

Usbong San Remigio: Local Growth for Global Goals

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ABSTRACT

This article aimed to present the progress of the Municipality of San Remigio, located on the northeastern coast of Cebu Island in the Philippines towards sustainable development. The featured local community development campaign “Usbong San Remigio” is discussed to exemplify a transformative local governance approach to fulfilling the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this case, the article further provides analyses and practical tips on how to relate and integrate local community initiatives to the 2030 Agenda. These contributions are relevant for developing an argument in the position paper which is to: “analyze and discuss a case study that shows how local, people-centered, and sustainable initiatives relate to and work toward the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.” The term “usbong” (or the process of germination in Cebuano language) was chosen to represent the ways by which San Remigio Municipality advances its local sustainable development within and beyond the parameters of the global SDG framework. San Remigio’s community participation in local governance (SDG 11.3), mangrove reforestation, conservation of marine resources (SDG 14) and natural and cultural heritage (SDG 11.4), and people’s participation in local-level planning, among others, are recognized as its strategic flagship campaigns. The municipalities’ mangrove reforestation and marine conservation drives (13 and 14), livelihood and skills development (8), environmental education and culture (4, 11.4), as well as people’s participation in planning and decision-making processes (11.3) are underscored as key thematic priorities that San Remigio has been undertaking in sync with both the global SDGs as well as the local cultural, historical, and demographic features of this place. The contextualized use of local language, identity, and traditional indigenous values within these campaigns, as well as citizens’ leadership in these local sustainability drives, are also featured. The featured case study supports the paper’s position of the need for localizing the SDGs and the importance of citizen ownership over global development targets. The examples and analyses on San Remigio’s “usbong” (sprouting) initiatives are used as pointers on what local, developing municipalities can learn and apply from one another in terms of heritage, innovation, and international solidarity in local sustainable development practice.

Keywords: Usbong San Remigio, Sustainable Development Goal, Community Development, Local Governance, Inclusive Growth

INTRODUCTION

The small coastal municipality of San Remigio, Cebu (henceforth San Remigio or SR) has just turned the page to another chapter in its history of transformation. In the local community, leaders and residents alike embrace the spirit of growth and community development that is homegrown, inclusive, and sustainable: “Usbong San Remigio”. “Usbong” in the Cebuano language means “to sprout”, or “to grow” (Joaquin, 2020). With this phrase, the municipality pledges its commitment to a better future for its people, culture, and the environment.

In a world where citizens and governments are called upon to address global issues together, San Remigio joins the challenge by aligning the community’s local development initiatives to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030” (United Nations, 2015). By its initiatives in community development, environmental protection, and people-first governance, San Remigio shows how the UN targets can be practically reached (Ybañez, 2020; UNDP, 2022). The case of SR is an example of how local

leadership with the support of engaged citizens and residents can bring about measurable progress to the UN targets without losing the community's spirit.

Philosophical Stance

This article embraces the idea that real and lasting development starts from within—from the everyday lives, stories, values, and shared hopes of the people themselves. Inspired by communitarianism and environmental humanism, it sees progress not just as economic growth, but as the nurturing of human dignity in balance with the natural world. *Usbong San Remigio* reflects this belief: that communities already have the seeds of meaningful growth within them, especially when they are guided by values like stewardship, unity, and self-determination. By honoring the voices, traditions, and wisdom of the locals, this approach moves away from rigid, top-down models of development and instead fosters a more grounded, people-centered path toward sustainability—one that is not forced, but gently grown and nurtured over time.

Ontological Stance

This article takes a constructivist view of reality, grounded in the belief that what we understand as “real” is shaped by the people who live it—their shared experiences, cultural practices, and collective dreams. In San Remigio, development isn't seen as something rigid or universally defined. Instead, it's a living, breathing process that grows and shifts depending on the local context, identity, and relationships within the community. The idea of *usbong* captures this beautifully—true growth springs not from outside forces or standard formulas, but from the deep connections between people, their land, and the values they hold dear.

Methodological Stance

This article takes a qualitative and interpretive approach, focusing on how people in San Remigio make sense of development in their own words, stories, and everyday experiences. It recognizes that to truly understand progress, we need to listen to the voices of the community and look closely at the meanings behind their practices and traditions—like those expressed in the *Usbong San Remigio* campaign. Instead of relying solely on numbers or statistics, this method values the richness of local narratives, symbols, and relationships, offering a deeper view of how the town's efforts connect to the larger vision of sustainable development.

Axiological Stance

This article embraces a humanistic view, grounded in the belief that values, meaning, and ethics are at the heart of how communities grow and shape their future. It recognizes that the people of San Remigio carry with them their own deeply rooted ideas of what truly matters—what they see as good, meaningful, and worth striving for. These cultural values guide their everyday choices and long-term hopes for sustainable progress. The *Usbong San Remigio* initiative is more than just a campaign; it's a movement built on shared responsibility and a deep love for their community. From this perspective, development—and the research that seeks to understand it—must be conscious of the values that people hold. It also acknowledges that both the community and the researcher bring their own ethical viewpoints to the work of creating real, lasting change.

