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# Student Leaders' Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals

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## Abstract:

This study examines the extent of engagement of student leaders at St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP) in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through various leadership initiatives and activities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research evaluates student leaders' involvement in sustainability efforts and identifies key practices and challenges in leading SDG-related initiatives. A total of 239 student leaders participated in the study, assessing their engagement across the 17 SDGs. Findings indicate a very great extent of engagement. Complementing the quantitative data, qualitative interviews explored participants' experiences, practices, and challenges in spearheading SDG-related activities. Results highlight the significant role of student leaders in promoting environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and community development. The study also emphasizes the importance of strong institutional support, including adequate training and resources, to strengthen sustainability leadership. By aligning student initiatives with global sustainable development objectives, SPUP reinforces its role as a transformative educational institution—preparing future leaders with the skills, values, and motivation to drive meaningful change within their communities and beyond.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Engagement, Student Leaders, St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP)

## Introduction:

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a universal framework adopted in 2015 to address pressing global challenges, such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation (United Nations, 2015). With the increasing emphasis on sustainable development globally, educational institutions play a pivotal role in instilling values

of responsibility, citizenship, and civic engagement within their student bodies (SDSN Youth, 2020). As a higher education institution committed to holistic education, St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP) has recognized the importance of aligning its student activities with the advocacy for the SDGs. Integrating SDGs into the University's framework enhances education while empowering students to contribute actively

to global goals. SPUP's initiatives encompass community service, environmental stewardship, and social justice, all crucial elements of sustainable development (Baker et al., 2020).

Higher education institutions serve as incubators for future leaders who will drive sustainable change in various sectors (UNESCO, 2020). SPUP's mission to foster a culture of social awareness aligns with the broader objective of universities worldwide to integrate sustainability into its curricular designs and student activities. According to Sterling (2021), universities that actively engage students in sustainability programs produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable about global issues but are also equipped with the skills and motivation to address them. Relevant to this, student leaders at SPUP play a vital role in championing sustainability efforts on campus and in their local communities. In a similar context, studies have shown that student-led sustainability initiatives foster a strong sense of environmental and social responsibility among students (Tilbury, 2019). Furthermore, student engagement in sustainability programs enhances problem-solving skills, teamwork, and ethical leadership, all of which contribute to a holistic and meaningful academic experience (Lozano et al., 2019). By integrating sustainability into student leadership development, SPUP enables student leaders to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts (Baker et al., 2020). However, the level of involvement of student leaders in the SDGs and their impact on raising awareness has not been extensively studied in the Philippine context. Although student leaders are increasingly participating in sustainability initiatives, various obstacles, such as limited knowledge and understanding of the SDGs, hinder them from fully engaging with these goals (Suklun & Bengü, 2024). While many student organizations engage in social and environmental projects, there is a need for more structured education and training programs to ensure that these activities align meaningfully with the SDGs (García-Feijoo et al., 2020). This research aims to bridge this gap by examining the extent of engagement of SPUP student leaders and by

providing valuable insights into the nature of their involvement along SDG-related activities (Uzorika et al., 2024).

Assessing the extent of student leaders' engagement along the SDGs offers several benefits. It can improve awareness of global challenges among students, foster a sense of responsibility, and cultivate partnerships with local communities and organizations dealing with sustainability issues (Pérez & Martínez, 2021). This research is timely and vital for SPUP as it positions itself as a leader in sustainable and transformative education. Moreover, assessing the engagement of SPUP's student leaders along the SDGs is vital on how higher education institutions can promote more sustainable practices and behaviors (Chinyere, 2020). This research also provides an overview of the University's student leaders current engagement with the SDGs and develops future strategies aimed at enhancing student activities in alignment with global sustainable development objectives (Filho et al., 2024). Strengthening student leadership initiatives, addressing existing challenges, and fostering greater institutional support ensure that SPUP continues to be a key player in student leadership, sustainability education and community engagement (Lee et al., 2023).

### **Conceptual Framework:**

This research is anchored on the theory of student engagement (García-Feijoo et al., 2020) and the sustainability leadership model (Lozano et al., 2019), which emphasize the role of student leaders in fostering awareness and action toward the SDGs. Higher education institutions serve as catalysts for sustainable development by integrating the SDGs into student leadership initiatives, promoting civic responsibility, and encouraging real-world applications of sustainability concepts (Sterling, 2021).

