



SDG POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN MALAYSIA

Edited by Teo Lee Ken and Debbie Loh



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FOREWORD

Professor Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria

Head of the APPGM-SDG Secretariat

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A review of the past seven years of the 2030 agenda on the SDGs is the focus of this book of 16 articles. These articles were first presented at an SDG conference that sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of SDGs in Malaysian society. From 42 papers, these 16 were short listed and revised. These articles are listed under five key SDG themes of: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships.

Malaysia along with member states of the United Nations have made a long-term commitment to use the 17 SDGs as part of the national development agenda with a thrust towards inclusive and balanced development in terms of economic, social and environmental concerns.

Over the past seven years between 2015 and 2022, Malaysia has been active in incorporating the SDGs into the national development plans and undertaken several innovative initiatives. These 16 papers serve as a review of the achievements noting the challenges and gap in localising SDGs in Malaysian society. There are pointers to the next agenda over the next seven years between 2023 and 2030.

Of the 16 articles, 10 of these articles or chapters make a review of thematic concerns such as health, gender, the development agenda of refugees, Orang Asli communities, natives of Sabah as well as environmental and climate change concerns. However, the articles and chapters are not comprehensive enough as there are some clear gaps such as a review of economic and employment matters in Malaysia.

A sizable number of articles namely six articles, which are chapters capture the multi-stakeholder partnerships from various dimensions. These are as listed below:

- **Chapter 7** on income generation projects at the grassroots by K. Eruthaiaraj and Nur Balqis Osman;
- **Chapter 10** on the grassroots mapping methodology of data collection by Teo Sue Ann;
- **Chapter 12** on the journey of CSOs from 2011 and 2022 by Denison Jayasooria;
- **Chapter 13** on collaborations by Lin Mui Kiang;
- **Chapter 15** on SDG solution providers by K. Eruthaiaraj; and
- **Chapter 16** on youth engagement by Zoel Ng, Philus George Thomas and Mohd Idham

The Malaysian experience in this mid-term review, documents the amazing story and journey of multi-stakeholder partnerships between civil society, academicians, parliamentarians, government servants, solution providers and grassroots communities. This is consistent with the SDG 17 on partnerships, especially SDG 17.17.

This is the incredible story of people from CSOs and academics who were in a consultative stage but eventually became partners in localising SDGs with funding from the Ministry of Finance over the whole partnership period, which is still ongoing. The progress has been very significant and historical.

Based on the review articles we can identify three phases in the partnership among the various stakeholders as indicated below:

Phase 1 of Multi-stakeholder Engagement: Providing Inputs

The networking with the government over the years highlights several possibilities and a progression towards greater trust in the relations. We started with CSOs and academicians providing inputs to the

formulation of the SDG Roadmap 1 undertaken in 2015-2016 and the first Voluntary National Review (2017). We were invited to meetings and we presented our views and comments, which were incorporated. For CSOs, this stage was coordinated by the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance, a network of CSOs committed to SDGs.

Phase 2 of Multi-stakeholder Engagement: Partners in Localising SDGs

However, the input-consultation process shifted to partners in the delivery of SDGs at the grassroots through the localisation of SDGs projects. This took place with the formation of the *All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on SDGs* (APPGM-SDG) and the establishment of a legal entity *The Society for the Promotion of SDGs*, which received the government allocations and employed staff becoming the legal entity for the APPGM-SDG Secretariat since January 2020.

The localising SDGs project undertaken by parliamentarians, academics, CSOs, solution providers and grassroots communities received the support and endorsement of Parliament, the Ministry of Economy previously known as the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF). A clear sign of approval is seen in the progressive enlargement of the funding from MoF from RM1.6 million in the year 2020, to RM5 million in 2021, to RM10 million in 2022. In 2023, the MoF doubled the allocations for the localising SDG projects and the allocation of a new fund for Community Farms or the *Kebun Komuniti*. Likewise, there is a major expansion of funding for solutions projects from 34 in 2020 to 508 in 2023. In terms of staffing, the numbers have increased from 2 full time staff in 2020, to 32 staff in 2023.

