



Fostering Sustainability and SDGs: The Experience of Uganda Management Institute in Promoting Sustainability and Implementation of SDGs in Uganda

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Abstract

The education sector, and more especially higher education, has been identified as one of the key avenues for promoting sustainability and supporting governments and other actors in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Management Development Institutes (MDIs) can particularly be handy in providing training, research and expert services to individuals and agencies as well as organizations on sustainability and implementation of SDGs. Such institutions enrol a number of practitioners on management-related courses and programmes and these individuals influence decisions in their organizations. A number of public agencies and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) approach such institutions to develop their management capacities and systems as well as providing expert services in various aspects of management and administration. The article presents the experience of Uganda Management Institute (UMI) in fostering sustainability and the engagement of government and other non-government actors on the implementation of SDGs in Uganda. The paper describes the various training, research, and policy engagements with actors on sustainable development and implementation of SDGs in Uganda conducted by the Institute.

Keywords: Sustainability Education, Uganda Management Institute, Policy Engagements on SDGs

Introduction

The conversations on sustainability and implementation of SDGs have been on for almost a decade at various levels (Calzadilla, Mauger, & Plessis, 2018). At global level, the conversations started with the Brundtland's report, "Our Common Future" in 1987 (UNESCO, 2011). This report provided a beautiful understanding of the concept and what it entails. Since then, individual governments and other actors have taken several steps in contextualizing sustainable practices and implementation strategies that promote economic, social, and environmental sustainability (UN, 2015). The academia has played a big role in engaging actors through their periodic research on sustainability and warning that if nothing is done, the globe would fail to have carrying capacity and therefore meeting

the needs of the current and future population (Alghamdi, 2018). The education sector, and more especially higher education, has been spotted as a key player in promoting sustainability (Reza, 2016). The UN decade of education for sustainable development illustrated the important role that education can play in promoting sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). While sustainability and related issues have been mainly visible in academic units focusing on the natural and geographical sciences in schools and universities, recent debates indicate that mainstreaming these issues across the various disciplines is more effective (Boyde & Hume, 2015). This implies that management and business education could be an avenue through which sustainability and implementation of SDGs can be promoted. Management Development Institutes (MDIs) can particularly be handy in providing training, research and expert services to individuals and agencies as well as organizations on sustainability and implementation of SDGs (Calzadilla et al., 2018). Such institutions enrol a number of practitioners on management-related courses and programmes and these individuals influence decisions in their organizations. A number of public agencies and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) approach such institutions to develop their management capacities and systems as well as providing expert services in various aspects of management and administration (Fernandez, Thi, & Shaw, 2014).

Uganda Management Institute is one of the MDIs in Uganda and the East African region that have been promoting sustainability and the implementation of SDGs through their study programmes, research interventions and policy engagement activities. This article presents the experience of Uganda Management Institute (UMI) in fostering sustainability and the engagement of government and other non-government actors on the implementation of SDGs in Uganda. First, the paper explores the integration of sustainability and SDGs in the postgraduate training programmes at UMI. This section examines how UMI successfully integrated these aspects in its curriculum by developing a cross-cutting module on sustainable development strategies offered across many of its postgraduate diploma programmes at all its campuses. The Master's and PhD programmes have doses of sustainability aspects in the contents of the core modules to contextualize these aspects in the various disciplines. Secondly, the paper examines the research activities and conferences organized with special themes on sustainability and implementation of SDGs. Through these conferences, UMI engaged government technocrats, academia, staff of Civil Society Organizations, policy makers and other citizens with interest in these issues from several countries. The paper shares the experience of UMI in engaging policy makers and influencing policies through the policy dialogue series. Through the Uganda Development Management Forum (UDMF), the institute has successfully engaged policy makers and government technocrats on various aspects including policy issues on sustainability and implementation of SDGs. Lastly, it highlights the key achievements and challenges faced in this process for the last decade.

Methods

The Context of the Selected Case

Uganda Management Institute (UMI) is the biggest public Management Development Institute (MDI) in Uganda. The UMI was established in 1969 as the Institute of Public Administration and later named the Uganda Management Institute with the enactment of the Uganda Management Institute Statute of 1992. It became a semi-autonomous public entity under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001 with a mandate of strengthening the management and institutional capacity of the public, private and Non-Governmental Sectors in Uganda and beyond. Its mandate covers provision of training through short and long-term courses or programmes for middle, senior, and executive level managers, organizing periodic conferences, seminars, and workshops, and; providing research, consultancy and distance learning services to the public, private and NGO sectors in Uganda and beyond. The Institute offers short-term training at certificate level in the areas of strategic management, project planning and management, project monitoring and evaluation, human resource management, administrative skills, and other management-related aspects. Many of the participants for these short courses are lower-level managers who acquire basic and soft skills to enhance their capacity in dealing with management and administrative functions in their organizations (UMI, 2021).

