ASSESSING COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS ON THE ROLE OF RAJAMANGALA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY RATTANAKOSIN IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Pranom Thangpreecharparnich
Rujeepat Pasukree
Wipawan Janprachum
Mahachai Sattayathamrongthian
Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

This research investigates the role of Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin (RMUTR) in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its community, exploring community perceptions, educational outcomes related to sustainability initiatives, and challenges and opportunities for Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, which RMUTR faces in its engagement efforts. Through a qualitative methodology involving

Pranom Thangpreecharparnich
M.B.A., Assistant Professor, Vice President, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand
Research interests: business, accounting
E-mail: pranom.tha@rmutr.ac.th

Rujeepat Pasukree
M.B.A., Assistant Professor, Lecturer, Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand
Research interests: business, management
E-mail: rujee.pas@outlook.rmutr.ac.th

Wipawan Janprachum
PhD, Deputy Dean, Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand
Research interests: industrial management
E-mail: wipawan_kik@rmutr.ac.th

Mahachai Sattayathamrongthian
D.B.A., Assistant Professor, Head of the Faculty of International Business, Business Administration, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand
Research interests: international business
E-mail: mahachai.sat@rmutr.ac.th
semi-structured interviews with various community stakeholders including students, faculty, local government officials, business owners, and residents in Nakhon Pathom. This study provides in-depth understanding of the expectations placed on RMUTR and its strategies to align with both global sustainability goals and the needs of the local community. The findings reveal community expectations, highlighting a pragmatic desire for direct, tangible benefits from the university's resources and capabilities, such as facility sharing, expertise in sustainability, and the development of practical skills through educational programs. While local businesses emphasize the need for resource sharing and partnership facilitation for immediate economic benefits, students and residents express a strong preference for practical sustainability support, exemplified by the demand for projects like the installation of solar panels.

Challenges identified include a need for more awareness about the SDGs among community members, resource constraints, and the difficulty of aligning university initiatives with immediate local needs. Opportunities for RMUTR lie in leading awareness campaigns, leveraging partnerships to pool resources, and conducting regular needs assessments to ensure the relevance and impact of sustainability initiatives. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of developing clear metrics for measuring the impact of these initiatives and fostering sustained community engagement.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); community engagement; Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin

**Introduction**

Educational institutions play a critical role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by raising awareness of sustainable development, imparting knowledge, and developing the capacity needed to solve complex global problems. Educational institutions are expected to engage with local communities to raise awareness of sustainable development issues and collaborate on projects that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs (Katarina, 2021).

Integrating sustainable development into educational content equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to achieving the SDGs. This involves revising curricula to include topics on climate change, sustainable living, and global citizenship (Verhulst & Lambrechts, 2015). Educational institutions are also expected to adopt pedagogical approaches that encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and active participation in sustainability initiatives (Lozano et al., 2017).

Furthermore, communities expect educational institutions to lead by example by incorporating sustainable practices into their operations. This includes energy conservation, waste reduction, and promotion of sustainable transport options (Disterheft et al., 2015).

These practices not only reduce the institutions' environmental footprint, but also serve as a practical learning experience for students. Research and innovation in sustainable development are another crucial expectation. Educational institutions are uniquely positioned to contribute to SDG-related research addressing issues such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and water conservation (Leal Filho et al., 2019).
Through partnerships with local communities, businesses, and government bodies, educational institutions can ensure that their research has a tangible impact on sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin (RMUTR), established in 2005 in Thailand, is renowned for its focus on vocational and technical education. The university, known for its practice-oriented teaching approach, consists of four campuses: Salaya (main campus), Bophit Phimuk Chakkrawat, Poh-Chang, and Wang Klai Kangwon (RMUTR official website, n.d.).

RMUTR assesses its integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) using key indicators such as the training of staff in SDGs, the inclusion of SDG-related content in the curriculum, reduction in energy consumption, and the strength of partnerships for SDGs (Seesa et al., 2024). These indicators help evaluate RMUTR's commitment to embedding SDGs in its educational and operational activities.