Rhetorical Stance

This article takes an engaged and people-focused approach, aiming to uplift and inform the people of San Remigio about their own progress and the meaningful steps they've taken together toward sustainable development. It speaks in a language of empowerment, partnership, and local pride—one that's meant to resonate with everyone from community members to local leaders, teachers, and grassroots advocates. Rather than portraying development as something brought in from the outside, it emphasizes that real progress comes from within—from the community's own choices, voices, and actions. At its heart, this article wants to inspire and remind readers that the power to shape a better future lies in their hands, and that their efforts are not only valuable but vital in reaching the national goals for 2030.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive-narrative-interpretive phenomenology approach in documenting local practices in San Remigio, Cebu's development planning and implementation in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 11. It gathers information on the basis of municipal documents and ordinances, local development plans, community-based programs, and related secondary sources such as government, academic, and SDG-related reports and journals. It also bases information from site visitation to certain programs and communities, and thematic review of their year-long SDG-themed local campaign, *Usbong San Remigio*. Through its analysis, it examines how San Remigio is internalizing culture, environment, and governance in its development framework. Its methodology is an attempt to present how local context and indigenous practice are key to the enactment of global development aspirations.

DISCUSSIONS

Identity-Rooted: “Usbong” (Sunrise/Sprout)

San Remigio's development is deeply anchored in its sense of identity. The municipality's campaign slogan, “Usbong San Remigio,” speaks to a deeper meaning of progress rooted in culture, language, and shared values. “Usbong” or sunrise/sprout, can be defined as the growth of a plant or organic matter (Joaquin, 2020). The term suggests growth as a natural process, implying that development is deliberate, inclusive, and from the ground up (Joaquin, 2020). This is a crucial point of distinction from a hyper-urbanized society that grows at the cost of its historical and cultural narratives. San Remigio, by contrast, integrates identity into its development (Department of Tourism, Region VII, 2022). This is a powerful takeaway from local development plans in which cultural sustainability is equally weighted alongside economic and social growth (Del Mundo, 2021). Identity can be understood as the anchor of development, as “without it, long-term transformation will be impossible” (Del Mundo, 2021, para. 6). Festivals, narratives, and the use of Cebuano as the main language in governance and education are examples of why the younger generation is growing more civic-minded and proud of the community.

Community Ownership: Participatory Governance

San Remigio's success is also based on the tenet of community ownership. From the municipal government to community stakeholders (barangay leaders, senior citizens, women's organizations, fisherfolk), everyone has a stake in development. This includes participatory governance practices that encourage community feedback and engagement in the planning and decision-making process. This is an essential part of SDG 11, which clearly states that cities should “ensure participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management” (United Nations, 2015, para. 12). Participatory governance not only ensures good accountability, it also results in a bottom-up approach that sets development priorities based on actual needs. According to Ybañez (2020), small municipalities like San Remigio can become formidable reformers “when they build people's participatory structures and processes” (para. 9). In the community, a strong sense of ownership is closely linked to a sense of responsibility, which empowers all citizens to propose solutions rather than rely solely on government initiatives.

Sustainable Habitat: Protecting the Environment

San Remigio's development is dependent on the natural environment, not just for tourism, but for its very survival as the town boasts the longest shoreline in the entire province of Cebu. In an era where climate-related risks and disasters are fast becoming a reality for most coastal towns and cities, the municipality of San Remigio has put into place mechanisms for environmental protection and sustainability that fulfill several targets of SDG 11, specifically that of building “disaster-resilient” cities and human settlements (United Nations, 2015). Mangrove reforestation programs, marine protected areas, and eco-tourism policies are all examples of environmental protection programs that safeguard natural resources and habitats for future generations (Cebu Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office, 2023). Environmental protection has also provided the basis for sustainable livelihoods for residents, such as through community-run eco-tourism initiatives (Department of Tourism, Region VII, 2022). Environmental education and awareness-building are also key

components of community programs (Department of Tourism, Region VII, 2022). San Remigio is thus living proof of the UNDP's (2022) insistence that "environmental protection must be mainstreamed in all aspects of local governance and development planning."

Local Actions for Global Change

The municipality of San Remigio is a demonstration of how local action can impact the world. The Sustainable Development Goals, as of writing, are global in both their origin and target audience. Without effective localization and contextualization, the SDGs can only be aspirational rather than achievable. San Remigio's "Usbong" campaign shows that even the smallest municipalities in the country can be aligned with the SDGs when grassroots initiatives are prioritized, plans are long-term and strategic, and leaders are driven by service and their values. Clean energy, quality and inclusive education, women's empowerment, and safe public spaces are a few areas where the municipality's programs clearly map to the SDGs (National Economic and Development Authority, 2021). A list of global development targets that have been integrated into local government plans are a testament that change begins with a single empowered, committed community. For San Remigio, global goals have become local truths, and the town is living these everyday.

