



# EVALUATING THE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES AT LETRAN MANILA: A UNIT-BASED APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This paper assessed the sustainability initiatives of Letran Manila using the Unit-Based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT). The findings indicate that while Letran demonstrates a commitment to sustainability through legal compliance and alignment with its recent institutional vision, it lacks a comprehensive institutional framework to effectively guide its units in implementing sustainable practices. This gap is evident in the limited integration of sustainability across key areas such as teaching, research, community engagement, operations and management, student involvement, and institutional policy. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at Letran presents a complex challenge, as it requires not only structural reforms but also value and behavioral changes among members of the institution. Success will largely depend on the strong and sustained commitment of the institution's leadership to fully implement and support sustainability initiatives across all levels of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Higher education, SDG, Letran

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development (SD) has become an integral part of both global and local practices aimed at mitigating and addressing climate-related issues. Across sectors and at the individual level, SD promotes a more responsible and acceptable way of operating to help solve environmental problems. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established to guide efforts in addressing environmental degradation. These goals became a global priority following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. Today, the SDGs serve not only as a policy framework for governments worldwide but also as a benchmark for organizations, sectors, and businesses to align their practices with the principles of sustainable development.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have a vital role to play in this global movement. They can benefit from the SD framework and are well-positioned to lead sustainability efforts through education, research, and community engagement. However, implementing sustainability initiatives can be complex and challenging. It often requires significant institutional and organizational transformation. In the context of the Philippines—where climate-related issues are becoming increasingly severe—there is a pressing need to adopt and implement sustainable development practices. The country faces recurring environmental challenges and has experienced major climate-related disasters over the past decades.

Colegio de San Juan de Letran, one of the oldest private educational institutions in the Philippines, has a crucial role in promoting sustainable development. Located in Intramuros, Manila, Letran is strategically positioned to influence neighboring higher education institutions and contribute to broader community responses within and beyond the walled city. Considering that Manila is a hazard-prone area, the active involvement of institutions like Letran is essential to advancing the goal of a more sustainable and resilient city.

Given this context, this paper assesses the status of sustainability initiatives and development at Colegio de San Juan de Letran—Manila. It seeks to answer the central research question: *What is the current status of sustainability initiatives at Letran Manila?* The study also identifies key sustainability initiatives, evaluates their implementation, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution's sustainability practices.

To conduct the assessment, this paper uses the Unit-Based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT) to evaluate sustainability initiatives across multiple units

of the institution, including Basic Education, Collegiate and Graduate Levels, Operations and Management, Community Service, Research, Student Affairs, and Institutional Policy units. The study employed data triangulation to validate and enrich the findings from the survey. The data covered in this assessment spans the period 2019 to 2024.

### Higher Education and Sustainability Initiatives

Educational institutions are key drivers of knowledge creation and dissemination. They play a crucial role in educating future leaders and community members, while also fostering flexible and responsible learning environments. These institutions are increasingly recognized as catalysts for promoting sustainability-related initiatives, with a significant influence on shaping societal mindsets and behaviors. In particular, higher education institutions (HEIs) have emerged as pivotal agents in advancing the sustainability agenda (Basheer et al., 2025).

According to Žalėnienė and Pereira (2021), HEIs contribute to sustainability through various channels, including teaching and research, community outreach, awareness-raising, the formation of future professionals, and the implementation of sustainable practices. By adopting and modeling these practices, HEIs can lead by example and influence their members, which is essential for the success of sustainability efforts.

Many HEIs have adopted declarations, charters, and initiatives aimed at integrating sustainability into their institutional structures and engaging surrounding communities in sustainable development. Achieving this requires comprehensive organizational change—moving from the current status quo toward a system aligned with sustainable practices, supported by continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Duran and Mariñas (2024) presented an interesting case on how teachers incorporate sustainability into their teaching. Their study found that the more teachers care about environmental and social issues and perceive them as relevant and important, the more likely they are to integrate sustainability into their instruction. However, simply knowing about sustainability does not automatically lead to its inclusion in teaching. This provides an important perspective on how micro-level actors, such as professors and teachers, contribute to advancing and integrating sustainability in Philippine higher education.

