Towards Attaining the Sustainable Development Goals: The Philippines and the 2030 Agenda

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Abstract: In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) adopted a global development agenda which aims to promote holistic development, human rights, and equality for all regardless of distinctions of any kind. Referred to as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this agenda encompasses 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets that build on the previously-adopted Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) by individual countries from 2000 to 2015. The questions that the paper seeks to address are: How can the Philippines achieve the SDGs within the government's policy framework? What strategies are needed to achieve these goals? How can the academe as a stakeholder contribute to attaining SDG targets through its community partnership and localization program? The paper draws lessons from the Philippine experience on the MDGs. An initiative to localize the SDGs through De La Salle University's linkaging with disadvantaged communities is used as a case in point.

Key Words: Sustainable Development Goals, localization, Philippine development

1. INTRODUCTION

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The paper explores issues and requisites for the country's attaining the SDGs by 2030, drawing lessons from the Philippine experience on the MDGs. An initiative to localize the SDGs through academic linkaging with disadvantaged communities shall be used as a case in point.

Based on the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on the SDGs (OWG), monitoring of the SDGs are in the national, regional, global, and thematic levels, emphasizing national reporting as the most significant level. (De la Mothe, E., et al, 2015). Global Reporting Indicators can complement national indicators which individual countries are free to develop and adopt whichever is applicable to their national priorities. In the case of the Philippines, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is at the forefront in coordinating and monitoring SDG implementation. The SDGs is still new and in the roadmap to localizing them, the Philippine government is still in the awareness-raising and advocacy stage. There is still a need to develop a system to come up with an aggregated data coming not only from the LGUs but from other sectors that add to the national performance in measuring SDG implementation in the country.

In order for the SDGs to take off in the Philippines, a number of requirements have to be addressed. One is political commitment. The SDGs have to be integrated in the next Philippine Development Plan (PDP) and the country's long term vision document – Filipino 2040.

During President Benigno Aquino III's administration from June 2010-2016, the conditional cash transfer scheme known as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is congruent with the MDGs and the SDGs as it seeks to address extreme poverty by providing conditional cash grants to the poorest of the poor, to improve the health, nutrition, and the education of children aged 0-18.

(Official Gazette, n.d.) The 4Ps will be improved upon by the current Duterte administration; hence, continuing poverty eradication efforts.

The PDP 2011-2016 is congruent with the SDGs as the national development framework seeks to improve transparency and accountability in governance, strengthen the macro economy, boost the competitiveness of our industries, facilitate infrastructure development, strengthen the financial sector and mobilize capital, improve access to quality social services, enhance peace and security for development, and ensure ecological integrity. For the PDP priority areas in line with the SDGs to be actualized, they have to be complemented with the necessary budget allocation for specific programs. Financing is key. Efficient and effective use of public funds in support of this is necessary.

In the areas of financing and operationalization, a dedicated oversight committee with a technical secretariat has to be constituted to ensure that there is consistent monitoring of SDG implementation. Another requisite is to generate and disseminate timely disaggregated SDG data through an SDG Watch and focal points within concerned agencies. Moreover, support and commitment of development partners including the private sector and other stakeholders have to be mobilized.

Continuing to form strong cooperation and linkages with international bodies is another strategy. Development cooperation can be a tool to meet SDG targets by facilitating technology transfer and knowledge-sharing.

There is a need to engage local government units (LGUs) and communities for localized SDG implementation. Since the main beneficiaries are people in communities, there is a need to enhance the absorptive capacities of local institutions, particularly increasing their technical know-how and involvement, to ensure that the SDG results are met and felt in the grassroots level. In doing so, the academe, as a stakeholder, can effectively participate in meeting communities' development needs through its knowledge sharing and capacitating work.

Relatedly, this paper focuses on De La Salle University's initiatives to assist partner communities with opportunities for livelihood, education, health, and environmental sustainability through its localization projects. It underscores the engagement of academe in development work; thus, helping contribute towards achieving the SDGs.

2. METHODOLOGY

Documentary analysis of the Philippine Development Plan and development programs related to the MDGs and SDGs during the Aquino and the Duterte administrations are made. NEDA's survey results referred to as Ambisyon Natin (Our Ambition) 2040 was examined to relate the SDGs to the long-term vision for the Philippines based on the aspirations of Filipino respondents nationwide. Reports of the DLSU COSCA office on SDG localization initiatives are also examined to illustrate the contributions to the attainment of the SDGs from the academe as a sector.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A main challenge in achieving the SDGs is to bring them down from the international to the national and local levels especially to the intended beneficiaries in communities or barangays.

