Good practices of social responsibility for promoting sustainable development goals from the university: a case study

Buenas prácticas de responsabilidad social para la promoción de los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible desde la universidad: caso de estudio

Rojo-Carlón, José María*[a], Rivera-Iribarren, Maricel [b] and Valencia-Romero, Alexia Zoe [c]

[a] ROR Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora • ACQ-0210-2022 • 0000-0003-3502-3379 • 1074691
[b] ROR Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora • S-7893-2018 • 0000-0003-1823-0149 • 896629
[c] ROR Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora • LMN-6707-2024 • 0009-0000-3577-328X • 2071551

CONAHCYT classification:

Area: Humanities and Behavioural Sciences
Field: Pedagogy
Discipline: Educational Organisation and Planning
Subdiscipline: Others

Abstract

The transformative role of universities is key to their contribution to sustainable development and the fulfillment of the UN's 2030 Agenda. University Social Responsibility, as an ethical impact management policy, promotes the implementation of good practices that have a positive impact in the formative, cognitive, social, and organizational domains. These practices enable the observation and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article aims to identify the social responsibility good practices that affect the SDGs in a public university in southern Sonora, Mexico. The method used was qualitative and deductive, following four steps: 1) defining good USR practices, 2) developing a catalog of good practices, 3) classifying the practice based on its impact, and 4) categorizing it according to the SDG it addresses. The main results show that a significant portion of these practices focus on SDGs related to people and are primarily directed at the university's internal stakeholders

Resumen

El papel de las universidades es clave en el desarrollo sostenible y en el cumplimiento de la Agenda 2030 de la ONU. La Responsabilidad Social Universitaria (RSU), como política de gestión ética, promueve la implementación de buenas prácticas con impactos positivos en los ámbitos formativo, cognitivo, social y organizacional, alineándose a los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS). Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar las buenas prácticas de RSU que inciden en los ODS en una universidad pública del sur de Sonora, México. Se utilizó un enfoque cualitativo y deductivo, siguiendo cuatro pasos: 1) definición de buenas prácticas de RSU, 2) elaboración de un catálogo, 3) clasificación de prácticas por impacto y 4) categorización según el ODS correspondiente. Los resultados muestran que una parte considerable de estas prácticas se enfoca en ODS relacionados con el bienestar de las personas, dirigidas principalmente a los grupos de interés de la universidad.

University social responsability, good practices, sustainable development

Responsabilidad social universitaria, buenas prácticas, desarrollo sostenible

RENIECYT
Registro Nacional de Instituciones y Empresas Científicas y Tecnológicas
1702902 CONAHCYT

ECORFAN Journal Republic of Peru

Article
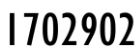
Introduction

University social responsibility (USR) is a cross-cutting management policy of higher education institutions that is focused on generating positive impacts at the organisational, social, educational and cognitive levels (Vallaeys et al., 2022). This concept implies that all activities carried out by universities are oriented towards achieving sustainable development, so there are efforts by different parts of the organisational structure as well as stakeholders to make the promotion of sustainable development a reality (Arias-Valle et al., 2021).

Sustainability is a need that has been consolidated in the 21st century as a guiding principle for international organisations. Since the Millennium Declaration, promulgated by the United Nations (UN), the interest in promoting sustainable development in different spheres of life in the world. This led to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were a set of statutes that address global issues: poverty eradication, universal primary education, gender equality and women's empowerment, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating diseases such as HIV, the environment and partnerships for the achievement of the goals (UN, 2000).

The background to the MDGs is related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Despite the efforts made to achieve the MDGs, in 2015 the impact of the MDGs began to be evaluated and the UN had to rethink its course and include social, economic, public health and environmental issues that were encountered along the way. As a product of this, the 2030 Agenda was created, which aims to achieve prosperity that balances five fundamental factors: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships (United Nations Group for Sustainable Development, 2024). These points highlight how education is implicitly linked to the principles and goals set out in the UN Charter, even though it is not the main focus of the document. Education is essential for human development, peace and global progress, and the UN considers it a key component of its global mission.

The 2030 Agenda includes the Sustainable Development Goals, which are 17 themes that address global issues related to people, society and the planet from social, economic and environmental perspectives (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2018).

These objectives set 169 goals to be achieved through the synergy of different stakeholders, such as countries, societies, companies and organisations, as well as international organisations.