The lack of knowledge and financial resources is perceived as one of the main barriers to sustainable development that needs to be addressed. Serafini, Morais de Moura, Rodrigues de Almeida, and Dantas de Rezende (2022)

identified several barriers to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in higher education, including difficulties in mobilizing the academic community to engage with the SDGs, the absence of organizational structures and leadership responsible for coordinating the implementation process, challenges in integrating the SDGs into institutional systems, and the lack of indicators, tools, and reporting mechanisms to measure progress.

The integration of sustainability across all university levels remains unclear. Murano and John (2025) also argued that university sustainability management is more effective when guided by a structured framework. Institutional characteristics play a central role in effective sustainability implementation, particularly in terms of funding structures, location, governance, and educational focus, all while navigating complex bureaucracies and rigid organizational structures. Furthermore, they acknowledge that there is no universal education model for sustainable development nor a standardized methodology for achieving a carbon-neutral campus.

Sustainability Reporting (SR) is defined as “the practice to measure, disclose, and be accountable to internal and external stakeholders for organizational performance towards the goal of sustainable development” (Culemans, Lozano, & Alonso-Almeida, 2015). SR is a vital tool for assessing and enhancing an organization’s sustainability performance over time. In this context, this paper utilizes the Unit-Based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT) to evaluate the sustainability performance of Letran Manila and its various academic and administrative units. The tool provides an initial assessment that can inform targeted improvements and strategic planning for sustainability integration.

### Unit-based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT)

This study utilized and adapted the Unit-Based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT), developed by Togo and Lotz-Sisitka (2009), to evaluate the extent to which various units at Colegio de San Juan de Letran engage in and adopt different sustainability practices. The USAT is specifically designed to assess sustainability efforts within universities, focusing on how functional units integrate sustainability into key areas such as teaching, research, daily operations, community engagement, and institutional policies and statements. The version adopted in this study aligns with the original design by Togo and Lotz-Sisitka (2009) and complements the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) initiative on Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities (MESA).

The USAT is structured around four key indicator areas to assess sustainability across different higher education units: (1) Part A: Teaching, Research, and Community Service. (2) Part B: Operations and Management. (3) Part C: Student Involvement. (4) Part D: Policy and Written Statements.

Part A focuses on the core mission of universities and evaluates aspects such as curriculum, teaching approaches, research, community service, examinations/assessments, and staff expertise. The curriculum component examines the integration of sustainability concerns and the inclusion of sustainability-related topics in academic courses. Teaching approaches are assessed based on how they foster critical thinking and awareness of sustainability. Research and scholarship activities are evaluated in terms of the extent to which faculty and students are engaged in sustainability-related work. Community engagement considers each department’s involvement in sustainability initiatives and its allocation of resources for community-based projects. Finally, staff expertise and willingness to participate are assessed to identify the level of faculty knowledge in sustainability and their readiness to engage in sustainability teaching, research, and community service.

Part B assesses the sustainability of institutional operations and management. It includes indicators on waste management, air pollution control, energy use, water conservation, landscaping, pest management, transportation, and sustainable purchasing practices. It also captures information on specific projects and the rationale behind their implementation. Part C evaluates student involvement in sustainability initiatives. This includes participation in voluntary sustainability-related activities, orientation programs, and career counseling focused on sustainability, and student governance and politics in support of sustainability goals.

Part D examines the institution’s policies and written statements regarding sustainable development. It focuses on how sustainability is embedded in higher education policy and how it is reflected in official institutional documents. These indicators are applied to assess the various units of Colegio de San Juan de Letran and their commitment to sustainability practices.

## METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to evaluate the extent to which sustainability practices are integrated into the operations of various units at Colegio de San Juan de Letran. The assessment used the Unit-based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT) developed by Togo and Lotz-Sisitka (2009), a framework designed specifically for evaluating sustainability engagement in higher education institutions. The primary data collection instrument was the standardized USAT survey questionnaire (see appendices), which consists of four key components: (1) Part A: Teaching, Research, and Community Service. (2) Part B: Operations and Management. (3) Part C: Student Involvement. (4) Part D: Policy and Written Statements

Each component contains multiple indicators rated by respondents to determine the presence and level of implementation of sustainability-related practices. The indicators were assessed using a six-point ordinal scale (adapted from Uebersax, 2006), loosely based on the Likert scale. The scale is interpreted as follows: (1) X (Don’t know) – Respondent lacks information about the practice, though it may exist. (2) 0 (None) – No evidence of the practice; interpreted as 0% implementation. (3) 1 (A little) – Minimal evidence of the practice; about 25% implementation. (4) 2 (Adequate) – Moderate or regular performance; about 50% implementation. (5) 3 (Substantial) – Good performance; about 75% implementation. (6) 4 (A great deal) – Excellent performance; more than 75% implementation.

The translation of scale levels into approximate percentages is based on the GASU (Graduation Approach to Sustainability in Universities) framework (Lozano, 2006), which helps clarify the degree of integration and performance in each indicator.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with direct knowledge or involvement in sustainability-related areas within the institution. These included faculty members, administrators, and operations staff across various units. The Units involved are the 4 colleges and the graduate school, primary, secondary, and senior high school departments for Part A. For Part B, the Auxiliary Services Department participated in this study. The Department of Student Affairs answered for Part C. The Offices of Rector, Vice President for Administrative Affairs, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Planning and Quality Assurance participated in Part 4.

The survey was distributed through both digital and printed formats. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and signed informed consent forms. Participation was voluntary, and responses were kept anonymous and confidential. To strengthen the validity of the findings, triangulation was applied. This involved the review and analysis of institutional documents, including curriculum guides, sustainability-related project reports, strategic plans, and official policies. These sources were used to verify and contextualize survey responses and assess the accuracy of the reported practices.

Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on mean scores for each indicator. No percentage conversions were used in the analysis, but interpretations aligned with the conceptual percentage ranges defined by Lozano (2006). To visualize performance across indicators within each USAT part, the study employed radar chart analysis (spider diagrams). By combining survey data, visual analytics, and supporting documentation, this mixed evidence approach ensured a more accurate and comprehensive assessment of sustainability practices at Colegio de San Juan de Letran.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Teaching, Research, and Community Service

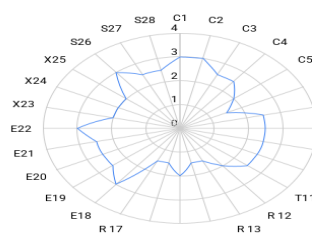


Figure 1. Sustainability Initiatives in Basic Education

The basic education units—comprising the Senior High School, Elementary, and Junior High School—were assessed as part of Letran’s sustainability evaluation. The results indicated that, on average, basic education demonstrated good performance across various sustainability initiatives. For curriculum indicators (codes C1–C6), the mean rating was 2.42, indicating a substantial level of performance, supported by good evidence. The teaching approach (codes T7–T11) had a mean rating of 2.5, also reflecting substantial performance. Research and scholarship activities (codes R12–R17) received a mean rating of 1.67, which suggests an adequate level, with evidence of regular performance. Community engagement (codes E18–E22) scored 2.7, indicating substantial performance. The assessment of sustainability topics (codes X23–X25) had a mean rating of 2.0, meaning adequate performance. Finally, staff expertise and willingness to participate (codes S26–S28) had a mean rating of 2.67, also denoting substantial performance.

Sustainability lessons and issues are substantially incorporated into the curriculum of both departments in the basic education unit. However, there is a need to enhance the inclusion of both local and global sustainability issues and challenges within the departments’ teaching programs. Teaching practices appear effective in fostering critical thinking skills and promoting informed, responsible student behavior concerning sustainability.

Among all assessed areas, research and scholarship were identified as the weakest, showing a lack of initiatives and institutional practices. Significant improvement is needed to engage students, faculty, and staff in research activities—from student outputs to faculty-led projects. It is recommended that sustainability be included in the department’s formal research agenda. In terms of community engagement, both departments displayed a strong commitment to integrating sustainability goals and collaborating with stakeholders to address pressing issues. This commitment could be further strengthened by expanding community partnerships and developing long-term projects that aim to produce lasting impacts.