Implementation Issues and Key Takeaways from Localizing SDGs

On the basis of evidence presented above, it can be concluded that despite the notable achievements of the Municipality of San Remigio in localizing SDGs through the Usbong San Remigio program, localizing community-based development also faces several implementation issues. Recent studies highlight that localizing SDGs entails more than just supporting local plans with the agenda of 2030; rather, it involves institutional continuity, financing, governance, and monitoring mechanisms that can translate to sustainable development impacts in the long run (OECD, 2024; UNDP, 2023). Many factors can affect how local governments, especially those in developing countries, can mainstream and localize SDGs. Resource constraints, capacity limitations, environmental risks, and governance practices represent common challenges that determine the success and sustainability of localized SDG efforts.

Financial Constraints. First, financial constraints often limit the continuity and scalability of local programs. Community-driven activities such as mangrove rehabilitation, environmental education, coastal resource management, heritage development, and sustainable livelihood programs will need continuous resource inputs for implementation, monitoring, maintenance, and evaluation. Local revenues are limited, and there are priorities in terms of development programs the local government can support. The OECD (2024) recently found that lack of financial resources was the top challenge why local and regional governments struggle to implement SDGs; in another report by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (2024), it was stressed that mobilizing sustainable financial resources and enhancing multilateral fiscal provisions are among the solutions to closing the finance gap of local SDG programs. Such studies suggest that local governments should diversify their funding sources by engaging national government partners, private organizations, academe, and development allies.

Capacity Development. Capacity development also represents an essential factor that can affect the success of localizing SDGs. Competent LGU employees, barangay officials, CSOs, and volunteers should have the capacity to deliver and implement development programs with scientific evidence. Leadership development, technical knowledge, organizational learning, and efficient institutional succession should constantly take place to promote better planning, implementation, program monitoring, and decision-making. According to UNDP (2023), LGUs that established mechanisms for continuous capacity-building and regular accountability are among the local governments that were able to deliver and quantify SDGs at the local level. The same organization also cited institutional ownership, capacity-building, and whole-of-society engagement as critical approaches to sustain local SDG implementation.

Citizen and Stakeholder Engagement. Ensuring citizen engagement is also not exempted from challenges. As mentioned earlier, stakeholders must continuously be engaged in local development through consultative mechanisms, updates, and decision-making processes that respect the opinions of women, children, Indigenous people, elderly citizens, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized members of the community. Future

public participation may be affected by different levels of awareness, priorities in livelihood, stakeholder expectations, and fatigue. As iterated by UNDP (2023), stakeholder engagement should be well-defined among LGUs so that communities are empowered, and vulnerable and marginalized groups are given due representation in local policy-making. In another article, OECD (2023) reported that engagement of stakeholders and localization partnerships are among the success factors of local sustainability programs.

Environmental Challenges and Climate Change. Localities like San Remigio are also exposed to various climate change impacts and environmental risks. Floods, sea-level rise, coastal erosion, degradation of marine resources, loss of biodiversity, and extreme weather events can affect fisheries, tourism, coastlines, and local communities' means of living. There is a need to bolster local development programs with climate change adaptation measures, ecosystem-based management, and disaster risk reduction. A recent study by the United Nations Global Policy Unit (2024) underlined that climate resilience and localizing SDGs should be addressed together by developing local climate change initiatives driven by governance, finance, and participatory inputs from the community.

Impact Assessment. Measuring impact is also valuable to ensuring sustainable programs. While Usbong San Remigio is evidently designed to support and complement the SDGs, assessment techniques can help cement whether the programs instituted by the local government are generating positive impacts on environmental, economic, and social factors. Strengthening local data systems and monitoring development through results-oriented frameworks should be a practice of LGUs. Indicators may include, but are not limited to: survival rate of rehabilitated mangroves; species and fishery biodiversity; increased income of households previously engaged in the program; cash earned from tourism; sense of good governance; citizen participation; stakeholder satisfaction; cleanliness of waterways and biotic factors, among others (UNDP, 2023; OECD, 2024). With the availability of valid and local data, policymakers can easily identify gaps in governance and program implementation. They can then formulate policies that can help bolster program impacts.

Thus, localizing SDGs is an achievable goal if community empowerment, public participation, local identity, environmental responsibility, and development partnerships are entrenched in local policies and practices. The case of San Remigio reinforces this claim. However, the issues discussed also provide insights on what local governments can do to improve their policies and adapt to changing dynamics that may affect sustainability programs. Although not stated in the analysis, identifying accomplishments and failures can help determine lessons learned in localizing global agendas. After all, just like how SDG frameworks emphasize the importance of having robust monitoring and accountability systems, evaluating successes and failures can promote transparency, allow LGUs to learn from the past, and increase the sustainability of local development programs. This notion was also concisely discussed in recent articles by OECD (2024) and UNDP (2023).

CONCLUSION

By embracing the spirit of *Usbong San Remigio*, the town has shown that real progress grows from within—from its culture, its people, and the sustainable ways they care for their community. Through active participation and local pride, San Remigio has brought the global vision of Sustainable Development Goal 11 to life: building places that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. What makes this town stand out is not just its achievements, but *how* they were made—through unity, tradition, and a deep respect for nature. San Remigio's journey reminds us all that even a small community can make a big impact when it listens to its people, honors its roots, and works together for a future that's not only brighter, but shared by everyone.

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