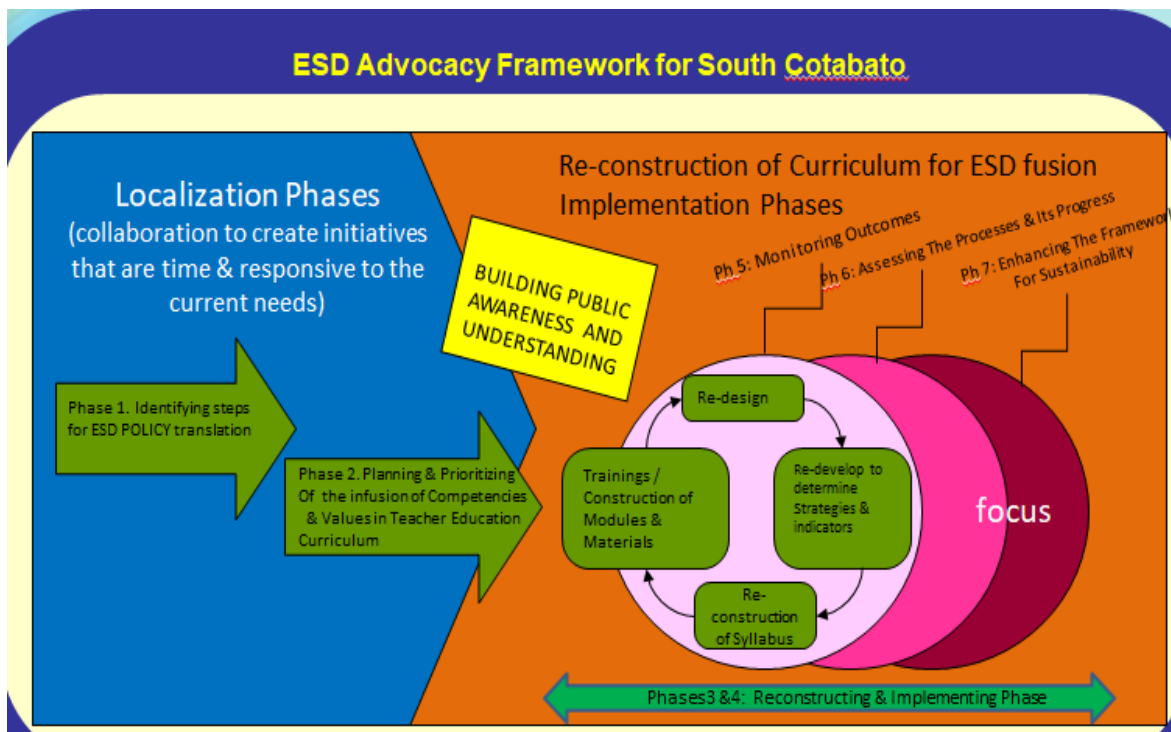


Figure 2. ESD Advocacy Framework

Phase 4 of the framework indicates the start of the reconstruction process of the curriculum for ESD fusion and is based on the timetable set by the parties. This is followed by Phase 5, which is the implementation process. This is done by conducting teacher seminars as well as training for material development.

Phase 6 and 7 deal with the assessment and enhancement of the whole process in order to identify the things needed to be sustained or improved for the present and next generation. This can be made doable by having innovations suitable to the need of the current and future generations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the researchers gave the following conclusions:

In ensuring the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the people, education is considered as one of the safeguards against the uncertainties of the future. The increased economic progress, which leads to ecological degradation of this generation, is noted as one of the pressing concerns of the people in South Cotabato. This, however, calls for a strong collaborative effort among school leaders, government officials, faculty, staff, students, and the community. To further, sustainable development is more than just a vision. It is an indispensable component to address challenges such as poverty, improvident consumption, population escalation, urban blight, and violation of human rights.