The evaluation of sustainability initiatives within courses and projects is not yet well-practiced or fully integrated. Developing appropriate rubrics and indicators to assess sustainability learning outcomes and project results would be a valuable step in measuring and monitoring the departments’ sustainability efforts. Lastly, the survey revealed that staff and faculty members hold a positive attitude toward teaching and researching sustainability. With adequate support and opportunities from the department, their professional capacities can be further developed to strengthen sustainability practices and initiatives.

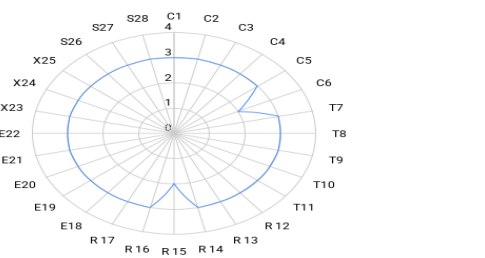


Figure 2. Sustainability Initiatives in Collegiate and Graduate Schools

The curriculum indicators (Codes C1–C6) received a mean rating of 2.9, interpreted as substantial, indicating that evidence shows good performance in integrating sustainability concerns into the curriculum. The teaching approach indicators (T7–T11) scored a mean of 3.08, also classified as substantial, demonstrating strong alignment with sustainability competencies such as critical thinking, informed decision-making, and problem-solving. Research and scholarship activities (R12–R17) had a mean rating of 2.6, which also falls within the substantial range but indicates relatively lower performance compared to other areas. Community engagement efforts (E18–E22) achieved the highest mean rating of 3.2, reflecting consistent involvement in sustainability-related activities. Assessment of sustainability topics (X23–X25) and staff expertise and willingness to engage (S26–S28) both had mean ratings of 2.73, suggesting substantial but improvable performance in these dimensions.

At the collegiate level, which includes all undergraduate colleges and the Graduate School, most indicators demonstrate a high level of engagement with sustainability in both course offerings and teaching methodologies. The Graduate School offers electives focusing on corporate sustainability and social responsibility. Across all academic programs, general education subjects such as Science, Technology, and Society, The Contemporary World, and the National

Service Training Program are part of the curriculum. While these courses are not mandated to explicitly cover sustainability topics, their content allows flexibility for instructors to incorporate relevant themes. This flexibility is a positive indicator of potential for integrating sustainability across disciplines.

In addition, several programs offer elective courses specifically addressing sustainability within their respective fields. Examples include Sustainable Tourism, Good Governance and Social Responsibility, Environmental Laws, Environmental Science, Risk, Disaster, and Humanitarian Communication, and Studies in Renewable Energy Resources. However, such courses are not available across all programs. It is therefore recommended that academic departments develop or integrate specialized sustainability-focused courses relevant to their disciplines.

While survey results suggest meaningful engagement in sustainability-related research, a review of research outputs reveals limited supporting evidence. Research activities explicitly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain underexplored by faculty, students, and staff. Over the past five years, only three sustainability-related research publications have been produced by members of the Letran community. Of these, only one was authored by college-level faculty members—from the College of Engineering and Information Technology and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences—while the remaining two came from the Senior High School Department. These publications addressed topics such as climate change awareness in public school textbooks, its perceived effects on Filipino youth, and the development of alternative energy sources.

In Luz y Saber, the Colegio’s open-access, semiannual international scholarly journal, three sustainability-themed articles have been published. Two of these focused on disaster risk reduction and management, while the third examined the United Nations SDG on women’s economic empowerment in the City of Manila.

