

ANDD Third Annual Meeting

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Success Stories in Incorporating SDGs in Education, Research, and Practice

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I. Introduction: ANDD Annual Meeting

The Academic Network for Development Dialogue (ANDD) holds a yearly meeting to bring together scholars and UN professionals, to discuss and encourage new themes/directions and ideas in the analysis of regional organizations and policy issues, as well as underlining gaps in SDGs' achievement strategies in the region. The third annual meeting was hosted by Qatar University on 18 May 2023, in collaboration with Al-Quds University and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) under the theme: "Success stories in integrating sustainable development goals into education, research and practice". The meeting covered a range of topics related to the SDGs, including education and research for sustainable development (Session 1), the role of the private sector in implementing SDGs (Session 2) and how inter- and non-governmental organizations serve the SDGs (Session 3). Finally, success stories from Malaysian and Kuwaiti universities showcased the fruitful implementation of SDGs in education and research, while the theme for the next two years of the ANDD paper series was revealed.

II. Session 1: SDGs in Education, Research & Practice

Session Overview:

This inaugural session shed light on the integration of SDGs within education, research, and practice, bringing several crucial topics to the forefront. Innovative strategies and projects to integrate SDGs into education and research were briefly discussed. Central to the discussion was the crucial role of academic organizations and policymakers in actualizing the SDGs. They carry the responsibility of fostering neutral platforms that encourage collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders.

Interlinking of SDGs:

The interlinked nature of SDGs emerged as a key theme, with emphasis on their collective importance and universal applicability. Also, the conversation explored the influence of socio-psychological factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic immigration on sustainable development. The need for innovative strategies to support individuals grappling with these challenges was accentuated.

Innovative Solutions/Projects:

The session presented innovative approaches and strategies that demonstrated effective implementation of SDGs in education. One such approach was the German Model dual studies by Dr. Isam Ishaq of Al-Quds University, Palestine. This approach involves partnering with private companies and allowing students to alternate between studying at the university and working at the company. This provides students with practical experience while acquiring the necessary qualifications. The model has been successful in addressing unemployment among graduates in Palestine, and it is being scaled up to international universities.

Another innovative approach mentioned was the establishment of small industry workshops within universities. These workshops simulate real factory environments, allowing students to gain practical experience and work on projects that have direct applications in industry. Such approaches encourage hands-on learning and bridge the gap between academia and the professional world.

Incorporation of SDGs in Education:

The need to integrate SDGs into education to foster sustainable development was a constant thread throughout the discussion. Universities were urged to lead by example, embedding SDGs within their curricula and everyday practices. Shared success stories illustrated the positive impacts of incorporating SDGs into education, such as enhanced productivity, fair trade practices, and an improved capacity to address societal needs.

III. Session 2: Engaging the Private Sector in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Session Overview:

This engaging session focused on the vital role of the private sector in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The discussions stressed the importance of contextual knowledge and creating customized regional solutions, highlighting the delicate balance between economic, environmental, and social factors that constitute sustainable development.

Participants identified the crucial roles of individuals, communities, and culture in this process, noting the importance of including human values and a sustainability mindset. The private

sector's underwhelming contribution, particularly in the Arab region regarding environmental, social, and governance issues, came under scrutiny.

Innovative solutions were discussed and the significance of collaboration between public and private sectors, R&D investment, behavioral economics, and data analytics in driving sustainable growth was reinforced.

Innovative Solutions/Projects:

Dr. Ahmad Ayyad of Al Quds University, Palestine, introduced a pioneering solution by establishing the Al-Quds Center, designed to equip graduates with career development, counseling, and job preparation services. This initiative is aimed at addressing the challenge of preparing graduates for the dynamics of professional environments.

Providing an insider's perspective from the industry, Dr. Mabrouk Ouederni, a representative from QAPCO (Qatar Petrochemical Company), emphasized the transformative potential of transitioning from linear to circular business models. He pointed out chemical recycling of plastic as a game-changer in addressing plastic waste, reinforcing the vital role of supportive legislation, continuous innovation, and comprehensive education in crafting sustainable solutions.

The Private Sector and Its Role in Advancing SDGs:

The session underscored the importance of embedding SDGs within the private sector to promote sustainable development. Despite some instances of industries 'greenwashing' their products to earn social credit, the progress made by the private sector in SDG implementation was recognized, noting its crucial role in bringing sustainable technologies into mainstream use. The session stressed the interdependence of economic growth and sustainable development, with emphasis on waste reduction, recycling, and R&D investment.

IV. Session 3: How Inter- and Non-Governmental Organizations Serve the SDGs

Session Overview:

This session emphasized the collective role of inter- and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recognizing the interconnectedness of the SDGs, the participants stressed the importance of collective action, incorporating all goals instead of prioritizing individual ones. The key role of policymakers and decision-makers in catalyzing collaboration and progress was recognized, with the Energy goal (SDG 7) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17) highlighted as central to SDG achievement.

Panelists proposed categorizing the SDGs into four clusters: Socioeconomic development, Environmental development, Ethical issues related to equality, and Human welfare, signaling the need for a multi-tiered and concerted approach at local, national, and regional levels.