During this phase the formulation of the 2nd VNR report in 2021 saw greater partnership and access to the draft documents before its release to the United Nations. CSOs and academics were

parts of the drafting and therefore the process was very different to the 2017 drafting of the VNR report. This too was coordinated by the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance.

Furthermore, the Chairperson of the APPGM-SDG, the head of secretariat and two of the secretariat staff secured official passes to the High-Level Political Forum in July 2022 along with the government delegates. Opportunities were available for participation in the main meeting hall as well as inside events.

Phase 3 of Multi-stakeholder Engagement: In Policy Advocacy in Localising SDGs and in District Level Task Force Teams

In 2022, the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance saw a change in the leadership of the co-chairs. This change has now made some demarcations to the roles. The Alliance is serving as the CSO network and forum on SDG policy advocacy, and provides inputs to the government as the voice of the CSOs.

The APPGM-SDG committee is a committee of Members of Parliament. This was first established during the 14th parliament and when parliament was dissolved in October 2022, the APPGM-SDG was also dissolved. However, the legal secretariat, namely the *Society for the Promotion of SDGs* continued during the interim period undertaking the approved projects. After GE-15 when parliament reconvened in December 2022, the members of parliament were approached and by March 2023, parliament officially announced the setting up of APPGMs in the 15th Parliament. All APPGMs had to recomplete the forms, and then received formal approval in March 2023.

The policy advocacy and CSO representation or voice is one key role via the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance. Another is the execution of the localising SDGs via the professional secretariat to execute the decisions of the APPGM-SDG. In that context, the *Society for the*

Promotion of SDGs as the legal body took a visible role for the localisation of SDGs.

The Malaysian experience is showcasing an effective bipartisan approach by parliamentarians. Between 2020 and 2023, 85 parliamentary constituencies were visited and mapping reports have been prepared. Funds were also allocated for solution projects in all the constituencies. In spite of changes in government between 2019 and 2022, the APPGM-SDG has secured the support of government throughout, which is a good example of bipartisan effort in ensuring *no one is left behind*.

We have experienced not only good networking with government at the federal level, but also at the district levels, especially the cooperation and support by the district officers (DOs). The DOs are also playing a role in interagency cooperation in addressing local issues and concerns.

We recognise the gaps, such as less emphasis on SDG 16 related matters on human rights and non-discrimination. The partnership with the business and private sector is another area that requires further attention and focus in the next phase of development.

This book entitled “SDG Policies and Practices in Malaysia” is an attempt to provide clarity during this mid-term review process of the SDGs locally, nationally and globally.

Acknowledgements

I take this opportunity to thank Teo Lee Ken and Debbie Loh for their role in editing these articles and getting the book ready for publishing. This is a valuable contribution and enlargement of local articles and reviews on SDGs in Malaysian society.

Appreciation is due to all the writers of the 16 articles for their contributions in this review process. Many of them have strengthened their articles and in the case of a few, undertook major revisions of the articles. Your labour is not in vain.

Thanks also to Zoel Ng and the communications team for the design, layout and publishing of this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Teo Lee Ken and Debbie Loh

As an agenda initiated in 2015, we have now reached the midway point of the United Nations SDGs 2030 Agenda. What are our achievements, where have we fallen short, what are our challenges, and where and how do we go from here? This book brings together writings from various community organizers and activists, policy makers and practitioners, researchers, academics and policy analysts that discuss Malaysia's progress in realizing the UN 2030 Agenda.

The article chapters are expanded from earlier versions of papers from the Malaysia SDG Conference held in November 2022. The Society for the Promotion of the SDGs, MySDG Academy and the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance with the support of the *Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia* (PSSM), KSI Strategic Institute, the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, and the Sejahtera Centre for Sustainability and Humanity of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) organised the conference. During the three-day conference from the 25th to the 27th, a total of 42 papers were presented. From these 42, we have selected and edited 16 papers for this book on policies and practices relating to the SDGs in Malaysia.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda and Malaysia's development trajectory, Malaysian society has progressed considerably since the declaration of the agenda in 2015. The goals have been incorporated into Malaysia's national planning, with various ministries formulating their action plans guided by the principles and objectives of the SDGs. The SDGs are incorporated, for instance, in the 11th (2016-2020) and 12th Malaysian Plans (2021-2025). There is also a National SDG Council and the National SDG Steering Committee. The Prime Minister heads the former. The National SDG Technical Committee further carries out the national coordination of the SDG agenda.

