

## **Internationalization of University: Issues and Challenges**

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The internationalization of higher education has become an increasingly important topic in academic research, as evidenced by a systematic review of 1,412 articles published over the past 25 years. Key themes surrounding this phenomenon include mobility, knowledge transfer, and cooperation, alongside competition, national strategies, and the mutual influence of higher education systems. The globalization of the economy has created pressures on academics, students, and university administrators, with challenges such as inadequate research funding and technological limitations. In response, universities have sought partnerships and alternative funding sources to enhance student and faculty mobility and foster research collaboration. This study builds on the work of Moshtari and Safarpour (2024), who identified key issues faced by East African countries in higher education, by exploring similar challenges in Southeast Asia, specifically the Philippines. These challenges are categorized into four main areas: i) policy; ii) financial and physical resources; iii) academic competencies; and iv) social and cultural factors. Additionally, our research proposes an agenda for success that includes the following dimensions: i) international engagement and mobility; ii) internationalization of the curriculum; iii) research collaboration; iv) reputation building; and v) fostering a research culture focused on innovation.

*Keywords:* internationalization, developing countries, innovation, publication

### **Introduction**

As a subject of growing importance in scholarly inquiry, the internationalization of higher education is increasingly recognized for its transformative influence and significant global implications. A systematic review of 1,412 articles from the past 25 years identified key themes: mobility, knowledge transfer, cooperation, competition, national institutional and political strategies, and the mutual influence of higher education (Ghani et al., 2022). Globalization has made international engagement a criterion of excellence for universities, influencing the allocation of funds for the mobility of professors and students (Woicolesco, Cassol-Silva, & Morosini, 2022a). Buckner (2019) studied 1,439 higher education institutions in 137 countries and found that American and Canadian administrators view internationalization primarily as an awareness advantage, while administrators in other English-speaking countries prioritize economic benefits.

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Drawing upon UNESCO Institute for Statistics, McAuliffe, Bauloz, and Kitimbo (2024) revealed that the number of international students surpassed 6.3 million in 2021. The report does not further specify the definition of internationally mobile students but only represents global statistics. In 2018, the global economy related to international students was valued at \$200 billion. Assessing the effects of international students on the economy reveals numerous benefits. Levent (2016) outlines both short-term and long-term, as well as direct and indirect, contributions of international students to the economy. The success of individual students significantly influences the visibility of these positive effects in the future. The short-term and direct contributions of international students to the host country's economy primarily involve their spending on accommodation, food, clothing, healthcare, transportation, and communication. Conversely, their long-term and indirect contributions revolve around the creation of a qualified workforce. Through their education, participation in scientific and technological advancements, and contribution to national income growth, international students help drive positive economic developments.

The United States, England, France, Australia, and Canada collectively hold a substantial share of this market (Galand, 2025). The economic bearing of international students in Canada is notable. Canadian universities hosted almost as many international students as U.S. universities, despite the U.S. having nearly ten times the population of Canada. According to the latest ICEF report, Canada received over one million international students in 2023, including nearly 50,000 from the Philippines—a six-fold increase from 2019 (ICEF Monitor, 2024).

This study principally argues that, informed by Moshtari and Safarpour's (2024) model, internationalization of higher education in the Philippines is shaped by a complex interplay of global trends and local challenges, which emphasizes the role of institutional strategies, policy environments, and cultural contexts. The varying levels of effectiveness in the strategies employed by universities, influenced by these factors, ultimately determine the country's integration into the global higher education landscape. To prove this, an exploration of the key factors influencing the internationalization of higher education in the Philippines is conducted, comparing the challenges and strategies employed by Philippine universities with those of other Southeast Asian countries and analyzing the impact of global trends on the country's higher education system. Specifically, this study responds to:

1. What are the key factors influencing the internationalization of higher education in the Philippines?
  - 1.1. How do the challenges faced by higher education institutions in the Philippines compare to those in other Southeast Asian countries regarding internationalization?
  - 1.2. What strategies have Philippine universities employed to promote internationalization, and how effective have these strategies been?
2. How do global trends in higher education internationalization impact the higher education system in the Philippines?