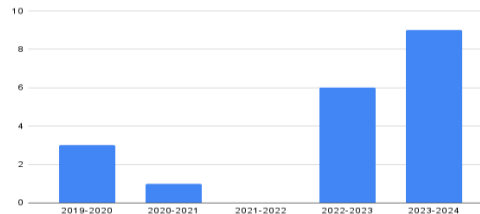


Figure 3. Number of Sustainability Initiatives in Community Service Activities

The data also highlight the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainability-related community engagement. The pandemic exposed gaps in community-based sustainability initiatives, with many units unable to sustain or adapt programs under pandemic constraints. While a resurgence in activities was observed in the later stages of the pandemic—mainly due to the easing of restrictions—most departments had minimal involvement in community sustainability efforts before and after the pandemic. Activities such as clean-up drives and tree planting were the most common, alongside a few seminars and workshops on disaster preparedness and sustainable living during the "new normal" period. Among these, clean-up drives remained the most consistently implemented initiative across different units.

Table 2. List of Sustainability Initiatives in Community Service Activities

Academic Year	Department/Unit	Activity/Project Title
2019–2020	College of Education Center for Community Development (CCD)	Clean-up Drive
		International Coastal Cleanup
2020–2021	College of Business Administration and Accountancy	Letran 2020 Tree Planting Project
		Sustainable Living in the New Normal Community
2021–2022	–	No recorded activity
2022–2023	Senior High School	Coastal Clean-Up
	College of Engineering and Information Technology	Shake Don't Rattle and Roll: An Earthquake Preparedness and Response Seminar
	College of Education (CED)	Tree Planting Part II
	LVC–DENR CED–ASD	Coastal Clean-Up International Coastal Clean-Up
2023–2024	Basic Education Senior High School	Trees for Tomorrow's Generation Let's Make it Green: Tree Planting Project 2023
	College of Business & Administration Accountancy	Growing Together: Hydroponics for Sustainable Community
		Roots to Riches: A Tree Nursery Activity

Graduate School	Tree Planting
College of Education (CED) Recognized Student Organizations (RSO)	Urban Gardening Workshop International Coastal Cleanup kaRAMPAligiran 2023
	E.A.R.T.H (Ecosystem Approach and Rejuvenation through Human Rights)

Despite these efforts, the overall assessment indicates considerable room for improvement. At present, there are no ongoing sustainability programs with substantial and lasting impacts on partner communities. As an educational institution, Letran is encouraged to strengthen community engagement by organizing more seminars, workshops, and collaborative projects with local stakeholders. These initiatives should aim to raise awareness and build practical skills that support sustainable lifestyles and community development.

In terms of evaluation, sustainability considerations are consistently included in course and project assessments, with all related indicators scoring a 3. However, documentation of these assessment practices is limited. It is therefore recommended that departments develop standardized tools and indicators for evaluating sustainability-related projects and events. This would ensure consistency, promote accountability, and better align departmental activities with institutional sustainability goals. Finally, staff members have shown substantial willingness to engage in sustainability-oriented teaching, research, and service. This reflects a supportive institutional culture that can serve as a strong foundation for scaling up sustainability initiatives across all levels of the Colegio.

### Operations and Management

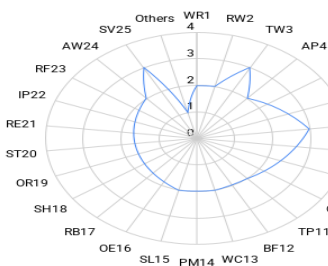


Figure 4. Sustainability Initiatives in Operations and Management

Most of the sustainable practices in operations and management are adequately implemented and practiced at the Colegio. Letran demonstrates a clear effort to comply with various environmental regulations and obligations aimed at addressing sustainability issues. These efforts include compliance with key laws such as Republic Act (RA) 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, RA 6969 or the Toxic Substances and Hazardous and Nuclear Wastes Control Act, RA 11285 or the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act, and RA 9275 or the Philippine Clean Water Act. The Colegio performs relatively well in areas such as the handling of toxic materials and radioactive waste, energy conservation practices, and chemical control, although there remains room for improvement. In contrast, water conservation, pest management, and sustainable landscaping require better monitoring and more consistent enforcement of maintenance protocols.