From the perspective of University Social Responsibility (USR), universities are transformers of the context in which they are established (Universidad Iberoamericana, 2020).

Therefore, through their substantive functions, they can have a positive impact on a local, regional, national and even international scale through research and the dissemination of their practices.

Likewise, USR proposes four impacts on which Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must manage actions and projects in order to have a positive impression on the university's internal and external stakeholders, as well as on the environment and the economy: formative, cognitive, social and organisational (Vallaeys et al., 2022). These are a reference framework for the implementation of good practices with social relevance and impact on the improvement of contextual conditions.

In Latin America, there are different universities and groups that have documented good practices of social responsibility in HEIs. According to Laurencio and Farfán (2016), good practices from the university are those activities that serve as a means to achieve established goals. Therefore, all those actions carried out by universities to comply with some strategy can be considered as good practices.

In order to delimit good practices in the field of university social responsibility, it is necessary to consider the goals of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as they belong to a global agenda to which there is a commitment to contribute. Taking the SDGs as a reference point provides support for good practices in social responsibility and allows the impacts to be observable.

Rojo-Carlón, José María, Rivera-Iribarren, Maricel and Valencia-Romero, Alexia Zoe. [2024]. Good practices of social responsibility for promoting sustainable development goals from the university: a case study. ECORFAN Journal Republic of Peru. 10[18]1-6: e11018106.
https://doi.org/10.35429/EJRP.2024.10.18.1.6

Article

In the particular case of the university under study, it has a social responsibility perspective from its philosophy, which establishes in its mission and vision the importance of training students with a social conscience through the relevance of the curricular content of the educational programmes presented. In the same way, the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) of this institution sets out different strategic objectives that focus on strengthening USR in all the substantive functions of the university, establishing mechanisms for its diagnosis, strengthening ties with stakeholders, promoting the dissemination of results in this regard, among other related aspects.

Despite the importance of having the means to make good practices of university social responsibility visible, there are no mechanisms for their dissemination. In this situation, the efforts made between the different levels of the organisational structure and the stakeholders may be dispersed and their impact may be diluted.

Furthermore, by being able to rely on the documentation of good practices, the actions carried out by the university can be seen as a reference at local, regional, national and international level in the development of actions that promote the scope of the UN's 2030 Agenda.

Other universities and research centres can even take the efforts made as a reference to be replicated in their own contexts, with the relevant adaptations.

This is why the aim of this paper is to document the good practices of social responsibility in a public university in southern Sonora, Mexico, so that by disseminating them they can be a reference for action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in other higher education institutions.

Method

The present research has a qualitative approach and is descriptive and documentary in nature, due to the fact that the practices carried out from January to October 2023 by an institutional programme of social responsibility in a public university in southern Sonora were analysed.

According to Hernández et al. (2014) and Valle et al. (2022), this type of study allows the systematic collection and analysis of information, facilitating a detailed understanding and description of the phenomenon studied through the systematic consultation of documents.

Likewise, the deductive method was used, which was developed from the following phases: (1) review of existing theories for the definition of good practices of university social responsibility (USR); (2) elaboration of a catalogue of good practices carried out by a University Social Responsibility programme in the Higher Education institution under study in the period January to September 2024; (3) classification of these practices according to the impacts proposed by Schwalb et al. (2019) and; (4) categorisation of these practices according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) they address.

Results

When the catalogue of good practices of social responsibility was carried out, it was found that the programme that promotes them carried out 25 practices. Most of these practices are oriented towards the SDGs that impact on people, for example, related to reducing inequalities, gender equity and health and well-being. Among the actions carried out in this area are awareness-raising campaigns on health care, promotion of gender equality and inclusion of minority groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community and adults.

On the other hand, there are those oriented towards a culture of University Social Responsibility. These include those that promote a culture of peace, the participation of internal stakeholders in the institution's democratic processes and the dissemination of the importance of contributing to the SDGs.