While globalization and internationalization are closely linked, it is important to distinguish between the two. Globalization has strongly encouraged and facilitated internationalization (Strielkowski, Grebennikova, Razinkina, & Rudenko, 2021), which involves integrating international, intercultural, and global elements into the mission and role of universities. Western countries have pursued internationalization primarily through two strategies: recruiting students from English-speaking European or Australian countries proficient in English, and opening campuses abroad through varying degrees of relocation (Tight, 2022). While Western countries have indeed sought internationalization through such strategies, the primary origin of most internationally mobile students is in Asia, particularly China and India. This has led to a nuanced understanding of the global mobility patterns and reflects the increasingly complex nature of international student flows, highlighting the dominance of China and India as the largest sources of internationally mobile students. In 2021, more than one million internationally mobile students were from China, the highest globally, followed by India with approximately 508,000 students. The United States, the largest destination for international students, hosted more than 833,000, followed by the United Kingdom (nearly 601,000), Australia (around 378,000), Germany (over 376,000), and Canada (nearly 318,000).

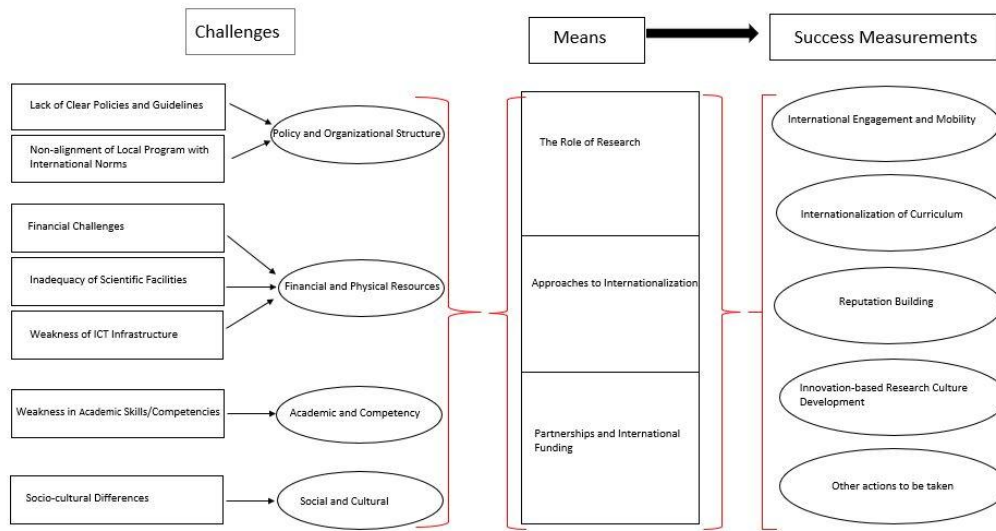
In Asia, internationalization should not lead to a new form of neo-colonialism but rather promote regionalization of practices and standards. This approach favors the emergence of opportunities to attract top students while facing fierce international competition. Buckner and Stein (2019) suggest that the criteria for successful internationalization may lack ethical considerations and favor wealthy nations. This neo-colonialism is also evident in the requirement for accreditation from organizations, often American or European. However, Marginson (2023) and Hughson (2024) argue that the need for international higher education is to critically engage with power dynamics and ensure a more equitable global exchange.

Accreditation is the most important criterion for choosing a university (Kumar, Shukla, & Passey, 2020), as it enhances the university's reputation, facilitates student mobility, and increases chances of obtaining grants. The COVID-19 pandemic, by limiting mobility, has highlighted the difficulty emerging countries face in achieving social justice in access to international education (Tasci, 2021). Alsharari (2020) lists the main opportunities that internationalization brings: improving status, exchanging students, facilitating publication, and establishing partnerships. Recognized international achievements bring increased prestige, improved quality, better research networks, and mobility for teachers and students, albeit at the cost of brain drain and increased expenses (Ho, Klemenčič, & Bello, 2023).

Given these factors, it is crucial to focus on internationalization from the perspective of emerging countries, specifically in Southeast Asia. This case study was designed as an initial exploration of the internationalization model within a limited environment, with the Philippines serving as a representative starting point for further comparative research in the region. This focus allows for a more nuanced examination of the challenges and strategies specific to the Philippines, while also offering valuable insights that could later be extended to other Southeast Asian countries.