The roadmap to localizing the SDGs include raising awareness for these goals in the local level. Advocacy is needed to form coalitions so that a local perspective could be integrated in designing and implementing projects that feed into the SDGs. Local partners in communities such as people's organizations, church, and business groups need to be engaged, as well. Monitoring to evaluate results of specific projects in line with the SDGs should be conducted to learn from experiences on the ground which can be applied for decision-making at the higher levels. Feedback mechanisms from different streams to include various sectors such as, civil society organizations, private sector, and government need to be developed to feed into national data on SDG results and outcomes.

A case of partnership between poor communities and the academe

Academic institutions play a role in bridging available human, organizational, and material resources with community needs. De La Salle University (DLSU), one of the leading universities in the Philippines, is a case in point. Its community engagement programs are anchored on the priorities of the UN on international development. The

University, through its Center for Social Concern and Action (COSCA), focuses its partnership with neighboring barangays in the areas of education, environment, health, and social entrepreneurship which are in line with specific SDGs.

SDG 4 which is "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all" is addressed by the Lasallian Accessible, Relevant and Alternative Learning (L-ARAL) component, integrating continuing education and scholarship opportunities for the disadvantaged youth through non-formal education. By implementing an alternative learning system approach, out-of-school youth in seven partner barangays in Leveriza, Manila will obtain literacy and functional skills to enable them to work and earn a livelihood. It is a joint undertaking by the College of Education & COSCA. (COSCA, n.d.)

The Lasallian Social Enterprise for Economic Development (LSEED) program helps address SDG 8 "to promote [a] sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" and SDG 17 "to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development."

The LSEED seeks to develop social enterprise incubation facility for DLSU Manila and adopted communities in nearby barangays in Leveriza district. The program also aims to create jobs and livelihood opportunities for the adopted communities. The project period is from 2015 to 2020 in collaboration with the faculty of the College of Business, Liberal Arts, School of Economics & COSCA. (COSCA, n.d.)

The Lasallian Health Education, Accessible Resources, and Training Services (L-HEARTS), for its part, was developed to mainstream SDG 3 "to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages", SDG 5 "to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"; and SDG 16 "to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels."

In partnership with the DLSU Health Sciences Institute, this component aims to train and build the capacity of barangay health units, community health workers, and advocates on preventive health-care, focusing on non-communicable diseases, to marginalized sectors in Leveriza, Manila. It also mobilizes public and private institutions in providing basic health services to residents of poor communities near the University. (COSCA, n.d.)

The Lasallian Environmental Sustainability and Governance (L-EnviSaGe) component was designed to create awareness and build the capacity of local government units and communities in the areas of environmental sustainability and community resilience through good governance. Policy advocacy at the local government level and collaboration with private and public sectors are the main features of this component through projects with COSCA, the College of Science, the College of Engineering, and the College of Liberal Arts. (COSCA, n.d.)

This is in response to SDG 6 "to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all"; SDG 11 "to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable"; SDG 12 "to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"; SDG 13 "to take urgent action to combat climate"; and SDG 14 "to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, marine resources for sustainable development." To meet targets set in the SDGs, the Philippines can build on what worked in the country's experience of the MDGs. The first critical step is to have champions in the local setting such as, local chief executives. They need to be informed about the post-2015 global agenda and be engaged in local development efforts to operationalize them. With such champions, political will, resource mobilization, and enrolling people into the agenda within the context of specific communities can be done smoothly. Formulating projects in a participatory process can generate a sense of ownership by the communities which can guarantee sustainability. Institutional support mechanisms (e.g., committees, technical working and coordinating bodies, task force, etc.) can also ease project implementation. Transparency in local governance and making LCEs accountable to their constituencies is another requisite. To support this, local legislation can be issued to promote SDGs. (Asuncion, 2016).

Localizing the SDGs would require more intensive coordination at national and local levels. This calls for generating reliable data for analysis and assessment with the possible use of community-based monitoring system (CBMS) to feed local data into the national monitoring and reporting system.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There are already existing programs in government and private/ NGO sectors that can be finetuned and aligned to the SDG targets and indicators. These need to be integrated in the national development framework and the Philippine Development Plan under the Duterte administration.

The 10-point agenda of the Duterte administration seems to be consistent with SDG items 5 to 10 namely, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG 5); ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (SDG 6); ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all (SDG 7); promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8); build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (SDG 9); and reduce inequality within and among countries (SDG 10). Concrete policy actions have to be put in place to ensure that outcomes add up to the Philippines' performance in meeting the SDG targets.

With an integrated effort from government and other stakeholders including the academe, hopes are high that the Philippines can achieve the main goal to end extreme poverty by 2030 as envisioned in the post-2015 global development agenda.

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