

Bridging the Gap: Assessing Challenges in University Community Extension for Sustainable Development

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Abstract: This study assessed the challenges and effectiveness of the university's community extension programs in promoting sustainable development. Using a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, data were gathered through surveys and qualitative interviews with faculty, students, and community stakeholders. Findings revealed 29 active programs across various departments, with strong collaborative partnerships (Mean = 3.67) but gaps in resource allocation (Mean = 3.16) and impact assessment (Mean = 3.25). Stakeholders identified key challenges such as financial constraints, manpower shortages, low community engagement, and bureaucratic delays. To address these issues, proposed intervention programs include resource mobilization, volunteer training, strengthened government collaboration, and structured evaluation systems. The study concludes that while the university's initiatives are impactful, enhancing funding strategies, faculty and student participation, and systematic monitoring will further improve sustainability and effectiveness.

Keywords: Bridging the Gap, Challenges, University Community Extension, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

University community extension programs in the Philippines play a crucial role in addressing local challenges and promoting sustainable development. However, despite their potential, these initiatives face obstacles including limited resources, lack of strategic partnerships, and misalignment with sustainable development goals (PSA, 2021; Zakaria et al., 2024).

Prior studies emphasize gaps in integration of sustainable practices, insufficient partnerships, and limited stakeholder engagement (Brundiars et al., 2021; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). This study addresses these gaps by assessing the challenges and proposing interventions to strengthen community extension programs.

Objectives:

1. To determine the status of the university's community extension programs.
2. To evaluate challenges in terms of partnerships, resource allocation, impact, and barriers.
3. To describe effectiveness in outreach strategies, SDG contributions, needs assessment, and stakeholder collaboration.
4. To explore stakeholders' perceptions and experiences.
5. To propose interventions for sustainable improvement.

METHODOLOGY

A **mixed-method sequential explanatory design** was employed. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys (Likert scale), followed by qualitative interviews and focus groups to deepen interpretation.

Respondents

Purposive sampling selected **30 faculty members** and **one community extension coordinator** from four schools of NU Baliwag (AY 2024–2025).

Data Collection

Permission from the Academic Director and ethics clearance were secured. Data were collected via Google Forms and email. Ethical compliance followed the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173) and RA 10532.

Instruments

Survey with 4-point Likert scale (1 = Not Evident, 4 = Very Evident). Interview guide on stakeholder challenges.

Analysis

Quantitative data analyzed with **Excel & SPSS** (means, descriptive stats). Qualitative data coded thematically into categories and themes.

Results

Status of Community Extension Programs

A total of **28 programs** were implemented across departments: Institutional ComEx (12), SBA (6), SHS (6), SEAS (2), Graduate School (2), and STHM (1).

Quantitative Findings

- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Very Evident (M = 3.67) – strong stakeholder engagement.
- **Resource Allocation:** Evident but low (M = 3.16) – gaps in funding, efficiency, and utilization.
- **Impact Assessment:** Evident (M = 3.25) – structured indicators present, but sustainability is limited.
- **Barrier Mitigation:** Evident (M = 3.34) – strategies exist but resource shortages persist.
- **Outreach Effectiveness:** Strongly Agree (M = 3.51) – active evaluation and feedback.
- **SDG Impact:** Agree (M = 3.41) – programs linked to SDG 1, 3, 4, 8, 13, and 15.
- **Community Needs Assessment:** Agree (M = 3.43) – adjustments made based on feedback.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Agree (M = 3.49) – effective partnerships, strong resource sharing.
- **Challenge Mitigation:** Strongly Agree (M = 3.61) – regular evaluation and updating of approaches. **Qualitative Findings**

Thematic analysis revealed four core barriers:

1. **Financial constraints** – lack of funding for long-term sustainability.
2. **Human resource shortages** – limited faculty/student volunteers.
3. **Community engagement barriers** – low awareness and participation.
4. **Collaboration challenges** – bureaucratic delays with LGUs and partner institutions.

Discussion

The study confirms that **NU's community extension programs are impactful yet constrained**. Collaborative partnerships and outreach strategies are strong, but issues in **funding, manpower, and long-term impact assessment** hinder full sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

1. NU demonstrates strong commitment with 28 extension programs.
2. Resource allocation and sustainability remain weak points.
3. Stakeholders report challenges in funding, manpower, community engagement, and bureaucratic processes.

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4. Interventions such as resource mobilization, volunteer recruitment, community awareness campaigns, and enhanced government partnerships are necessary.

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