Additionally, this streamlines the unique advantage this case study offers due to the firsthand expertise of one of the authors, who previously served as the Director of International Affairs at a university that has direct links with the other authors through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This connection has provided us with privileged access to important insights and data, ensuring that the study reflects not only academic research but also real-world experiences in the field of internationalization. The global perspective of this research, advocating for measurable means to face the challenges, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Global Perspective of the Research



## Background

### Challenges

The characterization of the challenges facing the Philippines is informed by the work of Moshtari and Safarpour (2024), whose qualitative study on the internationalization of higher education in low-income East African countries provides valuable insights. Their research, which combines an extensive literature review with interviews, offers significant merit, particularly because it derives its findings from low-income countries rather than highly developed nations. This distinction is crucial, as their study emphasizes the unique challenges faced by educational systems in countries with limited resources, which are often overlooked in broader discussions dominated by more developed contexts.

Furthermore, Moshtari and Safarpour (2024) argue that East African countries' higher education systems are among the most challenged globally, thus making their findings especially relevant for understanding the difficulties experienced by other low-income countries, including the Philippines. Given the lack of a comparable list of challenges specific to Asia or the Philippines, we considered their framework a useful starting point for developing an initial list of challenges tailored to the

Philippine context. This approach allowed us to build on existing research while addressing the gap in knowledge regarding the internationalization challenges faced by the Philippines and other Asian countries.

The current study presents the main challenges in Southeast Asia, using their framework organized around four aspects: policies and organizational structure, financial and physical resources, academic skills, and cultural challenges.

### ***Policies and Organizational Structure***

#### **a) Lack of Clear Policies and Guidelines**

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is responsible for defining and regulating all aspects of higher education. Unfortunately, like many governmental bureaucracies, this office often lacks adequate data. For instance, the list of directors and their contact information for international affairs and linkages is outdated, making it difficult to implement policies and guidelines consistently. Additionally, a survey of the 225 main universities in the Philippines revealed many errors on their websites, indicating unreliable information.

Nevertheless, in 2016, CHED adopted a key policy on internationalization, proposing strong actions to increase mobility and partnerships. According to Eder (2023, p. 5), this policy reflects “an ambivalent ideology characterized by nationalism and co-optation,” raising questions about the Western-centric understanding of internationalization and the decolonization of higher education.

#### **b) Non-alignment of Local Program with International Norms**

The Philippines compares favorably with its ASEAN counterparts in many areas. However, a significant weakness is its limited openness to international students and academics. Specifically, the visa application process for students is cumbersome, and international academics face substantial obstacles when trying to work in the Philippines (Killingley & Ilieva, 2015). To address these challenges, the Commission on Higher Education’s 2016 Memorandum Order No. 55 outlines policies and strategies for internationalizing higher education, aligning with the country's commitments to various international agreements and trade in services (iEducation Philippines, n.d.). Furthermore, Vibar and Rosales (2021) highlight the importance of institutional accreditation, organizational infrastructure, and budget allocation in influencing HEIs' internationalization efforts. Consequently, there is a pressing need for greater coherence between institutional strategies and global benchmarks within the Philippine HEI context.

### ***Financial and Physical Resources***

#### **a) Financial Challenges**

In Southeast Asia, opportunities for internationalization often hinge on financial capacity, which is typically limited. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred the

emergence of a more cost-effective form of student mobility—virtual internships (Woicolesco, Morosini, & Marcelino, 2022b). They consider it economically viable, socially equitable, and capable of significantly expanding access to international education. Financing is identified as the most critical aspect of internationalization, according to Neves and Barbosa (2020). Alsharari's (2020) study highlights funding as a weakness for universities and outlines the main opportunities that internationalization presents: improving status, exchanging students, facilitating publication, and establishing partnerships. The primary challenge lies in the lack of state funds, necessitating the search for alternative financing sources (Heng, 2023; Tanhueco-Nepomuceno, 2018).

