

Photo: Chulalongkorn University – taken by Kantapat Phutthamkul

At the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual [Asia Research Intelligence Conference on ‘Universities and the Power of Data – Science for a Sustainable Society’](#), ProSPER.Net delivered a session on ‘International Collaboration: Community-based Research in the Context of the SDGs’.

The conference, co-organized by ProSPER.Net member Chulalongkorn University and Elsevier, on 5-6 July 2017 in Bangkok, looked at solutions and best practices to optimize research strategies. The emphasis was on sustainability, diversity, and the power of data in research.



ProSPER.Net, during its session, addressed the issue of research and its contributions to sustainable development, specifically in communities. As one of the largest and most diverse regions, universities in Asia-Pacific have considerable potential to innovate and collaborate to advance sustainability in communities, at the same time harnessing the power of data for evidence-based research.

The adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda affirms a shift away from conventional development to sustainability across all areas, including economic and social systems and the environment. Universities are at the centre of research and education, and hence critical to address current and future development challenges.

Major topics raised during the ProSPER.Net session were:

How should (community-based) research be organized to tackle the challenges of the SDGs?  
How can universities best attract diverse research talent?  
How can universities manage the challenges and opportunities of data and analytics, relevant for policy making on sustainable development?  
What are key areas for international collaboration among universities, and how can they serve as models for international cooperation on sustainable development?

Naoya Tsukamoto, Project Director of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at the United Nations University – Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) highlighted ProSPER.Net’s mission to contribute to SDG implementation, to the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD, and the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI).

Kiat Ruxrungtham, Vice President for Research and Innovation at Chulalongkorn University, presented how their institute aligned their curricula with pressing issues in local communities. In Thailand, for example,

aging society has long-term effects on sustainability and on the implementation of SDGs.

Norichika Kanie, (Keio University and UNU-IAS), emphasized the concept 'governance through goals' rather than 'governance through rules' as a fitting proposition for SDG implementation. The SDGs framework itself provided tools for implementation of sustainable development. *"We need to pilot communities to better understand how SDGs translate from a global agenda into a local framework,"* he said.

Nestor Castro, Vice Chancellor for Community Affairs at the University of the Philippines at Diliman, looked at the issue through the anthropological lens, arguing that community stakeholders are not just informants or respondents to research, but active participants thereof. They may have to take co-ownership roles rather than being mere bystanders for community research.

During the open discussion that followed the session, the panel provided some insights on social impact assessment, a fast-emerging field. Moderator Mario Tabucanon (UNU-IAS) summarized some of the insights on international collaboration. The panel suggested to scale up international collaborations with a more direct approach, aligning individual aspirations with institutional goals, thereby harnessing synergies of priorities and actions. Creating a clear pathway from knowledge to practice through case studies, and developing pilot projects, were some of the tools mentioned, especially if SDGs are to be localized or domesticated. *"This conference was a good opportunity to discuss future collaborations in community-based research for sustainable development. It gave us at ProSPER.Net more insights into priority research areas in the Asia Pacific region,"* Mario Tabucanon said.