Currently, most sustainability actions appear to be reactive or compliance-driven, rather than part of a broader, proactive strategy. Developing a comprehensive Sustainability Action Plan and strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms—such as systems for tracking resource consumption, waste reduction, and maintenance schedules—will help the Colegio improve its adaptation to sustainability responsibilities. Initiatives such as implementing color-coded waste segregation, conducting waste management orientation sessions for all employees and students, and establishing clear procedures for proper waste disposal and the immediate reporting and repair of water leaks are recommended. Reducing the use of electrical appliances and implementing scheduled usage of air conditioning units are also encouraged.

In terms of transportation programs, the Colegio can promote the use of bicycles and e-bikes among employees and students by providing adequate parking facilities. Practices outlined in OE16-RF23 are not yet in place and should be considered for future implementation. Infrastructure-related sustainability practices, such as eco-friendly building construction and renovation based on ecological design principles, are yet to be adopted. Additionally, sustainable

procurement—purchasing from environmentally and socially responsible companies—has not yet been widely practiced and should be encouraged. It is also recommended that academic departments regularly conduct environmental awareness campaigns and waste management orientations for both employees and students.

Institutionalizing monitoring and evaluation through the adoption of established mechanisms or the development of localized systems is essential. Maintaining proper records and reporting will improve traceability and support continuous improvement. Overall, while the institution has made commendable progress in compliance and operational sustainability, many areas still require significant improvement. The development of a comprehensive Sustainability Action Plan—one that involves responsible units, academic and staff collaboration, and student participation—will help ensure that sustainability becomes an integral part of the institution's daily operations and long-term management.

### Student's Involvement

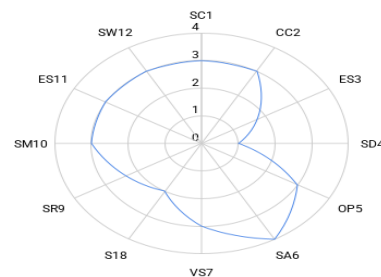


Figure 5. Sustainability Initiatives in Students' Involvement

In addition to evaluating how the curriculum integrates students into sustainability initiatives, the Unit-Based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT) also examined student involvement through institutional programs and activities. The assessment of student engagement in sustainability at the Colegio highlights several strengths, while also identifying areas that require improvement.

According to the Department of Student Affairs (DSA), various programs have been implemented to raise awareness of environmental and sustainability issues. The DSA also aims to establish itself as a student environmental center and has achieved a commendable performance rating in this regard. Furthermore, the Colegio offers career counseling services for the students that emphasize employment opportunities in the fields of environment and sustainability. Students are also actively involved in voluntary community service projects related to environmental concerns. These initiatives, often led by the student council, reflect a strong institutional effort to empower students to take leadership roles in addressing sustainability challenges. This also indicates a growing sense of responsibility and enthusiasm among students in contributing to environmental stewardship.

Despite these positive developments, there remain areas in need of further attention. Notably, the Colegio does not yet have an Environmental Student Society or any other student-led organization with a clear focus on sustainability. The presence of such groups would significantly enhance student engagement and foster peer-led initiatives across the campus. Additionally, there is currently no available data on the sustainability practices of students residing in on-campus dormitories or housing facilities. To address these gaps, it is recommended that the institution implement targeted improvements. These include: (1) Establishing and officially recognizing environmental student organizations. (2) Ensuring active student council involvement in campus-wide sustainability initiatives. (3) Enhancing sustainability efforts within student residences and dormitories. (4) Developing a unified sustainability action plan that aligns the efforts of all student organizations.

Moreover, there is currently no publicly available or general Sustainable Action Plan from either the Student Council or the Department of Student Affairs outlining long-term strategies for student participation in sustainability. Developing such a plan would provide clarity, direction, and consistency for future initiatives. It is also advisable to encourage all recognized student organizations to integrate sustainability-focused activities into their annual plans, as aligned with their respective missions and objectives. Finally, the Colegio should conduct regular student orientation and awareness programs related to sustainability, ideally organized in collaboration with or led

by the student council. These efforts would strengthen a culture of sustainability across the student body and ensure continuity in student-led environmental advocacy.