#### b) Inadequacy of Scientific Facilities

The science curriculum in the Philippines aims to create scientifically literate individuals who can solve community problems, but the country ranked last in science in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (De la Cruz, 2022). Inadequate laboratory facilities, equipment, and supplies are rife in state universities and colleges, recommending these to be upgraded (Mabini, 2022; Reyes & Pateña, 2023). Additionally, the rapid changes of Industry 4.0, including emerging technologies like AI and robotics, challenge the country to adapt, leading to initiatives by the Department of Science and Technology and the Science Education Institute.

#### c) Weakness of ICT Infrastructure

Belgium's Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) ranks the Philippines as highly disaster-prone, particularly due to devastating typhoons like Ondoy, which threaten the country's ICT development (Symaco, 2013). With Internet speeds lagging behind Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia, the Philippines faces challenges, especially in education. To compete with other Southeast Asian nations, proactive steps are crucial. Tomaro's and Mutiarin's (2018) analysis suggests enhancing ICT integration in Philippine education through measures like teacher training and improved infrastructure. The Government, via CHED, aligns the higher education sector with national and international goals, including emphasizing ICT, a priority underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic (Chao & Symaco, 2021).

### ***Weaknesses in Academic Skills/Competencies***

Heng (2023) conducted a qualitative study involving 23 universities in Cambodia, highlighting the challenges hindering their internationalization efforts. He underscores the importance of external assistance in bridging the north-south (or East-west) divide. One notable issue identified is the limited understanding of research nature among professors. Similarly, a study by Flander et al. (2023) involving 34,674 academics across 16 countries, including some emerging nations, sheds light on international activities within academia. The research reveals that senior professors predominantly engage in international endeavors, with grants being relatively scarce, accounting for only about 5% of activities. Additionally, there's a prevalent trend towards organizing local conferences rather than international ones.

Moreover, the Philippines, among its ASEAN counterparts, has the lowest number of international students. This suggests that the potential benefits of the English language proficiency have not been fully realized in attracting international students to Philippine universities (Killingley & Ilieva, 2015).

### ***Socio-cultural Differences***

The success of internationalization must consider culture in international development, highlighting the necessity of understanding the culture of others (Sa and Serpa, 2020).

A study by Ashikuzzaman et al. (2018) concluded that Asian students often struggle to grasp the concept of plagiarism. Culture likely influences academics' perceptions of plagiarism (Pan, Stiles, Tempelmeyer, & Wong, 2019). According to Bloch (2008), Asian cultures prioritize the imitation of masters, and collective authorship is valued over individual authorship, posing a challenge to Western standards. McCulloch and Indrarathne (2023) argue that standards are inadequately explained in Asia, emphasizing the need for clear policies, especially in the context of internationalization, regarding publication and study abroad. Although tools such as Turnitin exist, their prohibitive cost often limits their use. Given that academic cheating is deeply ingrained in Southeast Asian culture and challenging to address, could reform begin by focusing on what is most feasible, such as objective exams? Can tools be designed, particularly in the context of distance education, to detect cheating and thus take an initial step in combating plagiarism?

Ho, Klemenčič, and Bello (2023) acknowledge that international achievements bring benefits such as heightened prestige, better quality, improved research networks, and increased mobility for both teachers and students. However, these advantages come with the trade-offs of brain drain and higher costs.

### **The Role of Research**

Research and innovation are significant priorities for Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), but many struggle with low academic productivity due to a poor culture of research and innovation (Lunag et al., 2024). Achieving international recognition can enhance prestige, quality, research networks, and mobility for teachers and students (Ho, Klemenčič, & Bello, 2023). However, these benefits are often offset by challenges such as brain drain and increased costs. A study on BRICS countries shows a significant rise in quality publications tied to the depth and quality of research. Fan et al. (2022) suggest that collaboration with nations that have strong education networks can expand research opportunities for developing countries, strengthen their scientific and technological capabilities, and improve their overall research output.

## **Approaches to Internationalization**

According to de Wit and Deca (2020), internationalization can be achieved through two primary methods: abroad, based on the mobility of students and teachers (the previously most common model), and locally, which is currently in progress. Romani-Dias, Carneiro, and Barbosa (2019) suggest that research, publications, curriculum planning, and various peripheral activities such as participation in international organizations, professor exchanges, and collaborations can all be conducted remotely.