### **Purpose of the Study:**

This research aims to examine the extent of engagement of the student leaders at SPUP in advancing the SDGs through various leadership initiatives and activities. By assessing the extent

of their involvement, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into how student-led efforts contribute to sustainability, social responsibility, and community development (UNESCO, 2019). Given the growing emphasis on integrating sustainability into higher education, this research identifies existing practices and challenges to determine the student leaders' engagement along the SDGs (Wade & Parker, 2020). Ultimately, the findings align with SPUP's institutional mission of nurturing socially responsible leaders who are prepared to initiate and sustain transformative change within their communities and in broader societal contexts.

### Methodology:

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze student leaders' engagement with the Sustainable Development

### Results and Discussion:

The following describes the concrete outcomes of the study by offering a comprehensive view of how SPUP student leaders translate global sustainability goals into actionable local initiatives. By highlighting patterns of engagement, innovative practices, and the contextual realities faced by student leaders, the

Goals (SDGs) at SPUP. The quantitative component involved a survey administered to 239 student leaders from various academic disciplines, using a researcher-developed questionnaire that was validated through expert review and pilot testing. The instrument consisted of 4-point Likert-scale items assessing engagement across the 17 SDGs, with mean scores calculated to determine the average level of participation per goal. The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring the practices undertaken and challenges encountered by student leaders in leading SDG-related activities. The responses were thematically coded to identify key patterns and strategies. This combination of methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of student leaders' engagement, offering meaningful insights to inform future sustainability initiatives within the university.

results focus on both the depth and diversity of student-driven contributions to sustainable development. The discussion connects these results to broader academic perspectives, reinforcing the vital role of SPUP in shaping socially responsible and globally aware student and youth leaders. This study also uncovers opportunities for growth and institutional support.

**Table 1. The Extent of SPUP Student Leaders' Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Sustainable Development Goals		Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
1	Poverty Alleviation	3.38	Very Great Extent
2	Zero Hunger	3.12	Great Extent
3	Good Health and Well-Being	3.33	Very Great Extent
4	Quality Education	3.27	Very Great Extent
5	Gender Equality	3.28	Very Great Extent
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	3.29	Very Great Extent
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	3.18	Great Extent

8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	3.20	Great Extent
9	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	3.29	Very Great Extent
10	Reduced Inequalities	3.33	Very Great Extent
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	3.25	Very Great Extent
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	3.30	Very Great Extent
13	Climate Change	3.21	Great Extent
14	Life on Water	3.05	Great Extent
15	Life on Land	3.14	Great Extent
16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	3.42	Very Great Extent
17	Partnership for the Goals	3.36	Very Great Extent
	Overall Mean	3.26	Very Great Extent

Table 1 illustrates the extent of engagement of SPUP student leaders across the 17 Goals (SDGs). With overall mean of 3.26, interpreted as “Very Great Extent,” it indicates a strong collective commitment among student leaders toward the global goals. The goals on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, followed by Poverty Alleviation, Partnership for the Goals, Good Health and Well-Being, and Reduced Inequalities are key areas where students are especially active. Additionally, the findings also underscore student leaders’ proactive participation in advancing SDGs that emphasize social justice, equity, and sustainable community development. Their consistent engagement across goals such as Quality Education, Responsible Consumption and Production, and Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure further reflect a broadened commitment to both environmental and socio-economic sustainability. This means that SPUP student-led initiatives go beyond awareness, demonstrating action-oriented involvement, particularly in issues of peacebuilding, innovation, education, and collaborative partnerships. These insights contribute to the growing recognition of

student leaders as vital stakeholders in the achievement of the SDGs.

*SDG 1 - No Poverty:* The mean engagement score for SDG 1 is 3.38, indicating a very great extent of involvement among student leaders in poverty alleviation efforts. Student leaders at SPUP have played an active role in poverty alleviation through various community outreach initiatives. These initiatives include donation drives, livelihood training, and partnerships with local barangays to provide resources and support to marginalized communities. Sterling (2021) suggests that educational institutions should serve as catalysts for social transformation, equipping students with practical leadership skills to address societal issues like poverty. By engaging in real-world initiatives, students have not only learned about the complexities of poverty but have also taken concrete steps to reduce it. This proactive approach mirrors the broader educational trend towards fostering socially responsible leadership (Tilbury, 2019).

However, limited resources remain a challenge. García-Feijoo et al. (2020) highlight the

need for institutional frameworks that offer continuous support to poverty alleviation initiatives, emphasizing the importance of structured training and access to sustainable funding. Furthermore, the integration of these efforts into broader community development programs can amplify their effectiveness. While student-led poverty reduction programs have had measurable impacts, overcoming logistical barriers and limited resources are critical steps in the implementation of these initiatives (Tilbury, 2019).