With respect to long-term programmes, the Institute offers a number of postgraduate diplomas, master's degree programmes in the areas of project planning and management, human resources management, public administration and management, Institutional leadership and management, Information systems management, public policy analysis and management, Monitoring and Evaluation as well as Business Administration and Management. It also offers a PhD programme in Administration and Management. The institute has 3 branches spread across the country namely: UMI Mbarara branch in Western region, UMI Mbale branch in Eastern region and UMI Gulu branch in the Northern region. Most of the students at the Main campus located in Kampala city attend their courses on evening and weekend mode. The students within the branches mainly attend classes over the weekends while other students outside Uganda attend classes through the distance learning mode (UMI, 2019).

The Institute has a vibrant Research and Innovation Centre (IRIC) that manages the research and innovation activities including determining the research agenda, supporting the faculty to apply for research grants and developing capacity of faculty and administrators in research grant management. The IRIC also organizes periodic research seminars, symposiums and conferences that bring together researchers and policy makers on a number of policy and management aspects as well as development issues in the country and region. It also runs a policy think tank that organizes policy dialogues and engagements to shape government policy using evidence and guide policy makers on

effective policy interventions.

Through its consultancy arm, the Institute has provided expert services to the public, private and CSO agencies/ organizations in areas of management systems strengthening, capacity building of staff, applied research and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects, designing interventions in various sectors and recruitment and placement services as well as supporting institutions and organizations in developing management policies and strategies across sectors. The institute is held in high esteem for having provided training to almost 70% of Uganda's public service as well as private and CSO personnel. Currently, the institute has a student population of about 3,000 postgraduate students.

Research Design and Methodology

This paper presents a case study of a typical Management Development Institute (MDI) in a developing nation and its experience of promoting sustainability as well as effectively supporting the implementation of SDGs through postgraduate training, research, and policy engagement in the country. The researcher adopted a social constructivist perspective using the reflective methodology (Patton, 2015). Data was generated using a review of official documents, virtual correspondences and in-person discussion with faculty and administrators as well as key actors on sustainability and implementation of SDGs at the Uganda Management Institute in Kampala, Uganda. The researcher also reflected on the current practices at the institute in relation to the interventions on sustainability and its role in the implementation of SDGs. The data generated and analysed, reflects effective strategies that a management development institute in a similar context may adopt to promote sustainability and support the implementation of SDGs at national level. Other MDIs can borrow ideas and initiate interventions towards sustainability and achievement of SDGs in their respective countries.

Integration of Sustainability and SDGs in the Postgraduate Training at UMI

The institute has for the last 10 years ensured that aspects of sustainability are incorporated in its programming. UMI's programming comprises postgraduate training, research and innovation, policy dialogue and engagement as well as provision of consultancy services in the areas of management and administration. With respect to postgraduate training, the institute offers postgraduate diplomas, master's and PhD degree programmes in management and administration-related areas.

Since 2010, the institute has developed a cross-cutting module called Sustainable Development Strategies (SDS) that is offered across many postgraduate diploma programmes at all its campuses. The module is intended to provide a dose on sustainability and sustainable development to the students. The module is among the core modules for

all these programmes and has four (4) credit units and 56 contact hours in a semester. The content of the module covers fundamentals of development and sustainable development including its pillars, the development agenda at global, regional, and national levels. It also entails cross-cutting issues like environmental sustainability, gender equality, equity, and social inclusion as well as climate change. The module exposes students to practical integration of sustainability in their various sectors and offers examples of cases where sustainability has been integrated. There is a comprehensive discussion about SDGs and how various levels of government and actors can work towards their achievement. The module highlights the various strategies through which sustainability can be ensured across sectors of the economy e.g., agriculture, tourism, infrastructural development, education, and health as well as industrial development. The SDS module has been a huge success in all postgraduate diploma programmes and is highly appreciated by students across the UMI campuses.

For the master's and PhD programmes, sustainability aspects were integrated in the basic and core modules contextualized within the disciplines. For example, in the master's in business administration (MBA) programme, sustainability is integrated in modules like supply chain management, public sector management, public procurement management, transport policy planning and management, production and operations management, microfinance operations and management, as well as project planning and management. The content of all these modules has aspects of sustainability that are contextualized to make MBA students aware of sustainability issues in these areas of business management.

The same applies to UMI's master's in public administration (MPA) programme. Sustainability aspects have been integrated in several modules like local government administration and management, public service management, public procurement management, public policy management, urban development policy and planning, health policy and systems management and energy policy and management. The intention of integrating aspects of sustainability into the selected modules for master's and PhD programmes is to contextualize sustainability into specific core competences for the graduate. This would enable the graduate to practically reflect on sustainability and therefore the SDGs in his or her core aspects of the discipline. It is expected that the graduate would then transfer this knowledge and skills to the place of work and therefore take action accordingly.