The language of the SDGs has increased in prominence and the discourse of sustainability has now become a mainstream discussion in public life and daily conversations. As the authors Zainal Abidin and Nur Syahirah Khanum illustrate, whether in the sphere of policy-making and governance, entrepreneurship and social work, and daily conversations at the ground level, the essential ideas and principles of the SDGs have proliferated. The efforts to establish a National SDG Centre by the Malaysian government reflect the heightened currency of the SDG language. Many communities and social organisations are articulating the importance of the values and aims of sustainable development in diverse local towns, villages and neighbourhoods. These conversations that carry the discourse of SDGs, as will be shown through the 5 parts of the book, further traverse the different issues or areas concerning the people, peace, prosperity, the planet, and also partnerships.

Consequently, the values of *inclusion* and of *leaving no one behind*, and the meaning and scope of the method of localization, has become common parlance among government leaders and officials, social workers and academics, and local communities. Rashila Ramli and Sity Daud, and Teo Sue Ann describe the process in which contemporary frameworks of thought, methodologies of action-based research, and policy sensitivity, if not change, have emerged in the process of implementing the SDGs agenda.

The growth and consolidation of networks and collaborations taking place from the national, to the local community level is also another significant feature in the progress of SDGs in Malaysian society from the year 2015, to 2022. Denison Jayasooria, and also Lin Mui Kiang have highlighted how the establishing of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on the SDGs, or the APPGM-SDG, has fostered closer cooperation among members of parliament and also between members of parliament and civil society organisations on the SDGs agenda. Through the APPGM-SDG and also the Malaysian CSO-

SDG Alliance, new channels of engagements between members of civil society and government officials and policy makers have been created, while existing ones have been strengthened and thus, have been more frequent.

The expansion of collaborations has occurred not only at the national and policy making level, but also between non-governmental organisations and social groups or networks and the local communities. Movements of solution providers and solution projects are mobilised across the country. Key stakeholders have established schools to cater to the needs of the refugee community. Cooperation between various groups including NGOs, young people and local groups to look after Malaysian beaches and the ocean has occurred. Such cooperation has focused on local projects and efforts that seek to address the daily concerns of targeted communities in the form of social entrepreneurship and projects, capacity building, and issues-based deliberative committees or groups. The papers by Norani Abu Bakar and Thirunaukarasu Subramaniam, K. Eruthaiaraj and Nur Balqis, Julian Hyde, and Zoel Ng, Philus George Thomas and Mohd Idham, among others, describe this development of increasing mobilisation of grassroots networks on SDGs.

More importantly, the plight and issues of vulnerable and deprived communities, and localities on the margins of development, have been placed at the centre of national and international conversations through the SDGs framework and grassroots mobilization. Through the writings of Kon Onn Sein, Norani and Thirunaukarasu, and K. Eruthaiaraj and others, we discern how vulnerable sectors such as the Orang Asli, refugees and economically disenfranchised groups continue to gather attention in terms of media and academic prominence, socio-economic support and consistent engagements with the public and social sector.

This centring of key issues, include the continuous critique of key areas relevant to national progress such as the health sector, gender relations, the environment and the Malaysian oceans, and data driven policy making and governance, as shown by Amar-Singh HSS, Sharifah Syahirah, Lavanya Rama Iyer and Julian Hyde, and Wong Chin Huat. Through Wong Sing Yun, Jain Yassin and Faerozh Madli, we see how the adoption of the SDGs agenda into national planning and policy has allowed the renewed critique of imbalance development occurring in Malaysia. All in all, without delving into the detailed cross checking of indicators and targets, the overall and broader significance of the SDGs agenda has been to put in perspective and present with clarity the scale of problems confronted by the Malaysian government and society. A clearer depiction of the Malaysian condition that would not have been obtained had we continued to utilise conventional frames of policy making and data gathering.