Additionally, there is a call for further integration of poverty alleviation strategies into the curriculum and student leadership training. This approach would ensure that students are not only participating in charity-based activities but are also developing sustainable, systemic solutions to poverty. Addressing these barriers, as Sterling (2021) suggests, would enhance the scalability and sustainability of student-led efforts in poverty reduction, fostering a culture of social responsibility across the university and beyond.

*SDG 2 - Zero Hunger:* With a mean score of 3.12, student leaders show a great extent of engagement in addressing hunger through localized food initiatives. At SPUP, student leaders have spearheaded initiatives aimed at addressing food insecurity in their community. These include organizing food pantries, school feeding programs, backyard gardening, and nutrition education workshops. Their actions resonate with the global push to address hunger at the grassroots level, as stated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021), which emphasizes the importance of community-driven efforts in combating hunger. Moreover, SPUP's initiatives align with the findings of Filho et al. (2024), who assert that integrating food sustainability into leadership education empowers students to implement long-term solutions to hunger. The student-led food literacy campaigns also echo global trends in advocating for sustainable food practices and reducing food waste.

Despite the general participation of students, significant challenges persist, including logistical hurdles in maintaining sustainable food programs and ensuring community participation. Suklun and Bengü (2024) discuss the necessity of both local and institutional support in realizing student-led food security projects, suggesting that such initiatives require stable resources and stakeholder cooperation to be truly effective. The sustainability of these programs is contingent not only on student enthusiasm but also on collaboration with local government units and private organizations to secure the necessary infrastructure and expertise.

To improve the impact of food security initiatives, SPUP's student leaders could benefit from enhanced training in food systems management and sustainable agriculture. According to Filho et al. (2024), this would not only increase the effectiveness of student-led programs but also contribute to the wider goal of sustainable food production. By further integrating food security into their educational design, SPUP can help ensure that their students lead the charge in achieving the Zero Hunger goal in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

*SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being:* Student engagement in SDG 3 is to a very great extent, with a mean of 3.33, reflecting strong promotion and participation in health and wellness efforts. SPUP student leaders have demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting health and well-being in their community through various initiatives, including medical missions, wellness campaigns, and mental health awareness programs. These efforts are consistent with UNESCO's (2020) framework, which advocates for a holistic approach to education that integrates both mental and physical health. Addressing health issues is not only a priority for public health but also for educational institutions striving to produce well-rounded and socially responsible graduates. Hollweg et al. (2019) argue that student-led health initiatives are critical in fostering health resilience, particularly in

underserved or rural communities, where access to healthcare resources is limited.

While these health-related initiatives have made a positive impact, challenges related to resource constraints and the need for professional healthcare expertise continue to limit the scope of these efforts. Lee et al. (2023) suggest that institutional partnerships with health organizations and the inclusion of health education in leadership training can significantly enhance the reach and sustainability of these programs. Such partnerships could provide the technical knowledge and resources necessary for scaling up health interventions and addressing gaps in community health education.

Moreover, expanding these health initiatives to include a broader range of services, such as health screenings, vaccinations, and regular mental health support, would contribute to a more comprehensive approach to well-being. As UNESCO (2020) stresses, integrating health promotion into educational leadership helps create a more resilient and capable student body, ready to address public health challenges on a global scale. Strengthening the foundation of these initiatives through formal collaborations with local and national health agencies could provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure their long-term success and sustainability.

*SDG 4 - Quality Education:* The mean score of 3.27 for SDG 4 signifies a very great extent of student involvement in promoting inclusive and quality education. At SPUP, student leaders have contributed significantly to promoting inclusive education, engaging in initiatives such as peer tutoring, community-based literacy programs, and digital learning projects. Their efforts reflect the increasing recognition of the need for equitable access to quality education, especially for marginalized groups. Pérez and Martínez (2021) emphasize that student engagement is key to enhancing learning access, particularly in marginalized communities, as students are often able to address educational barriers from a perspective that resonates with their peers. Through initiatives like mobile

learning resources, functional literacy drives, and study hubs, SPUP students have successfully expanded educational opportunities for local communities, especially those affected by natural calamities and other challenges.

Moreover, the integration of digital literacy into educational service-learning programs aligns with Lozano et al. (2019), who argue that technology can be a powerful tool in making education more inclusive and accessible. This is especially relevant in SPUP's partner communities, where educational opportunities may be limited. The students' efforts in providing digital skills training and promoting online learning platforms demonstrate their understanding of the evolving educational landscape and their ability to adapt to these changes. By fostering technological literacy, SPUP student leaders are contributing to educational equity, empowering students to participate more actively in the global knowledge economy.