Research Activities and Conferences on Governance and Service Delivery

The institute has over the years conducted applied research and organized international conferences on governance and service delivery in Uganda and Africa. The applied research covers areas of public sector reforms in the light of current global,

regional, and national development agenda like the MDGs in 2000, the SDGs in 2015 and the agenda 2063 by the African Union. Most of this research is conducted by UMI staff and postgraduate students. The institute also conducts commissioned applied research for government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as well as national and international NGOs and UN agencies. Part of the research has been focused on sustainability and implementation of SDGs in the different sectors of the economy. For example, a group of UMI staff and some PhD students conducted research on the role of public service in promoting sustainable public procurement in the transport sector in 2018. This study explored sustainability in the context of public procurement in the transport sector and the findings were used to engage the high-level civil services and government officials as well as private actors involved in the procurement processes on sustainability practices that can be adopted in this process. Another example of research on sustainability was the study on the community service functions of the higher education sub sector and the achievement of Agenda 2063 and SDGs conducted by three UMI staff and two PhD students in 2016. The findings of this study created awareness of the higher education actors in Uganda and the region to reflect on their community engagement function and the role it can play in supporting the achievement of Agenda 2063 (The Africa we want) and the SDGs. Several policy briefs were produced and used in engaging actors in this sector. The intention was to awaken the actors to start thinking about how their community engagement function can be a key driver in supporting these development frameworks.

In 2015, UMI in partnership with the Ministry of Public Service in Uganda, the International Association of Schools, and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) organized the 1st UMI International Conference on Governance and Service Delivery in Developing Economies. The conference was held at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala, Uganda, from 24th to 28th August 2015. The conference that attracted 154 participants from 45 countries, including Uganda, was aimed at how to speed up the pace of sustainable development, especially for low-income counties, through the generation of practical strategies for improving governance processes, curbing corruption, and improving social service delivery. The conference had five themes:

Theme 1: Public sector reforms

Theme 2: Performance management, monitoring and evaluation

Theme3: Post-NDG development agenda, globalization, regionalism, nationalism, and partnerships

Theme 4: E-governance

Theme 5: Anti-corruption strategies

After the four days of plenary sessions, panel discussions and thematic presentations, there was a call for governments and other actors to:

Re-design public service systems to respond the challenges of sustainable

development and poverty reduction;

Develop strong institutions and a capable, disciplined and committed public service to effectively implement the SDGs;

Customize the implementation of the SDGs to their specific contexts;

Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation systems and participation of citizens in these processes to enhance transparency and good governance;

Institute integrated, multi-sectoral approaches to implementing the SDGs with effective engagement of all actors;

Promote inclusiveness in the implementation of SDGs ensuring that nobody is left behind in accessing services;

Explore the adoption and rolling out of e-governance at all levels of government as an effective mechanism in the implementation of SDGs and service delivery in their respective countries;

Put in place effective mechanisms to fight corruption and strengthen anti-corruption institutional arrangements for effective implementation of SDGs and service delivery.

This conference was timely and ignited discussion around the implementation of the SDGs right at the beginning of their implementation. At the end of the conference, it was clearly evident that enhancing good governance, curbing corruption, and improving service delivery were critical for successful implementation of the SDGs. UMI and its partners successfully engaged key actors and policy makers from the 45 countries and therefore achieved its objective of fostering sustainability and calling for action right at the beginning of the SDGs to implement the development agenda.

After four years of implementing the SDGs, UMI and its partners organized the 2nd UMI international conference on governance and service delivery in developing economies. The conference was held at Hotel Africana in Kampala, Uganda, from 22nd to 26th October 2019. The conference was attended by 495 delegates from over 26 countries comprising academia, policy makers and actors from the private and NGO sectors. This conference was aimed at sustaining the debate on management challenges that perennially contribute to failure of African and other developing countries to meet their development targets. The delegates deliberated on new and emerging issues such as youth employment, sustainability higher education, food and agriculture, sustainable tourism, sustainable migration and special focus on sustainable development agenda, agenda 2063, regional and country-specific development strategies. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, the delegates explored new approaches to governance and management policy issues, practical strategies for improving governance process, curbing corruption, and improving service delivery.

UMI and its partners engaged the delegates in debates and discussions around effective public service reforms towards implementation of SDGs, localizing the SDGs and

the role of local governance, innovative engagement strategies for the private sector and other actors in contributing to the implementation of SDGs and policy reviews in the health and education sectors to achieve the SDGs. There were discussions around effective Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanisms that promote participation of communities to enhance evidence-based implementation of SDGs. The conference also explores the innovative approaches and strategies that higher education can adopt in promoting sustainability education and supporting governments and the private sector to implement SDGs. These two conferences were key in engaging actors across different sectors and political leaders in Uganda as well as other developing countries to reflect on their governance systems as well as their approaches and practices in promoting sustainability and the implementation of SDGs.