The Philippines has a comprehensive strategy for transnational education (TNE), but overseas HEIs may face obstacles in operating through local partners due to ownership requirements. Despite lower research output compared to ASEAN peers, the country demonstrates competitive citation impact, particularly in environmental and agricultural sciences, yet faces challenges in retaining talent and has fewer researchers per million of the population compared to its peers (Killingley & Ilieva, 2015).

## **The Importance of Partnerships and International Funding**

Establishing partnerships can facilitate the development of the education system, as noted by Kashkan and Egorava (2015), by tailoring the content and level of education to the needs of the economy. Through the shared utilization of knowledge and skills across different countries, particularly through development aid via the financing of international foundations (Hussaini, 2020), it was observed that countries in South Asia lag behind in higher education, risking further economic growth retardation. Khalid, Ali, Nordin, and Shah (2019) analyzed ASEAN internationalization trends and found that Thailand and the Philippines rank among the countries with average internationalization. The Philippines mainly focuses on international research, while Thailand accepts a controlled number of off-campus locations.

Neves and Barbosa (2020) also highlight partnerships as a means to enhance internationalization. According to Campbell and Neff (2020), who examined over 100 scientific articles, scholarship granted to emerging countries serve several purposes: (1) acquisition of skills and knowledge for human capital development, (2) promotion of social change or social justice in the country of origin, and (3) contribution to international or sustainable development and humanitarian aid.

Partnerships between universities in emerging and developed countries are pivotal in addressing the need for development. Shakirova (2019) emphasizes that international development is based on: (1) development of educational and scientific programs, (2) mobility of students and staff for training and scientific and educational activities, (3) joint implementation of scientific and innovative projects, (4) participation in the creation and development of educational networks, (5) engagement in international organizations' activities, (6) organization of international educational events, and (7) exchange of educational and scientific literature.

### **Agenda for Success: Measures of Internationalization**

Can developing countries in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines, aspire to reap the benefits of internationalization and expand their presence? Dubovitska (2013) offers quantitative criteria for evaluating universities' foreign activities: a) evaluating international research activities, including the number of international scientific conferences, grants, and scientific articles published in international journals indexed in databases, as well as the number of foreign specialists invited; and b) assessing the internationalization of the learning process, such as the number of study programs offered in foreign languages, the percentage of foreign students, and the proportion of graduates with double degrees compared to the total number of graduates.

From this perspective, the authors propose the following measures for Philippine universities to undertake:

#### **International Engagement and Mobility**

a) Student Mobility: Mobility, whether through short or long-term courses, degree mobility, credit mobility, or internships, is encouraged. Existing scholarships such as AIMS, SEMEO, UMAP, and USAID are widely disseminated and supported. Additionally, CHED may provide funding for deserving students to gain knowledge and skills through international education, internships, and other relevant endeavors. Students can also participate in research fellowships and opportunities abroad.

b) Faculty/Staff/Researcher Mobility: This encompasses (a) faculty/staff studying in foreign countries; (b) exchanges between institutions in different countries; (c) research fellowships/collaboration involving visits of scholars to collaborating institutions; (d) foreign language study; and (e) building international perspectives through conferences and networks involving travel of learners, faculty, or researchers.

The mobility of students, faculty, staff, and researchers will be promoted by CHED as integral to internationalization efforts. Proactive measures will be taken to address information, financial, academic, and administrative barriers to academic mobility. Information barriers will be tackled through well-functioning, IT-based information systems on educational opportunities and qualified education providers. Efforts will be intensified to mobilize funds from internal and external sources to support academic exchanges, with better programming of these funds to prioritize activities covered by internationalization initiatives. Academic barriers will be addressed through transparent and standardized mechanisms for recognizing academic qualifications and awards, as well as credit transfer schemes. Enhanced coordination among concerned agencies will ensure greater efficiency.

c) Internationalization and ASEAN Festival: Periodic activities related to internationalization and ASEAN awareness will be conducted on campuses as part of the Philippine government's ASEAN awareness program. These activities will be incorporated into the official Calendar of Activities. During these festivals, orientations on international programs and scholarship opportunities will be provided to faculty, staff, and students.

d) Academic/Administrative Leaders' International Immersion Program (ALIIP): This program is tailored for academic and administrative leaders, such as campus

directors, deans, chief administrative officers, academic chairpersons, chairpersons for Internationalization and ASEAN Integration, etc., to visit other competitive universities for sharing internationalization practices and identifying potential partnership programs.