RMUTR plays a key role in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their communities. However, they need help in aligning their initiatives with both global sustainability targets and local community expectations. The primary obstacle is the identification and integration of community needs with the broader objectives of the SDGs. There is often a gap between the potential of universities to contribute to sustainable development and the actual implementation of projects that resonate with local priorities and expectations. Such disunity not only reduces the effectiveness of such initiatives, but also limits community engagement and participation, which are important components for achieving sustainable results.

In addition, small universities need help with resource limitations, requiring them to prioritize initiatives that can deliver the most significant impact. Therefore, identifying strategies to effectively leverage their unique position and resources to advance the SDGs in a way that meets community expectations is critical.

**Research questions**

How does the community perceive the role of RMUTR in promoting sustainable development goals?

How do RMUTR's sustainability initiatives contribute to the educational outcomes of students in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards sustainable development?

What are the main challenges RMUTR faces in implementing its sustainability initiatives and engaging with the SDGs community?

**Research objectives**

To understand community perceptions and expectations regarding the role of RMUTR in advancing the SDGs.

To identify challenges and opportunities for RMUTR in enhancing its contribution to achieving the SDGs through community engagement.

**Literatures review**

*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

Thailand's dedication to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations in 2015 exemplifies a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development.
By integrating these global goals into its national policies and strategies, Thailand has made remarkable strides across various sectors, demonstrating both progress and acknowledging the challenges that remain.

In the area of poverty reduction (SDG 1), Thailand has witnessed a significant decline in poverty rates, highlighting the effectiveness of its economic strategies. Despite this success, rural areas and ethnic minorities continue to face challenges, underscoring the need for targeted interventions (World Bank, 2022). Food security and sustainable agriculture (SDG 2) have seen advancements, though issues related to nutritional quality and access for marginalized communities persist, pointing towards areas requiring further attention.

The Universal Health Care System (SDG 3) stands as a testament to Thailand's commitment to health and well-being, even as the country continues to struggle with non-communicable diseases and health inequalities (Sumriddetchkajorn et al., 2019). In education (SDG 4), the country navigates the delicate balance between embracing the international sustainability agenda and preserving Thai tradition, indicating a nuanced approach to educational reform (Tan & Vickers, 2024).

Gender equality (SDG 5) has seen efforts to dismantle power structures that perpetuate discrimination in order to create more inclusive societies (UNDP, n.d.). At the same time, improvements in clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) have been marked by significant advancements, albeit with existing pollution and management challenges (The United Nations in Thailand, n.d.).

The transition to renewable energy (SDG 7) demonstrates Thailand's efforts to reconcile energy needs with environmental protection (IEA, 2023). The country's approach to economic growth and employment (SDG 8) reflects a commitment to sustainable practices, even as it faces labor rights challenges in specific sectors (ILO, 2019). Industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9) remain central to economic competitiveness, supported by macroeconomic and financial stability (The Nation, 2024).

Reducing inequalities (SDG 10) remains a work in progress, with significant disparities still present (World Bank, 2023). Urban development strategies (SDG 11) address the challenges of rapid urbanization (UN-Habitat, n.d.), and sustainable consumption and production initiatives (SDG 12) aim to mitigate waste and environmental impact (The United Nations in Thailand, n.d.).

Climate action (SDG 13) involves policies and international cooperation to address environmental challenges. Efforts to protect marine life (SDG 14) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15) focus on sustainable management and biodiversity conservation (The United Nations in Thailand, n.d.; Thailand Social Innovation Platform, 2018). Governance and the rule of law (SDG 16) are crucial for peace, justice, and strong institutions, with ongoing efforts to enhance transparency.

Finally, partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) underline the importance of collaboration and domestic resource mobilization, including international support for developing countries (The United Nations in Thailand, n.d.). Thailand's journey toward the SDGs exemplifies a committed and multifaceted approach to sustainable development, reflecting both achievements and the road ahead.

Stakeholder Theory, formulated by Freeman (1984), underscores the importance of considering the interests and expectations of all stakeholders in the operational and strategic decisions of educational institutions.
This holistic approach is critical to aligning educational objectives with the SDGs, ensuring that institutions contribute effectively to societal and environmental sustainability. Service-learning theory, highlighted by Bringle & Hatcher (1996), advocates an educational approach that combines learning goals with community service. This pedagogical strategy not only enriches the learning experience, but also directly contributes to the achievement of the SDGs by addressing real-world issues through academic inquiry and practical application.