ECORFAN Journal Republic of Peru

Article

Box 1

Table 1

Good MSW practices promoted by the MSW programme

Good practice	Target group	Main impact	SDG to which it contributes
Donation campaign for the event of the Fight Against Childhood Cancer to benefit an A.C.	Student body Academic and administrative staff General community	Social	Health and well-being
Talk 'Myths and realities of childhood cancer'.	Student body Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Health and well-being
Human ribbon in commemoration of the International Day Against Childhood Cancer.	Student body Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Health and Welfare
Stand to promote participation in a university consultation on the process of appointing a rector or rectoress	Student body Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Panel 'STEM Women	Student body Academic and administrative staff	Formative	Gender Equality
Conference 'What is 8M all about?	Student body Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Gender Equality
Picnic and activity 'express yourself' in commemoration of International Women's Day	Student body	Organisational	Gender Equality
Talk 'Sorority: strengthening links, transforming realities'.	Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Gender Equality
Small entrepreneurial market aimed at female university students.	Student body	Organisational	Decent work and economic growth
Workshop 'University Social Responsibility' for the promotion of a culture of USR, aimed at students.	Academic and administrative staff	Formative	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Workshop 'Introduction to the SDGs' for academic staff.	Student body	Formative	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
Rally of Coexistence for Peace in coordination with the ITSON-Peraj Obregón programme.	Student body	Social	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
LGBT+ Café and Allied People / Art Therapy.	Academic Staff	Organisational	Reducing Inequalities
Conference 'Basic concepts of sexual diversity'.	External community	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Screening of the film 'Love, Simon'.	Student body	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Lecture 'Inclusion work with an emphasis on gender diversity'.	Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Lecture 'History of the LGBTQ+ movement and university practices that promote the inclusion of gender diversity'.	Community at large	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Conversation 'Voices and experiences'.	Student body	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Diversidrag' Cultural Event	Academic and administrative staff	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Workshop 'Make your poster for the march'.	Community at large	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Taking of a photograph forming the LGBT+ Pride flag.	Student body	Organisational	Reducing inequalities
Informative talk for students interested in becoming technological literacy trainers for adults.	Academic and administrative staff	Social	Reducing inequalities
Human ribbon in commemoration of International Suicide Prevention Day	Community at large	Organisational	Health and well-being
Basic Mexican Sign Language course 'Words in silence'.	Student body	Social	Reducing inequalities
Technological Literacy Project	Academic and administrative staff	Social	Reducing inequalities
Donation campaign for the event of the Fight Against Childhood Cancer to benefit an A.C.	Community at large	Social	Health and well-being

From the perspective of the impacts of USR, a considerable part was directed towards organisational impact. These good practices are oriented towards generating inclusive spaces, promoting the human rights of internal stakeholders and caring for their physical and mental health, with a special focus on caring for the dignity of the people who coexist in university spaces.

Likewise, training is another impact towards which the good practices of the university studied are directed. These were carried out in the form of workshops that sought to ensure that the teaching-learning practices had a positive social impact. Through these, work was carried out directly with the institution's students and academic staff, who were the main beneficiaries.

Finally, from a stakeholder perspective, the main target audience was the students.

Considering them as the main stakeholder of the university, a representative part of the activities were directed towards them, in the form of workshops, talks and spaces for coexistence and expression. In turn, within the internal groups, the academic and administrative staff were the next beneficiaries. As a consideration, extending the good practices to external stakeholders could increase the impact of the actions carried out.

Conclusions

Among the challenges faced by universities is the need to reconcile the commitments that, as drivers of change, they have with their stakeholders, both internal and external; which must generate alternatives to solve the problems of an increasingly complex society, thus contributing to the common good (Olarte-Mejía and Ríos-Osorio, 2015; Rubio-Morua et al., 2022).

The above underlines the fundamental relationship between university and society, highlighting the social transcendence of the former. In this context, university extension plays a key role in addressing the needs that impact on social development.

This approach makes the role of universities in the transformation of society visible, through the various actions they carry out in their substantive functions, particularly extension and relevant and timely attention to social requirements (Olarte-Mejía and Ríos-Osorio, 2015; Pazmiño et al., 2022). Arias-Valle et al. (2021) state that university extension is associated with innovation and knowledge transfer that arises from the different disciplines and instances that make up higher education institutions (HEIs).

These seek to promote the development of the environment in which they are immersed, through innovation and social commitment, which constitutes the third mission of the university. In this context, and in the face of the growing demands of a society in constant change and evolution, a fourth mission arises that highlights the collaboration between the different stakeholders and the HEI, with the aim of promoting a transformation based on sustainable development (Gamboa et al., 2022). According to Vallaeys (2018), a university cannot be classified as socially responsible through the analysis of isolated practices, since the author considers USR as a transversal policy.