Therefore, despite the value and benefits that the SDGs agenda has brought over the past seven years to national planning and policy making, various gaps and challenges nevertheless persist. These take the form of the conceptual and methodological, and technical and practical. Among others, the socio-economic and geographical dislocation of the Orang Asli community remains a critical issue. In terms of refugees and their educational needs, more needs to be done to integrate the refugee community to mainstream national development, including education. In the preservation of our coastal shores and coral reefs and oceans, there is still the need for a policy and legal and enforcement system that address the micro and macro aspects of the preservation of marine biodiversity and ocean ecosystems. And conceptually, the approaches to data gathering and formulation of statistical data adopted by the Department of Statistics in evaluating the indicators of SDGs in Malaysia may mask certain problems faced by vulnerable communities, such as the Orang Asli.

While the APPGM-SDG and its supporting partners have managed to identify the local issues of each of the 57 parliamentary constituencies covered up to 2022, many of these issues, approximating the number 300 over, remain unresolved. The solution projects subsequently implemented by the APPGM-SDG can only address these issues only in the short term. For long term and lasting remedies still require structural and systematic change whether in the economic, social, environmental and governance sphere through policy reforms, and accountable and visionary leadership.

Thus, to discuss those issues and themes and more, this book is divided into five parts. **Part I** focuses on SDGs and People, and consists of six chapters. The first chapter on *The Development State of Sabah: An Observation based on SDGs* by Wong Sing Yun, Jain Yassin and Faerozh Madli examines the measures taken by the state government to implement development, including the Sabah Development Corridor (SDC), and argues how the approach of SDGs can complement and fill the gaps found in the planning and implementation of the SDC. In chapter two on *Charting Orang Asli's Progress and the SDGs through the Lens of Land Rights Recognition (2015-2022)* by Kon Onn Sein, he argues that by forming partnerships with the Orang Asli, the government achieves the multiple objectives of improving the socio-economic status of the Orang Asli community, preserving the forests, and contributes to building a greener economy for Malaysia. In *Leave No One Behind: SDG 4 for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Malaysia* by Norani Abu Bakar and Thirunaukarasu Subramaniam that makes up chapter three, the authors discuss how access to education, particularly formal, remains a challenge for refugees while the direction for refugee education and the education system at the policy level is still ad hoc, and proposes, among others, eight improvements for advancing education for the refugee community.

Chapter four by Rashila Ramli and Sity Daud on *Human Security and the SDGs: Malaysia's Experience Linking the Global Framework to the Local Context*, presents an in-depth discussion on the relationship between human security (HS) and the principles of SDGs. They further review the Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2017 and 2021 from the framework of human security (freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from indignity) and the SDG Principles. Additionally, the findings of APPGM-SDG impact evaluation of the localisation of SDGs in 10 Parliamentary constituencies are also presented.

In *Successes and Challenges in Implementing SDG 3 in Malaysia*, which constitutes chapter five, Amar-Singh HSS presents a comprehensive overview of the nation's progress in achieving good health and well-being, with a focus on children in Malaysia. He further uncovers the gaps and challenges that remain including population groups that are left behind; emphasizing the critical need for a transformative and inclusive approach towards achieving health equality for children nationwide. The final, and chapter six of this part, *SDG 5 and SDG 16 in Review: Relating CEDAW and the Malaysian VNRs through Feminist Governance* by Sharifah Syahirah Syed Sheikh evaluates the implementation of gender equality in Malaysia by analysing the Malaysian VNRs, and CEDAW reports. Using SDG 5 and SDG 16 as a reference point to review the 2022 Malaysian Government CEDAW Report, she then identifies best practices and main challenges faced in promoting gender equality.