### Policy and Written Statements

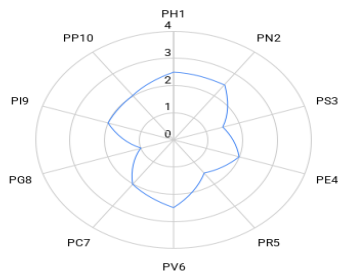


Figure 6. Sustainability Initiatives in Policy and Written Statements

This section examines the extent to which sustainability is embedded in the institutional policies, frameworks, and practices of the Colegio. Utilizing ten key indicators, the assessment revealed performance ratings ranging from 1.0 to 2.5. These scores suggest a generally average level of integration, with some indicators falling below expectations and highlighting critical areas for improvement. While the institution has demonstrated initial recognition of sustainability—most notably through its updated vision and mission statements—its integration into policies remains superficial and underdeveloped.

Evidence from the survey indicates that sustainability is acknowledged at a conceptual level. However, the articulation of sustainability within institutional documents tends to be broad, generic, and lacks specificity. There is currently no dedicated policy framework that explicitly addresses sustainability. Existing policies are either absent, vaguely formulated, or not aligned with the institution's operational context. Moreover, there appears to be a lack of strict implementation and monitoring mechanisms, resulting in limited accountability and coherence across units.

Importantly, the analysis reveals a significant disconnect between the Colegio's institutional strategies and broader national and global sustainability agendas, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or national climate action commitments. Sustainability-related goals and targets are not clearly reflected in the institution's programs, policies, or operational practices. This misalignment has contributed to fragmented efforts and a lack of coordination among institutional units. The absence of a governance framework further undermines the potential for sustainability to be systematically integrated across functions such as curriculum development, student engagement, research, and community outreach.

The underdeveloped policy environment has led to missed opportunities for mainstreaming sustainability throughout the institution. For example, the lack of a clear sustainability mandate hampers efforts to incorporate environmental and social sustainability themes into academic programs, co-curricular initiatives, and research priorities. Compounding this challenge is the limited external support received from government agencies, which restricts the Colegio's ability to expand or institutionalize sustainability-related efforts.

To address these challenges, the Colegio must take decisive steps to establish a formal, institution-wide sustainability policy. This policy should be comprehensive and binding, covering key thematic areas including educational quality, waste and energy management, community engagement, and student participation. Such a policy would serve as a guiding reference for all institutional units, ensuring alignment and coherence in sustainability actions.

Furthermore, the development of a comprehensive sustainability framework is recommended. This framework should articulate the institution's vision and goals, define thematic priorities, assign roles and responsibilities, establish timelines, and set out evaluation metrics and reporting mechanisms. The creation of a regular policy review and updating process is also essential to ensure responsiveness to emerging sustainability issues and evolving institutional capacities.

In parallel, capacity-building initiatives must be implemented to support the operationalization of sustainability across the Colegio. Training and consultation programs for faculty, staff, and students will help build awareness and skills

related to both global and local sustainability challenges. Empowering stakeholders through education and active participation will enhance institutional readiness and commitment, thereby strengthening the Colegio's long-term sustainability agenda.

### Assessment and Recommendations for Letran's Sustainability Initiatives

Letran's current sustainability initiatives fall short of the ideal standard expected from a higher education institution. While there is a clear commitment to supporting sustainable development (SD), as evidenced by the integration of the sustainability agenda into the institution's new vision and mission, further action is needed to translate this commitment into meaningful progress. To move forward, the institution must develop a comprehensive institutional framework and action plan that aligns with specific sustainability goals. This should include clearly defined targets (possibly aligned with one or more of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals), localized indicators, implementing guidelines, and regular evaluation tools to measure each unit's contributions toward Letran's sustainability objectives.

### Institutional Planning and Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder involvement is critical in crafting an effective sustainability framework. As sustainability entails instructional changes, the curriculum must be aligned with SD principles. This can be done by integrating sustainability-related content into courses or encouraging faculty to embed sustainability concepts and issues in their lessons. Faculty participation is therefore essential. The institution should also provide professional development opportunities to build the capacity of faculty and staff to teach and model sustainable practices.