Social Cognitive Theory, introduced by Bandura (1977), emphasizes the role of observation, imitation, and modeling in learning and behavior change. Educational institutions can use this theory to promote sustainable behavior among students and staff, thereby advancing the SDGs related to quality education, reduced inequalities, and climate action through demonstrative leadership in sustainable practices.

Transformational Leadership Theory, discussed by Bass & Avolio (1994), emphasizes the influence of visionary leadership in stimulating and enacting organizational change. In the context of education, leaders can mobilize an institution to achieve sustainable development goals by creating a culture that supports the SDGs both within the country and in the wider community.

Community-Based Learning Theory, developed by Minkler & Wallerstein (2008), focuses on the synergistic benefits of close interaction between educational institutions and their communities. This approach facilitates meaningful learning experiences that are deeply embedded in the community's context, thereby enhancing the educational sector's contribution to achieving the SDGs.

The Sustainability Education Framework, proposed by Sterling (2001), calls for an integrated approach to sustainable education, encompassing environmental, economic, and social aspects. This framework advocates a holistic educational paradigm that empowers students to critically address complex sustainability issues while aligning with community expectations and contributing to the global sustainability agenda.

Finally, Critical Pedagogy, as conceptualized by Freire (1970), encourages a reflexive and questioning stance in relation to prevailing norms and practices. This pedagogical approach empowers students to engage critically about sustainability issues, promoting active, informed citizenship that supports the achievement of the SDGs.

Research methodology

The qualitative method was chosen for its ability to deeply explore complex issues such as community expectations and the challenges to sustainability efforts (Creswell, 2013). The study involved semi-structured interviews with 45 stakeholders from Nakhon Pathom, including students, faculty, officials, business owners, and residents, to elicit diverse perspectives (see Tab. 1).

Following the Delphi method, a broad participant base is essential, typically more than 30 people, to ensure that diverse perspectives are taken into account (Sattayathamrongthian & Vanpetch, 2022). This diverse pool of participant provides a comprehensive understanding of community expectations from multiple stakeholder perspectives.
Table 1 - Demographic of interview community representatives in Nakhon Pathom
(compiled by co-authors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private company</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Official</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Owner</td>
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<td>15.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Resident</td>
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<td>22.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resident District</td>
<td>Phutthamonthon</td>
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<td>26.667</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nakonchaisri</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Sam Phran</td>
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<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kampangsan</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meung</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
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The semi-structured interview format provides flexibility to explore topics deeply while ensuring that all relevant areas are covered (Patton, 2015). The interview guide will be developed based on the research objectives and questions, ensuring consistency in the interviews while allowing for in-depth exploration of individual perspectives.

To refine the interview questions and improve reliability, a pilot test will be conducted with a small group of participants. Interviews will be recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure the accuracy of data collection (Seidman, 2013). The study will adhere to ethical guidelines, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis will follow thematic analysis techniques, including initial coding, development, and refinement, ensuring a systematic approach to data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The research employs strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and audit trails. Triangulation will be achieved by comparing data from different sources (e.g., interviews with students vs. faculty).
Member checking involves sharing findings with participants to verify accuracy. Audit trails, documenting the research process and decisions, will enhance transparency and allow for verification of the research results (Maxwell, 2012).

**Research result**

*Community perceptions and expectations of RMUTR's role in promoting Sustainable Development Goals*

Most business owners expect the university to share resources that could benefit the local business community. This could include access to university facilities (such as meeting spaces), equipment, or even human resources in the form of student internships or faculty consultancy. The aim here is to use university assets to support business operations, innovation, and development.

Business owners expect universities to facilitate connections that can lead to partnerships, funding opportunities, or new customer bases. Events such as business fairs, networking dinners, and speaker series are venues where such connections can be fostered.

Business owners may not primarily seek sustainable support from universities and recognize that immediate economic pressures often necessitate a focus on short-term profitability and survival over long-term sustainability goals. The reality of the current economic environment is forcing these businesses to prioritize strategies that ensure short-term financial viability and organizational survival.