Nonetheless, the logistical and technological barriers to reaching remote communities persist. Wade and Parker (2020) highlight the need for collaborative strategies between universities, local governments, and the private sector to overcome issues related to infrastructure, connectivity, and technological access. Addressing these challenges could enhance the impact of SPUP's initiatives, ensuring that all students, regardless of location, can benefit from quality education. By building stronger partnerships with key stakeholders, SPUP's student leaders can continue to expand their educational outreach and promote lifelong learning for all.

*SDG 5 - Gender Equality:* Student leaders' engagement in gender equality is rated at a very great extent, with a mean of 3.28. Student leaders at SPUP have demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting gender equality through awareness campaigns, gender sensitivity workshops, and educational forums addressing critical issues such as gender-based violence, gender stereotypes, and gender inclusivity. These efforts are in line with

global initiatives that call for inclusive and equitable educational environments (UN Women, 2020). By promoting gender discourse within their student organizations, SPUP student leaders have contributed to the creation of a more inclusive campus culture. Crenshaw (2017) underscores the significance of institutional support in advancing gender equality, noting that formal structures, such as gender focal points within student organizations, play an essential role in embedding gender equity into leadership activities and decision-making.

Furthermore, the collaboration between female and male student leaders in initiatives such as the "EmpowHER" campaign and gender and development workshops demonstrates the potential for cross-gender solidarity in fostering a culture of gender justice. Kabeer (2015) highlights the importance of such collaborations in challenging traditional gender norms and empowering women and girls. The use of student publications and social media platforms further amplifies the reach of these campaigns, with digital tools offering a dynamic space for advocacy and dialogue. Bates (2021) suggests that online platforms have become crucial in global movements for gender equality, with students leveraging these tools to disseminate information and mobilize action.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain in engaging conservative segments of the community. Perry (2018) discusses the cultural and ideological resistance that often arises when gender equality initiatives challenge traditional societal norms. This highlights the need for continued education and outreach to foster understanding and acceptance of gender equality principles. Strengthening formal policies and institutionalizing gender training for students and staff could help create an environment where gender equality is not just an advocacy, but a practice embedded in all aspects of university life.

*SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation:* The engagement level for SDG 6 is 3.29, interpreted as very great extent, showing solid student involvement in water and hygiene initiatives.

SPUP student leaders have engaged in various initiatives aimed at improving water and sanitation conditions in local communities, including cleanliness campaigns, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) education programs, and water conservation efforts. These initiatives align with global efforts to ensure access to clean water and sanitation, particularly in underserved regions, as emphasized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). The installation of handwashing stations in local barangays during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies the university's commitment to promoting public health and hygiene. Luby et al. (2021) highlight that access to clean water is not only essential for health but also a matter of social justice, as disadvantaged communities often lack the infrastructure necessary to maintain proper sanitation.

In addition to their activities, SPUP students have conducted educational workshops in schools and communities to raise awareness about the importance of water conservation and proper hygiene practices. These efforts are aligned with UNICEF's (2018) findings that community-based approaches to water education have lasting positive impacts on public health and environmental sustainability. By integrating water and sanitation education into broader environmental and disaster preparedness programs, SPUP students have ensured that these issues remain at the forefront of community discussions, empowering locals to take ownership of their water resources.

Regardless of their enthusiasm and commitment, student leaders faced significant challenges related to the sustainability of water and sanitation projects in remote partner communities. Sullivan et al. (2017) discuss the logistical and technical barriers to providing consistent access to clean water in rural communities. To overcome these challenges, collaborative efforts could help secure resources and technical expertise necessary to ensure that these water and sanitation initiatives are both sustainable and accessible. Tshombe (2020) suggests that educational institutions play a vital

role in supporting local governments in addressing these challenges through research, resource mobilization, and capacity-building initiatives.

*SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy:* A mean score of 3.18 reflects a great extent of student participation in advocating for clean and affordable energy solutions. The engagement of SPUP student leaders in promoting affordable and clean energy reflects their understanding of the critical need to transition to sustainable energy solutions. They have organized various advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, with a focus on making these technologies accessible to underserved communities. According to IEA (2020), access to clean energy is crucial for poverty alleviation, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. SPUP students have collaborated with the university, local governments and energy providers to facilitate community-based solar energy projects, aiming to provide sustainable power solutions for remote areas that suffer from unreliable electricity access.