However, by promoting different activities aimed at sustainable social, economic and environmental development, their impact makes a difference, as they are based on the SDGs and promote the UN's 2030 Agenda, which extensively underpins USR. The challenge for the universities that propose good practices as a benchmark for calling themselves socially responsible is articulation. This implies the cohesion of different interest groups, that a model of social responsibility exists in the university, that it covers the good practices carried out and that they become sustainable actions. Likewise, they must take into account the contribution to the UN's 2030 Agenda, as a benchmark for development and well-being for the aspects that make up humanity.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. They have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that might have appeared to influence the article reported in this paper.

Authors' contribution

Rojo-Carlón, José María: Project leader, methodology and analysis of results, drafting of the article, expert translator.

Rivera-Iribarren, Maricel: Project collaborator, methodology and analysis of results, article writing, modelling expert.

Valencia-Romero, Alexia Zoe: Project fellow, state of the art study and grapher.

Abbreviations

CEPAL	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
IES	Higher Education Institutions
ODM	Millennium Development Goals
ODS	Sustainable Development Goals
ONU	United Nations
PDI	Institutional Development Plan
RSU	University Social Responsibility

References

Background

Arias-Valle, M., Berbegal-Mirabent, J., & Marimon, F. (2021). How much are universities engaged with their social responsibility? *Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 29*(54).

Laurencio, A., & Farfán, P. C. (2016). La innovación educativa en el ámbito de la responsabilidad social universitaria. *Revista Cubana de Educación Superior, 35*(2), 16-34.

Universidad Iberoamericana. (2020). La investigación educativa y su compromiso con la equidad, la justicia y la mejora de la política educativa. *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos, 50*(2).

Vallaeys, F., Oliveira, M. L. S., Crissien, T., Solano, D., & Suarez, A. (2022). State of the art of university social responsibility: a standardized model and compared self-diagnosis in Latin America. *International Journal of Educational Management, 36*(3), 325-340.

Basics

Hernández, R., Fernández, C. & Baptista, M. P. Metodología de la Investigación (6° ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Schwalb, M. M., Prialé, M. A. & Vallaeys, F. (2019). Guía de Responsabilidad Social Universitaria (1era Ed). Perú: Universidad del Pacífico.

Valle, T., A, Manrique, V., L., & Revilla, F., D. (2022). La investigación descriptiva con enfoque cualitativo en educación. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

Support

Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. (2018). La Agenda 2030 y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible: una oportunidad para América Latina y el Caribe. Organización de las Naciones Unidas.

Grupo de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Sostenible. (2024). Las 5Ps de los ODS: Personas, Planeta, Prosperidad, Paz y Pactos.

Organización de las Naciones Unidas. (2000). Declaración del Milenio.

Differences

Olarte-Mejía, D. & Ríos-Osorio, L. (2015). Enfoques y estrategias de responsabilidad social implementadas en Instituciones de Educación Superior: Una revisión sistemática de la literatura científica de los últimos 10 años. *Revista de Educación Superior, 44*(175), 19-40.

Pazmiño, L., L., Guncay, S., C., Salcedo, M., V., & Bejarano C., H. (2021). La responsabilidad social universitaria como estrategia de vinculación con el sector privado en la recuperación post pandemia en la ciudad de Machala, Ecuador. *Revista Dilemas Contemporáneos. Educación, Política y Valores,* 9(spe1).

Discussions

Gamboa, A., J., Salinas, H., L, Salcedo-Muñiz, V., & Guale, L. (2022). El Triple Bottom Line en las acciones de responsabilidad social universitaria: Caso Universidad Técnica de Machala. *Telos: Revista de Estudios Interdisciplinarios en Ciencias Sociales, 24*(2), 340-444.

Rubio-Morua, B., C., Zorrila-del Castillo, A., L., & Briseño-García, A. (2022). La responsabilidad social universitaria y sus dimensiones para las instituciones de educación superior. *Ciencias Administrativas Teoría y Praxis, 1*(18), 105-117.

Vallaeys, F. (2018). Las diez falacias de la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria. *Revista Digital de Investigación en Docencia Universitaria,* 12(1), 34-58.