Innovative Solutions/Projects:

Innovative solutions were highlighted, including the potential of viewing waste as a resource, and establishing alternative venues other than COP (Conference of Parties) for advancing SDG implementation. It was suggested that the public be harsher with corporations that choose to be ignorant about their impact on the environment. The discussions underscored the need to assertively address wasteful practices and move beyond conventional binding and non-binding agreements, underlining the proactive role NGOs and IGOs can play.

Uniting for Progress: NGOs and IGOs in Sustainable Development

Inter- and non-governmental organizations play a vital role in the practical application of SDGs, contributing significantly to local and global sustainable development. Effective leadership was identified as critical, spanning multiple levels from academia to institutions. A common-driven approach involving individuals who share aligned values and can translate these into actions was advocated.

Finally, the session emphasized the importance of creating new alliances and networks, both regionally and globally. Small-scale coalitions partnering with larger ones, collaborations between policymakers, private sectors, and academia based on evidence-based results were seen

as crucial. The need to combat fake news and misinformation that can derail progress towards the SDGs was also emphasized, reinforcing the vital role these organizations play in educating the public and promoting truthful information.

V. Success in Action: SDG Implementation Case Studies from IIUM and Kuwait University

Usrah in Action Initiative by IIUM University:

Dr. Zainal Abidin Sanusi showcased how IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia) transformed itself towards a "communiversity" through the "Usrah in Action" initiative. The project localized the SDG agenda by combining it with Shariah perspectives, utilizing the community-based approach of Sajahtera. This approach successfully leveraged existing cultural values within the Malaysian community to embrace the SDGs.

The initiative applied a Whole Institution Transformation (WIT) strategy by introducing three courses on sustainable development. Each course revolved around discovering a community problem, approaching communities to understand their issues, and implementing the project to solve the problem. The unique aspect of this approach was its research-focused work, distinct from traditional NGO-based work, which aimed to create impactful solutions to empower the community. Each project was linked directly to the SDGs.

This initiative earned the Green Gown Award, a testament to its success. The award served to recognize the initiative's focus on nature as a valuable source of knowledge and society as an effective teacher in sustainability education. This success story suggests that the integration of cultural values with the SDGs in an educational setting can yield impactful community-based solutions. It stands as a shining example for other institutions that seek to incorporate the SDGs into their curriculum, particularly within a community-focused, research-based approach.

Sustainable Development at Kuwait University:

Prof. Haitham M.S. Lababidi represented Kuwait University, highlighting its successful integration of SDGs into education, research, and professional practice. The university aligned its educational experience with state goals and future aspirations by identifying areas for improvement by utilizing key performance indicators (KPIs). Notable achievements include

Sabah Al-Salem University City, featuring smart buildings, advanced data systems, and an emphasis on environmental sensitivity while promoting sustainable practices like recycling, energy conservation, and water conservation.

The university's Innovation Office regularly reviews projects in healthcare, education, and engineering sponsored by both private and public sectors, with approximately 80% of them relating to SDGs. This success story showcases how Kuwait University incorporates SDGs into its curriculum, research, and operational strategies, fostering exceptional human capital and promoting sustainability.

VI. Call for ANDD Paper Series.

The conference provided a review of the recent ANDD paper series and unveiled the theme for the forthcoming two years. The series pursues two primary objectives: fostering constructive dialogue concerning challenges in the Arab region and offering a publishing platform for Arab scholars. The previous year's cycle yielded 62 abstracts, of which a dozen papers were chosen for publication.

The conference heralded the inauguration of the fresh theme set to span the next two years, centering on enhancing human well-being and fortifying capabilities. This theme intends to address multiple avenues for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Discussion touched on specific themes earmarked for the upcoming years, encompassing education, scientific research, and the labor market challenges confronting the youth.

Researchers were encouraged to concentrate on the intersection of science and policy, develop policy solutions, and devise intervention strategies. Highlighted was the necessity of cultivating conducive conditions, interdisciplinary skills, and bridging the divide between graduate aspirations and employer needs.

Finally, the conference made a call for submissions, announcing that papers could be submitted in either English or Arabic. Participants were urged to disseminate this information and to actively engage in the continuous dialogue, putting into action the knowledge derived from the conference.

VII. Conclusion

To conclude, the ANDD conference successfully highlighted the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across various sectors, including education, research, and professional practice. The conference offered insightful perspectives, novel approaches, and success stories from diverse stakeholders, demonstrating how the SDGs can be practically incorporated into their respective fields.

In particular, the role of the private sector, inter- and non-governmental organizations, and the academic community was underlined, noting their collective influence in driving sustainable development on both local and global scales. The discussions emphasized the necessity for collaborative efforts, the importance of adapting innovative solutions, and the need for fostering an environment conducive to sustainable practices.

Moreover, various success stories provided valuable lessons, proving the effective implementation of SDGs is both possible and beneficial. These instances of successful incorporation of SDGs into their practices can serve as inspiration and a guide for similar initiatives in other contexts.

The launch of the new theme for the ANDD paper series marked another significant milestone, further emphasizing the focus on human well-being and the strengthening of capabilities. Researchers were encouraged to focus on the intersections between science and policy and devise effective intervention strategies.

Ultimately, the conference served as a vibrant platform for exchanging ideas, sharing success stories, and promoting constructive dialogue around sustainable development in the Arab region. It has set a clear direction for future research and practice, with a strong focus on achieving SDGs through collaboration, innovation, and dedication.

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