Most students and residents are increasingly seeking tangible, practical support from their universities to engage with and contribute to these goals directly. Moving toward practical implementation of SDG-related projects, such as the cost-effective installation of solar panels, represents a proactive approach to sustainability that benefits both the university community and the broader environment. Practical support, such as installing solar panels, is a direct way for universities to reduce carbon emissions, lower energy costs, and promote renewable energy.

The community expects the university to actively seek partnerships with other educational institutions, government, NGOs, and the private sector to work on SDG-related projects and initiatives, leveraging its network for more significant impact. There is also an expectation for the university to take a proactive role in advocating for sustainability, both within its operations and in the broader community, influencing policy and practice in favor of the SDGs.

*Challenges and opportunities for RMUTR in enhancing its contribution to achieving the SDGs through community engagement*

Enhancing its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through community engagement presents both challenges and opportunities for the Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin (RMUTR).

1. Awareness and engagement: a significant challenge identified was the need for more awareness among community members and stakeholders about the SDGs and their relevance. This lack of awareness has hindered meaningful engagement in sustainability initiatives. However, the opportunity for RMUTR to conduct awareness campaigns and educational programs has become a critical strategy. The university's efforts to host public lectures,
workshops, and events focused on SDG themes have begun to improve engagement and understanding of sustainability issues within the community.

2. Resource constraints: the study identified the challenge of limited financial, human, and physical resources, which restrict the scale and scope of RMUTR’s sustainability initiatives. Despite these constraints, the university has found opportunities through partnerships with local businesses, government bodies, and NGOs. These collaborations brought together resources and expertise, enhancing the university's ability to support the SDGs through community engagement. Grant writing and fundraising campaigns targeting sustainability projects were also identified as vital in providing additional resources.

3. Aligning interests with community needs: the discrepancy between the interests and expertise of the university and the immediate needs or priorities of the local community was noted as a problem. However, RMUTR’s approach of conducting regular needs assessments and engaging in open dialogues with community representatives has begun to align university initiatives with local priorities. Projects created in collaboration with the community ensured relevance and impact, bridging the gap between university resources and community needs.

4. Measuring impact: the complexity of effectively measuring the impact of community engagement initiatives on SDG outcomes has been identified as a significant challenge. RMUTR’s development and implementation of clear indicators and evaluation frameworks for sustainability projects, in collaboration with its research departments, began to provide the basis for more accurate and systematic impact assessment.

5. Sustained engagement and participation: maintaining sustained engagement and participation from both the university and community stakeholders, especially for long-term projects, has been identified as a challenge. The establishment of a dedicated community engagement team or office within RMUTR has been a strategic move to maintain focus and momentum. Furthermore, recognizing and rewarding the contributions of community and university participants effectively promoted sustained participation.

**Research discussion**

Community expectations, especially from local businesses, emphasize the practical and immediate benefits of university resources and capabilities, such as the utilization of university facilities and expertise to support business operations and development.

This pragmatic outlook, primarily driven by economic survival and profitability concerns, needs to neatly fit into the stakeholder theory's broader stakeholder engagement framework (Freeman, 1984) or the reciprocal benefits highlighted in community-based learning theories (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). Instead, it points to a more utilitarian perspective that prioritizes tangible outcomes over theoretical stakeholder inclusivity or educational enrichment.

The community's desire for direct action on sustainability, such as implementing solar panel projects, suggests an expectation for RMUTR to engage in tangible environmental stewardship beyond what might be traditionally expected from educational institutions under service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996) or sustainability education frameworks (Sterling, 2001).
These expectations reflect a demand for universities not only to educate and research but also to lead by example in adopting sustainable practices, a perspective that transcends the conventional scope of academic theories focused on pedagogy and learning outcomes.

This gap between community expectations and the application of educational theories suggests that while theories provide valuable frameworks for understanding and guiding university-community engagement, they may only sometimes capture the full range of community aspirations, particularly in contexts heavily influenced by immediate practical challenges and economic concerns. Theories such as social cognitive (Bandura, 1977) and transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994) highlight the influence of modelling and visionary leadership in promoting behavioral change and achieving organizational goals. However, they may need to be more representative of the urgency and pragmatism that underpin community expectations for immediate environmental actions and economic benefits.