Part II of the book, *SDGs and Prosperity*, encompasses one chapter. In *Income Generation Projects: Generating Income for the Marginalised Community*, K. Eruthaiaraj and Nur Balqis Osman discuss the work of the APPGM-SDG in the area of solution projects and the solution providers who are involved. They elaborate the kinds and numbers of solution projects that the APPGM-SDG has carried out over the years from 2020 to 2022. These projects, they explain, have

contributed immensely to uplifting the socio-economic status of vulnerable groups, including women and single mothers, youth, people with disabilities, farmers, and small traders.

The theme of prosperity, while consisting only of one chapter in this book, continues to be a critical issue that necessitates more public engagements and formal discussions. Economic well-being, access to dignified income, and social mobility, and have and continue to be a core concern of the Malaysian populace across all geographical locations. The paper by K. Eruthaiaraj and Nur Balqis highlight how social entrepreneurship and support through mediums such as micro-funds and micro-projects can contribute to improving the socio-economic status of social groups on the margins.

There are two chapters in **Part III** on SDGs and Planet. In chapter eight *Our Planet in Crisis: How is Malaysia doing in this “P” of the SDGs?*, Lavanya Rama Iyer focuses on the twin crisis Malaysia is confronted with, climate change and biodiversity loss. She further highlights the nation’s progress in SDGs 13, 14 and 15, identifies gaps and challenges and proposes recommendations. Chapter nine, *Coral Reefs, The Embodiment of the 5Ps of the SDGs: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships* by Julian Hyde, explains how there is much to be done to improve the management of the marine ecosystem and particularly the coastal habitat and coral reefs in Malaysia, and argues for stronger action in upholding SDG 14.

Part IV of our book focuses on SDGs and Peace, and covers chapters ten and eleven. In *A Reflection on the Localisation of the SDGs in Malaysia: The APPGM-SDG Issue Mapping Methodology*, Teo Sue Ann describes the issue mapping process employed by the APPGM-SDG while offering empirical insights. She goes on to examine the challenges and hindrances encountered, particularly at the local district and grassroots level, and their implications. She emphasises the need for concerted efforts and persistent engagement with the

multiple stakeholders as the way forward. Zainal Abidin and Nur Syahirah Khanum in *Addressing SDG Implementation Challenges: Exploring the Role of the National SDG Centre and Capacity Building*, explore how the National SDG Centre potentially serves as a catalyst in coordinating and building synergy among the various multi-stakeholders involved in making and accelerating progress in the SDGs. They propose leveraging on capacity building to inculcate the necessary change in mind sets to improve implementation and delivery of the SDGs.

The final part of the book, **Part V** focuses on SDGs and Partnerships, and encompasses five chapters. In chapter twelve, *A Journey in SDGs from Advocacy to Action: Past & Present (Between 2011-2022) and Future (2023-2030)*, Denison Jayasooria reflects on the development of the SDGs agenda and programmes since 2015, and considers the way ahead and how Malaysia from the present position of the awareness of SDGs and the localisation process, notwithstanding intense challenges, can better realize the ideals of the SDGs and global standards. Lin Mui Kiang in chapter thirteen, *Government and CSO Collaboration in SDG Implementation*, highlights the journey and inclusion of CSOs, including the significant role of the Malaysia CSO-SDG Alliance, in the implementation of the SDGs and policy input. She further calls for the greater involvement of the Third Sector in contributing towards achieving the SDGs.

Wong Chin Huat in his chapter, *Data Disaggregation to Increase the Visibility of Indigenous Peoples in Achieving SDGs in Malaysia*, argues how the present mechanisms to gather data by government institutions covers the other more specific information relating to identity, such as that of the Orang Asli, which are important to understand the needs and gaps in social services required by the Orang Asli. He calls for the disaggregation of some of these data, and demonstrates how these data and indicators might be by employing proxy categories as a reference point.

Solution Providers as Grassroots Mobilisers in Localising SDGs by K. Eruthaiaraj as chapter fifteen discusses the role of APPGM-SDG's solution providers as grassroots champions in localising the SDGs, from 2020 to 2022. Premised on empowerment, partnership and ownership, the projects undertaken by these solution providers nationwide along with the opportunities, challenges and best practices garnered are presented. In the sixteenth and final chapter, Zoel Ng, Philus George Thomas and Mohd Idham Mohd Yusof in *A Mid-Term Review of Malaysian Civil Society Organisations in Engaging Youths in SDG Implementation* takes us through the role of youth as important articulators and actors advocating the SDGs agenda, and argues that while there are still limitations to the participation of youths in public decision making and social action, they form the foundation for the realising of the SDGs.