Moreover, SPUP's student leaders have incorporated clean energy into educational programs by organizing workshops on energy conservation and the benefits of renewable sources. This aligns with the findings of Dey et al. (2018), who argue that educating communities on energy efficiency can play a key role in reducing carbon footprints and lowering energy costs. SPUP students have not only focused on energy access but also on reducing energy consumption in the university itself by promoting energy-saving habits and the use of eco-friendly technologies. These efforts have contributed to a more energy-conscious campus environment, reflecting the growing recognition of the importance of sustainable practices in educational institutions.

Notwithstanding these commendable efforts, challenges remain in making renewable energy solutions more affordable and accessible to the broader community. Mulugetta et al. (2019) emphasize that the high initial costs of renewable energy technologies, coupled with the lack of

infrastructure and financing options, can be significant barriers to adoption. To overcome these obstacles, SPUP could consider exploring partnerships with clean energy startups, government agencies, and international development organizations to create affordable and manageable energy solutions. Additionally, integrating clean energy projects into academic curricula could help inspire future engineers, entrepreneurs and other students to continue innovating in the field of sustainable energy.

*SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth:* The mean score for SDG 8 is 3.20, indicating a great extent of involvement in promoting work readiness and economic development. SPUP student leaders have played an important role in promoting economic growth and decent work opportunities, particularly through entrepreneurial initiatives and skill-building programs. Recognizing the challenges posed by youth unemployment, student leaders have organized workshops aimed at enhancing employability, with a focus on soft skills such as leadership, communication, and teamwork, alongside technical skills like coding and digital marketing. According to the ILO (2020), fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and equipping young people with market-relevant skills is crucial in addressing the global youth employment crisis. SPUP students have collaborated with local business owners and startups to create internship and mentorship programs that help students gain practical work experience.

Furthermore, SPUP student leaders have advocated for ethical employment practices and fair wages through campaigns that raise awareness about labor rights and social protection. These efforts are in line with the global push for decent work, as outlined by the UN (2019). By addressing issues like fair compensation, workplace safety, and equal opportunities, SPUP's initiatives help promote an inclusive work environment for all students. Additionally, the university's involvement in social enterprises has helped cultivate a culture of social responsibility, where students are encouraged to create

businesses that benefit both the community and the environment.

Nevertheless, challenges persist in providing adequate job opportunities for students, especially in a rapidly changing global economy. The rise of automation and artificial intelligence has led to the displacement of traditional jobs, and students must be prepared for an evolving job market. According to Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2018), the rapid pace of technological change necessitates a shift in educational and workforce strategies to ensure that students are prepared for the jobs of the future. SPUP could strengthen its efforts by expanding career counseling services, establishing stronger partnerships with industries, and providing resources for students to explore emerging sectors such as green technologies and the digital economy.

*SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure:* Student engagement in SDG 9 reached a very great extent, with a mean of 3.29, highlighting involvement in tech-driven and innovative initiatives. SPUP student leaders have actively contributed to the promotion of innovation and infrastructure development through their involvement in technological projects, particularly in fields such as sustainable construction, digital innovation, and engineering. According to the UNCTAD (2020), fostering innovation in industries and infrastructure is crucial for achieving sustainable development and addressing global challenges like climate change and resource depletion. SPUP students have demonstrated their commitment to these goals by participating in national and international competitions where they showcase their inventions aimed at solving societal problems.

Additionally, SPUP students have been at the forefront of promoting digital transformation in both their academic and extracurricular activities. Through hackathons, coding boot camps, and digital workshops, student leaders have empowered their peers to develop innovative solutions using technology. These activities align with the research of Sahay (2019), who asserts that digital innovation is a key driver of economic

growth and job creation. SPUP's investment in digital infrastructure, such as e-learning platforms and online research tools, has enabled students to engage in cutting-edge research and development, which in turn supports the university's broader goals of academic excellence and technological advancement.

In spite of these successes, challenges in infrastructure development persist, particularly in partner communities where access to technology and reliable infrastructure remains insufficient. According to Zhang et al. (2021), infrastructure development in developing regions often faces constraints such as financial limitations, political instability, and inadequate human capital. SPUP could address these challenges by establishing strategic partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and private companies particularly those that promote sustainable development. Additionally, incorporating innovation and infrastructure-related topics into the university's curriculum could inspire more students to pursue careers in fields related to technology, and sustainable development.

*SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities:* The mean engagement for SDG 10 is 3.33, showing a very great extent of participation in equality-focused projects. At SPUP, student leaders have demonstrated a strong commitment to reducing inequalities by advocating for the inclusion of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous communities, and economically disadvantaged students. These initiatives align with the principles outlined in the UN Youth 2030 Agenda (2019), which emphasizes youth leadership as a key tool for promoting inclusive societies. By organizing awareness campaigns, conducting service-learning, participating in ecumenical services, and creating accessible platforms for dialogue, student leaders have played an instrumental role in raising awareness about the need for equality in educational and social spheres.