Moreover, critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) emphasizes the role of education in empowering individuals to challenge and change social structures, but directly applying this theory to meet the immediate community needs for sustainability and economic development can be challenging. This underscores a potential dissonance between the theoretical ideal of empowerment and education for societal transformation and the practical desire for immediate, tangible outcomes that directly benefit the community's economic and environmental landscape.

**Theoretical implications**

The findings of this study of Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin (RMUTR) efforts to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contribute to several theoretical frameworks, providing a detailed understanding of the role of educational institutions in sustainable development. These implications offer great insight into how theories can be applied and extended in the context of community engagement and sustainability initiatives.

Stakeholder Theory: this research reinforces the Stakeholder Theory by illustrating the multifaceted nature of stakeholder interests in the context of sustainability initiatives led by educational institutions. RMUTR's engagement with a diverse range of community stakeholders underscores the importance of considering and balancing various expectations and needs. The practical focus on resource sharing and direct benefits for local businesses and residents highlights a broader application of stakeholder theory, suggesting that educational institutions must navigate complex stakeholder ecosystems to promote the SDGs effectively.

Service-Learning Theory: the emphasis on practical sustainability initiatives, such as installing solar panels, supports service learning theory by demonstrating the value of integrating real-world problem solving into educational content. This study proposes to extend the theory to include sustainability education, where experiential learning can be a critical mechanism for engaging students in SDG-related projects, thereby connecting theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Social Cognitive Theory: by modelling sustainable practices and fostering an environment that encourages the adoption of sustainable behaviors, RMUTR exemplifies the Social Cognitive Theory. This research indicates that educational institutions can play a
significant role in shaping community norms and behaviors toward sustainability, providing a practical example of how observational learning and imitation can be used for societal benefit.

Community-Based Learning Theory: the study results highlight the effectiveness of community-based learning in increasing the relevance and impact of sustainability education. RMUTR’s approach to aligning its initiatives with community needs and co-creating projects with local stakeholders illustrates the theory’s emphasis on mutual benefit and learning through engagement with real-world community issues.

**Practical implications**

The insights gained from this study have significant practical implications for RMUTR and similar institutions aiming to enhance their contribution to the SDGs through community engagement.

Enhancing Community Awareness and Engagement: institutions should prioritize raising awareness about the SDGs among community members. Developing targeted campaigns and educational programs can increase engagement and participation in sustainability initiatives.

Resource Optimization and Partnership: facing resource constraints, educational institutions can benefit from forming strategic partnerships with local businesses, government bodies, and NGOs. Such collaborations can pool resources and expertise, amplifying the impact of sustainability projects.

Aligning Initiatives with Community Needs: regular needs assessments and open dialogues with community stakeholders are crucial for ensuring that sustainability initiatives are relevant and impactful. Institutions should adopt a flexible approach to project development, incorporating community input to align with local priorities.

Measuring and Communicating Impact: establishing clear metrics for assessing the impact of sustainability initiatives is essential. Institutions should also prioritize communicating these impacts to stakeholders, enhancing transparency and accountability.

Sustaining Engagement: to maintain momentum and participation in sustainability projects, institutions could benefit from establishing dedicated community engagement teams. Recognizing and rewarding community and university participants’ contributions can also boost sustained involvement.

**Conclusion**

The discrepancy between community expectations regarding the role of RMUTR in advancing the SDGs and the ideas presented by educational and sociological theories highlights the difficulty of aligning academic pursuits with community needs. While theories offer frameworks for understanding the potential of university-community engagement in fostering sustainable development, they may only partially encompass the scope of practical, immediate needs expressed by the community.

This analysis highlights the importance of adopting a flexible, responsive approach to community engagement, one that values both theoretical guidance and the pragmatism required to meet community expectations effectively. It also points to the need for ongoing dialogue between universities and their communities to ensure that initiatives in support of
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the SDGs are both theoretically sound and pragmatically valuable, bridging the gap between academic insights and community realities.

Limitation

The research involved semi-structured interviews with a diverse but limited group of community representatives. While efforts have been made to ensure a comprehensive understanding, the perspectives of unrepresented stakeholders may provide additional insight. The selection process may also introduce bias based on the availability and willingness of participants to participate in the study.

Future recommendations

Future studies could include multiple institutions across different regions to explore the variability in community expectations and institutional strategies for promoting the SDGs. This expansion would enhance the generalizability and applicability of the findings.

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