All these articles encompass important insights gained from various individuals, social groups and organisations, and networks from the 2015 to the present in their work of promoting and localising the SDGs agenda in Malaysia. However, within the context of this book, there is a gap in articles and analysis that focus on the theme of prosperity or economic development, and planet or environmental justice and climate change. This has to be remedied in our future conferences and publications. At a broader level, as these writings have shown, there has been considerable progress in the development of SDGs in Malaysia, in line with global practices and standards. However, fundamental grievances and issues still remain. In the next half of the SDGs odyssey, even more needs to be done to ensure that the objectives of the 2030 agenda are not only realised on paper, but also on the ground.

The era of government knows best, and the top-down approach has ended, or at least proven to be ill capable of addressing contemporary problems and issues. Moving forward, the concepts of

people and partnership have become more essential as ever. *Inclusion* is not only a goal, but also a process. As the writings of our authors and their organisations, and the APPGM-SDG have shown, when projects and efforts are participatory and collective, local issues become manageable, and solvable. Such collaborative structures require involvement of all sectors, whether governmental or non-governmental, institutional or non-institutional. And these mechanisms are necessary at all levels of society and governance.

Further, the multi-dimensional and cross cutting nature of today's many problems also require cross and multi-institutional coordination. Government institutions, departments and agencies should not be confined by conventional boundaries of administration and issues identification and solving. Rather than ad hoc and reactive, cross-ministerial and governmental coordination should be institutionalized. Such mechanisms of governance need to be embedded within the governmental structure, linking the federal to the most local level.

Finally, we should return SDG 16 to the centre of national and policy conversations. SDG 16 can be said to form the foundation and prerequisite for the implementation and realisation of all the other SDGs. Additionally, a more robust rights-based framework can be used to guide the next process of localising the SDGs agenda as we transition into the second half of the UN 2030 SDGs Agenda.

To conclude, it is our greatest hope that this book serves as a key reference for all government leaders and officials, policy-makers, academics, researchers and students, activists, and members of the federal and also state legislative bodies to understand the landscape and status of SDGs implementation in Malaysia, and that it also serves as a valuable source of input for both, firstly, the *Mid-term Review of the 12th Malaysian Plan* that is being undertaken by the Malaysian government, and secondly, the *SDG Mid-term Review* process carried

out by the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance. And finally, we would also like to take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude and sincere thank you to Professor Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, head of the APPGM-SDG Secretariat for his continuous support and vision, and for writing the foreword to this book.

P A R T



SDGs and People

CHAPTER ONE

The Development State of Sabah: An Observation based on SDGs

Wong Sing Yun, Jain Yassin and Faerozh Madli

INTRODUCTION

The SDGs (SDGs) were adopted in 2015 by the United Nations as part of the Agenda 2030, a mutual agreement drawn by 193 members of the United Nations. The SDGs consist of 17 goals and 170 targets that cover all aspects of sustainability. Researchers in the past¹ had provided a critical review on sustainable development. Hak, Janouskova and Moldan² have highlighted the need to operationalise the SDGs targets and evaluate the indicators' relevance. Meanwhile, in their work, Smith and others³ have demonstrated that greater attention should be emphasised on the interlinkages and interdependencies among goals. Bexell and Jonsson⁴ developed a three-fold conceptual framework that allows the identification of key