Student participation must also be prioritized. The Department of Student Affairs (DSA), in coordination with the Student Council and recognized student organizations, should create a supportive environment for students to actively participate in sustainability initiatives. The DSA must work closely with student leaders to align their programs and projects with sustainable practices.

### Sustainability-Focused Research

Letran should invest in and prioritize research initiatives that address sustainability. This can be encouraged through funding incentives and prioritization of sustainability-related research proposals. Faculty who handle research courses and these should receive training and guidance on how to promote sustainability-focused topics among students. Engaging students in sustainability research will help foster a deeper institutional commitment and contribute to the broader body of knowledge on sustainable development. Research topics may include sustainable practices suitable for Letran's various departments, renewable energy options for educational institutions, effective teaching methods for sustainability education, and sustainable development models applicable to Letran's partner communities.

### Operations and Resource Management

Implementing sustainable operations and resource management will require institutional investment and long-term planning. Initiatives such as the use of solar panels as an alternative energy source are commendable and should be pursued through internal funding and external partnerships. Simple yet impactful initiatives—such as fully banning the use of plastic and straws in the school canteen—must be strictly implemented. Moreover, the institution must address waste management challenges by providing sufficient waste bins and promoting proper waste segregation through regular awareness campaigns.

### Community Engagement

Community outreach activities related to sustainability remain limited and often focus only on cleanup drives and tree planting. Letran should explore more impactful and sustainable community engagement programs that generate long-term benefits. Workshops and training sessions introducing sustainable practices to partner communities can serve as a foundation. These can be followed by long-term projects that build community resilience against environmental hazards and promote sustainable livelihoods.

### Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

To ensure progress, Letran must establish a clear framework and action plan that outlines necessary adjustments and institutional changes. The development of indicators and evaluation tools is crucial to monitor the progress of these efforts. Sustainability reporting should begin as soon as possible to track current achievements, identify areas for improvement, and ensure transparency. Letran can initially focus on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), aligning these with institutional goals. Visible advocacy and promotion of sustainability policies across the campus can raise awareness among the

community. Sustainability principles should also be incorporated into the planning and execution of all institutional events and activities to demonstrate consistent practice.

## CONCLUSION

This paper provides an initial assessment of Letran's standing in terms of sustainable development, reinforcing the broader view that higher education institutions (HEIs) serve as critical agents in advancing sustainability through education, research, and community engagement. While Letran has demonstrated commendable efforts in legal compliance and the integration of sustainability into its strategic vision, the findings highlight a crucial gap: the absence of a cohesive and institution-wide action plan. As emphasized in the literature, sustainability efforts in HEIs are most effective when guided by structured frameworks, clear leadership, and coordinated institutional mechanisms. Without these, initiatives risk remaining fragmented, inconsistent, and difficult to sustain over time.

The results also reflect common barriers identified in previous studies, such as limited organizational structures, insufficient engagement across the academic community, and the lack of standardized tools and indicators for monitoring progress. Moreover, the role of micro-level actors—particularly faculty members—emerges as essential. As suggested by existing research, individual commitment and perceived relevance of sustainability significantly influence its integration into teaching, underscoring the need for both capacity-building and value-driven engagement within the institution.

While the Unit-Based Sustainability Assessment Tool (USAT) offers a useful starting point for evaluating sustainability performance, it may not fully capture the complex and context-specific dynamics of sustainability implementation in HEIs. Future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-method approaches, such as interviews and focus group discussions, to generate deeper insights into stakeholder perspectives, institutional challenges, and opportunities for policy development. These approaches can support the creation of more adaptive, localized, and inclusive sustainability strategies.

Ultimately, achieving sustainable development is a long-term and evolving process that requires comprehensive organizational transformation. In line with the role of HEIs as models of sustainable practice, Letran has the potential to strengthen its impact by developing a clear institutional framework, fostering stronger community engagement, and embedding sustainability across all levels of operation. With sustained commitment from leadership, active participation from faculty and students, and strategic collaboration with external partners, Letran can transition from compliance-driven efforts toward becoming a proactive and exemplary institution in sustainability.

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