e) Policies and Committee on International Mobility: To ensure proper management of human and non-human resources, a committee will evaluate who will travel abroad or take international opportunities.

f) International Memberships: Universities are encouraged to apply for international memberships such as the Washington Accord and ABET, Sydney Accord, Seoul Accord, Bologna Accord/Process, ASEAN University Network (AUN), ASEAN Qualifications Framework, Standards of Training Certification and Watch Keeping (STCW), ASEAN/Inter-Country Mobility of Students, and others.

### **Internationalization of Curriculum**

To effectively address regional and global trends, curricula must undergo internationalization. Additionally, achieving internationalization at home requires a focus on curriculum internationalization. The following considerations should be considered during the revision process: a) Foreign Language: The selection of foreign languages offered should align with students' prospective international industries; b) Joint Programs: Establishing joint programs involves aligning curricula with those of international partner universities; c) Global Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes should encompass international competencies essential for fostering students' global citizenship. This approach contributes to internationalization efforts at home; d) Programs for International Students: Introducing new programs, such as medical programs, can attract international students. Additionally, offering short-term English language programs can facilitate the enrollment of international students.

### **Research Collaboration**

Faculty and students should have ample opportunities for collaborative research with their foreign counterparts, a vital aspect of internationalization. Key components enhancing research's global reach include: a) Establishing a transparent institutional policy; b) Providing support systems for international collaboration; c) Integrating international teaching and learning into graduate-level programs; d) Offering short-term mobility opportunities for scholars and doctoral students; e) Maintaining an open policy for appointing international scholars and doctoral students; f) Promoting the development of international research networks and partnerships; and g) Supporting the international dissemination of research findings.

### **Reputation Building**

a) Marketing, Design, and Publication: Enhancing the visibility of universities online involves improving branding, design, and publication efforts.

b) National Accreditation and World Ranking: Improving rankings requires seeking both national and international accreditation. This can be achieved by

attaining prestigious designations such as the highest State Universities and Colleges (SUC) level, Center of Excellence (COE), or Center of Development (COD), among others.

## **Innovation-based Research Culture Development**

### **Other Actions to Be Taken**

A brainstorming session with a convenience sample of professors from one Philippine university concluded that simple actions can effectively enhance the international footprint:

#### **a) Student Mobility**

Foreign companies established in the Philippines can propose projects to university students and offer internships through partnerships with Canadian (and/or other countries') Chambers of Commerce. Engage former students who are now working abroad and those who had foreign advisors for their projects. Facilitate foreign thesis/thesis supervisor exchanges (free of charge). Facilitate post-doctoral positions abroad (ideally paid).

#### **b) Mobility of Professors**

Despite salary differences, explore exchange programs. Invite foreign professors for sabbaticals. Encourage participation in virtual conferences instead of local ones; offer paid tutorial sessions.

Look for postdoctoral (<5 years) and temporary job offers, for example, from Tulane University.

#### **c) Internationalization of Courses**

Integrate international issues into existing course plans. Develop new courses dedicated to global issues in specific disciplines, guiding students towards relevant internships. Offer courses unrelated to business, such as history, foreign policy, and language studies.

#### **d) Choice of Targets**

Recognize the limitations of targeting all 5,300 colleges and universities in the United States.

Focus on smaller, second-tier public universities in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Identify federations of establishments or professions by field, such as the federation of marine and freshwater sciences in the Philippines, AISworld in information technology, and IEEE for electrical engineers.

## Conclusion

The globalization of the economy, pressures from government to enhance research, and the recognized need for innovation have placed high demands on universities to adapt to the new education paradigm and improve internationalization. This pressure affects everyone, from professors needing academic challenges, to students eager for new insights, to managers curious about how others face these issues. The challenges are numerous, including a lack of clear policies, insufficient financial and technical resources, and weak academic competencies. To address these issues, universities have established units dedicated to finding partnerships and funding to improve student and professor mobility and foster research collaboration. While this broad summary of challenges and issues varies among higher education institutions and countries, it highlights the main actions being undertaken or planned. Further research is needed.

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