In this paper, findings revealed that although they were **undecided** if laws and rules to protect the environment need to be stricter than they are now; their primary concerns were on the teaching of knowledge, values, and skills for sustainable development, and the commitment of the schools in integrating sustainable development principles in the curriculum. These findings imply that state colleges, universities, business sectors, and government officials must be the chief advocates for sustainable development.

More importantly, it was found out that although they experience **least** challenge on the limited understanding of people regarding SD, which is a requisite to the diminishing effect of climate change; their greatest challenge

experienced, however, was on the incompetence of the businesses in ensuring responsibly on the balance of economic development, social development, and environmental protection.

Thus, the above results imply that sustainable development initiatives were **mediocre** in its execution. Hence, the need to craft an ESD advocacy framework was done and suggested to be embedded for the uptake of PA 21 guidelines in the local setting. This kind of outlook strives not only to meet and protect the present generation but also for those who belong to future generations.

It is on this premise that the researchers recommended that in the pursuit of sustainable development, concerned people and organizations are discouraged from employing conventional schemes that are unsustainable in nature in supplying people's complex needs. For quality assurance, re-orientation of the existing education program must be done, so the infusion of ESD is aligned in the HEIs' educational program as support to the PA 21. Grounded on the results of the study, an ESD framework was crafted not to proliferate ineffective policies nor leaders' lip services, but to boost the well-being of the people.

Finally, government officials, school leaders, teachers, students, and the community should assimilate the significance of ESD in order to overcome poverty, promote people's health, and sustain the production of its natural

resources as well as environmental conservation and protection. The primary contribution of this paper is the bridging of gaps between theory and practice relative to sustainable development.

This contributes to new knowledge for it developed a framework which may be used for the translation of the PA 21 to local settings.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Commonwealth of Australia (2005). Educating for a Sustainable Future A National Environmental Education. Retrieved on September 2012 from <http://www.environment.gov.au/education/publications/pubs/sustainable-future.pdf>
- [2]. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR, 2019). Retrieved on March 2019 from <https://www.denr.gov.ph/>.
- [3]. Foundation for the Philippine Environment (2019). Retrieved on May 5, 2019, from <https://fpe.ph/>
- [4]. Gilbert, Richard, and Nelson, Jane (2018). Advocating Together for the SDGs: Business Fights Poverty and the Corporate Responsibility Initiative at the Harvard Kennedy School, at <https://www.hks.harvard.edu>
- [5]. Gentle, Acharya & Dahal (2007). Advocacy Campaign to Improve Governance in Community
- [6]. Forestry: A Case from Western Nepal. *Journal of Forest and Livelihood* 6(1).
- [7]. MacNeill, Jim (2013). Brundtland Revisited. Retrieved on January 15, 2013, from <http://www.iisd.org/>
- [8]. McDonald, C. (2006), "Moving forward on educating for sustainability in Manitoba,"
- [9]. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Vol. 14 No. 9-11, pp. 1010-1016. Vennila Govindaswamy
- [10]. Nsanzimana, D, and Tushabe, R. (2010). Guidelines for Education for Sustainable Development into Schools in Rwanda. Retrieved on February 2013 from http://www.rema.gov.rw/rema_doc/publications/Guidelines%20for%20infusing%20ESD%20into%20schools.pdf
- [11]. Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (2012). The Philippine Sustainable Development Status. Retrieved on January 2013 from <http://www.pcsd.ph>
- [12]. Sandell, K., Ohman, J. & Ostman, L. (2005) Education for Sustainable Development:
- [13]. Nature, School and Democracy, Studentlitteratur, Lund
- [14]. The Philippine Agenda 21 (2013). Retrieved on January 15, 2013, from <http://www.psdn.org.ph/agenda21/start.htm>
- [15]. Tungpalan, R (2012). US Environmental Protection Agency (2013). Retrieved on January 20, 2013, from <http://yosemite.epa.gov>.
- [16]. UNESCO-Bangkok, (2012). Education for Sustainable Development. Retrieved on January 2013 from <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/esd-unit/definition-of-esd/>