Student-led programs such as scholarship drives, accessibility workshops, and events that promote inclusivity for PWDs and indigenous

communities reflect the university's focus on making education more accessible to all. These efforts resonate with Tilbury's (2019) findings that student leaders can help break down barriers and create more equitable opportunities for marginalized groups. Moreover, these initiatives have sparked important conversations about systemic inequality and human rights, with students advocating for policy changes in the wider community.

While these initiatives have made significant strides, challenges remain in achieving systemic change. Deep-seated social and cultural biases, as well as the lack of robust social support structures, have hindered the full realization of equality. According to Suklun and Bengü (2024), the success of inequality-reduction programs often hinges on the ability to implement sustainable, institution-wide policies that challenge discriminatory practices. To build on their progress in the community, SPUP student leaders could work toward establishing formal partnerships with NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations to advocate for inclusive policies, and create more structured platforms for engagement with marginalized communities.

*SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities:* Student participation in SDG 11 holds a mean of 3.25, which is interpreted as a very great extent. SPUP student leaders have been instrumental in promoting sustainable community development and resilience through initiatives focused on environmental preservation and disaster risk reduction. Their efforts to engage in greening projects, such as tree growing and community garden development, contribute to building more sustainable and livable urban spaces. These initiatives align with UNESCO's (2020) framework for integrating sustainability education into student leadership practices. By actively participating in neighborhood clean-up drives, mural painting projects, and waste management campaigns, students have fostered a sense of shared responsibility among community

members, reinforcing the idea that everyone can contribute to sustainable urban development.

Moreover, SPUP student leaders have shown a keen interest in disaster preparedness, organizing workshops and simulations on how to cope with natural disasters. This aligns with global recommendations for strengthening community resilience in the face of climate change and urbanization challenges. As stated by Sterling (2021), these experiential learning activities enhance students' ability to think critically about sustainable urban planning and to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. These initiatives not only promote environmental sustainability but also foster stronger community bonds, as students collaborate with local governments and NGOs to address issues of urban waste management and disaster risk reduction.

Despite the success of these projects, students have encountered challenges in navigating bureaucratic procedures and coordinating efforts with local government units (LGUs). As Lee et al. (2023) point out, effective collaboration between educational institutions, local governments, and civil society organizations is crucial for overcoming the complexities of community development. Strengthening these partnerships, along with providing students with more training in local governance and policy advocacy, could enhance their capacity to contribute to the development of sustainable and resilient cities and communities.

*SDG 12- Responsible Consumption and Production:* The engagement mean for SDG 12 is 3.30, showing a very great extent of student-driven sustainability practices. SPUP student leaders have actively promoted responsible consumption and production through a variety of sustainability initiatives. These initiatives, such as zero-waste campaigns, eco-brick building projects, "trash to patterns" project, and educational seminars on sustainable lifestyles, aim to foster a culture of environmental responsibility among students and the broader community. These efforts are consistent with the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO, 2021) call for

integrating sustainability practices into educational curricula to promote responsible consumption behaviors. SPUP students have also advocated for reducing single-use plastics and encouraged sustainable consumption patterns through campus-wide bans on non-recyclable materials.

Student-led efforts, such as recycling competitions and sustainable fashion events, have helped raise awareness about the environmental impacts of overconsumption. According to Filho et al. (2024), youth-led movements play a significant role in encouraging responsible production and consumption behaviors, particularly in educational settings. By demonstrating how small changes in consumption patterns can have large-scale environmental benefits, SPUP students are leading the charge in promoting more sustainable practices within their communities. Additionally, students have worked with local businesses to promote sustainable procurement practices, helping to create a circular economy in the region.

Yet, the transition to sustainable consumption and production is not without its challenges. As Wade and Parker (2020) indicate, the availability of sustainable alternatives and the higher cost of eco-friendly products can present significant obstacles to the widespread adoption of responsible consumption practices. To overcome these challenges, SPUP could consider institutionalizing sustainability policies that prioritize eco-friendly procurement and establish partnerships with green vendors to increase access to sustainable alternatives. Additionally, incorporating these practices into the academic curriculum could inspire students to pursue careers in sustainable industries, further advancing the SDGs.