Policy Dialogue Series on Sustainability and Implementation of SDGs

In 2003, UMI established the Uganda Development Policy Management Forum (UDMF) with the support from the Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF) based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The intention was to provide various stakeholders in the development process with an opportunity to make positive and informed contribution to national policy development and implementation process in Uganda and Africa in general. The Forum is a think tank for analysing policy development and implementation issues that are relevant to the country and the Great Lakes region. Through its activities, the forum influences policy development and management, including policies for the implementation of SDGs.

Through the UDMF, UMI has held a number of policy dialogues on topical issues including those that relate to sustainability and the implementation of SDGs in Uganda and the region. The dialogues bring together academicians, CSO actors, private sector actors, government technocrats, policy makers, implementors and citizens concerned with national policy. These often debate and provide alternative input into the policy development, implementation, and management processes. Examples of policy dialogues held include:

- A policy dialogue on financing higher education in Uganda; A case of public universities;

- A policy dialogue on agricultural value chains and the benefits for smallholder farmers;

- A policy dialogue on land use policy and implications for sustainable development;

- A policy dialogue on management of disasters in Uganda;

- A policy dialogue on transport management policy and its implications for sustainable development;

- A policy dialogue on pursuance of SDGs among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Uganda;

A policy dialogue on gender equality in Uganda and the implications on the achievement of SDGs;

A policy dialogue on Uganda's tax regime; implications for sustainable socio-economic development in Uganda.

Through these policy dialogues, UMI has influenced development policy and promoted integrated of sustainability as well as the implementation of SDGs by government and other actors outside the government. The dialogues created spaces for the academia, policy makers, government technocrats and citizens to effectively engage on various government policies, including making recommendations for policy review and reforms towards sustainability-friendly practices. The dialogues have created an effective avenue for critical analysis of these policies and a space for the academia and CSO actors to share evidence in support of policy review and reforms in Uganda.

Achievements and Challenges

The Institute has registered a number of achievements with respect to promoting sustainability and supporting the implementation of SDGs in the country. These include: Almost all students have a dose on sustainability and SDGs in their programmes. This has led to production of graduates who are sensitized and informed about these aspects and appreciate the need to adopt sustainable practices and support the implementation of SDGs at whatever levels.

The policy engagements through the UMDF have led to increased awareness among policy makers and government technocrats on issues of sustainability and SDGs. A number of government policies have been reviewed and analysed and recommendations for policy reforms have been made during the dialogues.

The two conferences held on governance and service delivery have engaged hundreds of academia, policy makers, government technocrats and interested citizens. These engagements made a loud statement on sustainability and contributed to original ideas on the implementation of SDGs.

Despite these achievements, a lot needs to be done to promote sustainability and support the implementation of SDGs. The institute will strive to open up more training programmes specializing in climate change and sustainability management; embark on evaluation studies to assess the integration of sustainability practices in the major key sectors of the economy; and establish a centre of excellence in sustainability management to promote sustainability research and innovation at the institute.

There are several challenges that UMI faces in its quest to promote sustainability and support implementation of SDGs. These include:

- a) limited number of experts on sustainability which limits the number of programmes and initiatives on these aspects;
- b) limited funding to implement more programmes and activities, especially

evaluative studies on the implementation of SDGs in the various sectors.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

UMI, a public Management Development Institute (MDI), in Uganda has for more than a decade worked hard to promote sustainability and the implementation of SDGs in Uganda and the region. Through its study programmes, research, and policy engagement interventions, it has been able to reach out to thousands of postgraduate students, members of the academia, policy makers, government technocrats and other interested citizens on issues of sustainability and supporting the implementation of SDGs in Uganda and other countries. This implies that other MDIs across the globe have the potential of promoting sustainability and supporting governments and other actors to implement SDGs. The experience of UMI provides a good ground for other MDIs to innovate and implement interventions within their contexts and systems on sustainability and SDGs. However, this can only happen when the governance organs of such institutions appreciate the need to promote sustainability through the programmes as well as organizational practices. Integrating sustainability-friendly practices in the organizational culture and systems through reviewing their organizational strategies, policies and HR manuals would be the first step in working towards sustainability. Curriculum review to integrate sustainability and SDGs can then be the next step in this direction. There are co-curricular activities that can be organized at campus for students and staff to create awareness on SDGs. These could be festivals, sports events, innovation weeks, talk shows etc. MDIs moving in this direction could explore such activities.

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