*SDG 13 - Climate Action:* A mean score of 3.21 indicates a great extent of student engagement in climate action initiatives. Climate action is also a central focus of student-led initiatives at SPUP, with student leaders organizing activities aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change and raising awareness

about its consequences. Student engagement in climate strikes, reforestation drives, and carbon footprint awareness campaigns aligns with the findings of Hollweg et al. (2019), who emphasized that youth-led environmental programs are essential in fostering climate consciousness and catalyzing community action. By incorporating climate change education into workshops, webinars, and field activities, students have been able to communicate both the scientific understanding and ethical responsibilities that underpin climate action.

Through these activities, SPUP students have worked to engage not only their peers but also local communities in climate resilience efforts. These initiatives mirror Sterling's (2021) assertion that higher education institutions should be hubs for sustainability leadership, preparing students to tackle global environmental crises. By providing knowledge and practical tools for addressing climate change, student leaders are playing a crucial role in encouraging the adoption of environmentally responsible practices both on and off campus. Additionally, these actions are fostering a sense of urgency among students and community members to address climate-related challenges, emphasizing the need for coordinated action.

However, despite their enthusiasm and commitment, students have expressed challenges in shifting from awareness-raising to systemic action. As noted by Uzorka et al. (2024), students often face limitations in implementing continuing strategic initiatives that could influence policy or broader community practices. To address these challenges, SPUP could enhance its climate action programs by integrating more formal training in climate policy, environmental economics, and advocacy, thereby equipping students with the tools necessary for their climate initiatives.

*SDG 14 - Life Below Water:* Student engagement in SDG 14 is at a great extent, with a mean of 3.05, reflecting consistent advocacy for marine conservation. While SPUP is not located in a coastal area, student leaders have demonstrated a strong commitment to marine

conservation through awareness campaigns and collaborative efforts with coastal communities. Initiatives such as plastic reduction drives, marine awareness campaigns, and education on the impact of land-based waste on marine ecosystems are prime examples of the university's commitment to sustainability. These efforts resonate with Tilbury's (2019) argument that education for sustainability should transcend geographical boundaries and encourage global stewardship. By raising awareness of the link between land-based activities and ocean health, SPUP students have effectively broadened the scope of environmental consciousness to include marine conservation.

The involvement of students in collaborative coastal clean-up activities further aligns with the findings of García-Feijoo et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of student-led environmental projects in fostering a sense of global responsibility and sustainability. While SPUP students have worked to highlight the need for marine conservation, their initiatives have also helped to bring attention to broader issues related to waste management and plastic pollution, particularly in areas adjacent to coastal ecosystems. These campaigns have spurred dialogue within local communities, urging the adoption of sustainable practices that protect marine life.

Conversely, the geographical distance of SPUP from coastal areas has posed challenges for direct engagement with marine ecosystems. As written by Lozano et al. (2019), leveraging digital platforms for environmental education can help overcome geographical limitations. In this context, expanding the reach of marine conservation initiatives through digital education programs and establishing partnerships with coastal universities and environmental NGOs could enhance the impact of SPUP's efforts and provide students with opportunities for deeper engagement in marine conservation.

*SDG 15 - Life on Land:* With a mean of 3.14, the extent of student involvement in land and biodiversity initiatives is interpreted as great.

SPUP students have actively engaged in biodiversity protection efforts through tree growing drives, wildlife education programs, and reforestation campaigns. These initiatives align with UNESCO's (2020) call for student-led environmental literacy programs that contribute to the protection of ecosystems. By partnering with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and local eco-groups, student leaders have played a pivotal role in restoring degraded areas, promoting local biodiversity, and raising awareness about the importance of preserving natural habitats. These initiatives reflect the growing recognition of the need for educational institutions to take an active role in the conservation of life on land.

Student organizations have also spearheaded programs focused on educating communities about the importance of sustainable land management and the dangers of deforestation. These efforts resonate with the findings of Hollweg et al. (2019), who argued that student environmental leadership is crucial for enhancing ecological resilience at the local level. Through collaboration with environmental agencies, SPUP students have been able to create platforms for wider community engagement in biodiversity conservation, helping to build a collective sense of responsibility for the environment.

However, challenges remain in ensuring the sustainability and impact of these programs. As stipulated by Lozano et al. (2019), many student-led environmental projects face difficulties in tracking outcomes and measuring the effectiveness of their conservation efforts. To enhance the impact of biodiversity protection initiatives, SPUP could implement citizen science frameworks that allow for monitoring of local ecosystems and provide students with valuable data for refining their conservation strategies.

*SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions:* SDG 16 received the highest mean score of 3.42, indicating a very great extent of student involvement in ethical leadership and peace-building. SPUP students have been at the

forefront of promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions on campus and within their communities. Through initiatives such as anti-bullying campaigns, human rights education, and student election reforms, they have contributed to building a culture of transparency, accountability, and ethical governance. These efforts are in line with the United Nations Youth 2030 vision (2019), which calls for the active participation of young people in creating strong institutions and upholding democratic values. By practicing ethical leadership in student councils and other student organizations, they model the principles of peace, justice, and inclusivity within their own governance structures.

Student-led initiatives have focused on fostering peaceful conflict resolution methods, such as peer mediation programs and restorative justice workshops, which have contributed to reducing violence and promoting harmonious relationships among students. These initiatives align with the findings of Lee et al. (2023), who emphasized that practicing ethical leadership at the student level can have a lasting impact on future democratic engagement. Additionally, these efforts have encouraged students to be more mindful of their role in promoting social justice and inclusivity in all areas of campus life.

Despite these positive developments, students have encountered challenges in sustaining conflict resolution frameworks. As affirmed by Chinyere (2020), peace education and negotiation training are essential for strengthening student-led initiatives. By expanding training in conflict resolution, restorative justice, and governance, SPUP students could enhance their capacity to promote peaceful dialogue and equitable decision-making processes on campus and beyond.

*SDG 17- Partnerships for the Goals:* Student engagement in building partnerships is at a very great extent, with a mean score of 3.36. Partnerships have been central to the success of many of SPUP's student-led sustainability initiatives. Through collaboration with other school-based organizations, local government

units, NGOs, and other institutions, students have been able to leverage resources, expand their reach, and increase the effectiveness of their programs. These partnerships are in line with the collaborative ethos described by the SDSN Youth (2020), which emphasizes the importance of cross-sectoral partnerships in achieving the SDGs. By forming networks with local businesses, faith-based organizations, and international student associations, SPUP students have not only shared resources but also enhanced their collective impact on sustainability goals.

The ability of students to engage in multi-sectoral collaborations reflects the growing recognition that complex global challenges, such as poverty, climate change, and inequality, require diverse stakeholders to work together. According to Filho et al. (2024), partnerships can amplify the results of sustainability efforts and foster a more inclusive approach to addressing global issues. SPUP's emphasis on fostering global connections through academic partnerships and joint initiatives underscores the importance of collaboration in achieving the SDGs.

Still, sustaining these partnerships has proven to be a challenge. As observed by Uzorka et al. (2024), maintaining strong relationships requires institutional support, clear agreements, and ongoing communication. SPUP could benefit from formalizing these partnerships through memoranda of agreement (MOAs) and setting shared targets for mutual accountability, ensuring the continued success and growth of these partnerships.

## **Conclusion:**

This study affirms the critical role of higher education institutions in shaping student leadership that aligns with the imperatives of

global sustainable development. The engagement of student leaders at SPUP illustrates how academic environments can serve as incubators for nurturing ethically responsible, socially engaged, and globally competent individuals. The implications point to the value of integrating sustainability into student leadership experiences, foster heightened awareness of global issues and the development of key competencies in civic responsibility, collaboration, and innovation.

Furthermore, the study highlights that student leadership is a vital mechanism for embedding sustainability principles within both academic and community contexts. As SPUP actively supports student engagement in global sustainability efforts, it contributes meaningfully to the cultivation of future leaders capable of driving systemic change and social transformation. This indicates that the engagement of student leaders with the SDGs reflects an institutional commitment to equity, inclusivity, and shared responsibility—core values that enhance the transformative capacity of higher education in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Recommendation/S**

To enhance the impact and sustainability of student-led engagement with the SDGs, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Institutionalize SDG Training and Leadership Development Programs: SPUP should provide clear and practical training programs for student leaders on

sustainability topics like climate change, digital innovation, gender equality, and community involvement. These programs can be part of the leadership curriculum or extra activities to help students gain useful knowledge and skills.

2. Create a Centralized SDG Resource and Innovation Hub: SPUP can set up a space on campus where student leaders can find learning materials, get guidance, access data, and receive support for their sustainability projects. This hub can also help students work together and develop new ideas connected to the SDGs.
3. Strengthen Monitoring, Documentation, and Impact Reporting of Student Initiatives: SPUP should build a system to keep track of student-led SDG projects. This includes tools for recording results, making reports, and saving examples of successful projects. This helps recognize student work and share it with others.
4. Integrate SDG-Based Metrics into Institutional Planning and Evaluation: SPUP should include SDG-related indicators in how it checks progress and plans activities. This makes it easier to see the impact of student efforts and ensures they support the university's sustainability goals.

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