¹ T. Hak, S. Janouskova, B. Moldan, "Sustainable Development Goals: A Need for Relevant Indicators", *Ecological Indicators* 60, 2016: 565-572; M. Stafford-Smith, D. Griggs, O. Gaffney, F. Ullah, B. Reyers, N. Kanie, B. Stigson, P. Shrivastava, M. Leach, D. O'Connell, "Integration: The Key to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals", *Sustainability Science* 12, No. 6, 2017, pp. 911-919; Magdalena Bexell and Kristina Jonsson, "Responsibility and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals", in *Forum for Development Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2017, pp. 13-29; A. Fleming, R.M. Wise, H. Hansen, L. Sams, "The Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study", *Marine Policy*, 86, 2017, pp. 94-103; R. Bali Swain and F. Yang-Wallentin, "Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: Predicaments and Strategies", *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 27, No. 2, 2020, pp. 96-106 (Hák *et al.*, 2016; Smith *et al.*, 2017; Bexell and Jönsson, 2017; Fleming *et al.*, 2017; Swain and Wallentin, 2020)

² T. Hak, S. Janouskova, B. Moldan, "Sustainable Development Goals: A Need for Relevant Indicators", *Ecological Indicators* 60, 2016: 565-572

³ M. Stafford-Smith, D. Griggs, O. Gaffney, F. Ullah, B. Reyers, N. Kanie, B. Stigson, P. Shrivastava, M. Leach, D. O'Connell, "Integration: The Key to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals", *Sustainability Science* 12, No. 6, 2017, pp. 911-919

⁴ Magdalena Bexell and Kristina Jonsson, "Responsibility and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals", in *Forum for Development Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2017, pp. 13-29

issues and concerns emerging from the way responsibility are framed in two key SDG documents.

On a separate note, findings by Fleming and other writers⁵ revealed that businesses can fruitfully engage with the SDGs by broadening their interpretation of business sustainability and being reflective of the values. Swain and Wallentin⁶ advocated that the synergies, trade-offs, and inter-linkages between SDGs may be better leveraged in achieving sustainable development, by focusing on the economic and social factors in developing countries. In another study by Swain and Shyam Ranganathan,⁷ analyses of the data revealed that developing countries are better off being focused on their economics and social policies in the short run. More real-world case discussions of practical applications of the SDGs are still required to better understand how they can be applied and to achieve the broader uptake that is necessary to achieve the ambitious targets of the SDGs.⁸

In wake of the necessary review to be conducted on the achievement of the SDGs within the local context, this paper aims to shed light on some of the critical issues that are relatable to the SDGs in the state of Sabah. Besides that, the lagging development of Sabah, making it the poorest state, has called for a critical need to review the issues in an effort to strategize necessary remediation actions. The remainder of this paper will be structured as follows: Section 2 to provide an overview of Sabah's economy, Section 3 to review the

⁵ A. Fleming, R.M. Wise, H. Hansen, L. Sams, "The Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study", *Marine Policy*, 86, 2017, pp. 94-103

⁶ R. Bali Swain and F. Yang-Wallentin, "Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: Predicaments and Strategies", *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 27, No. 2, 2020, pp. 96-106

⁷ R. Bali Swain and S. Ranganathan, "Capturing Sustainable Development Goals Interlinkages", Conference Paper for 8th IAEG Meeting, 5-8 November, 2018, Stockholm

⁸ A. Fleming et al, "The Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study", *Marine Policy*, 86, 2017, pp. 94-103

publications in Malaysia conducted spanning over 2015 to 2022 evolving the SDGs, and Section 4 to present the issues and implications in the state. In the last Section 5, strategies will be suggested and a conclusion presented.

Brief Overview of Sabah's Economy

As found in much of the literature,⁹ the common question of “Why Sabah’s development is falling behind despite having rich resources” has been frequently debated among the researchers. In view of this, scholars have shed light on some of the many issues that require serious attention such as non-favourable food self-sufficiency level or deficit food trade balance position, regulation, and institution transformation issues in areas such as labour and business licensing and even unstable water supply in certain areas.¹⁰ Sabah’s economy was mainly driven by commodity-related sectors, especially agriculture, mining, oil and gas, and tourism as illustrated in *Figure 1* making the state highly vulnerable to global economic shocks. The vulnerability of the Sabah state was further exposed during the pandemic crisis in the form of a high unemployment rate, an increasing poverty rate, and the shrinking of Sabah’s economy by 9.5%, which was much higher than the national percentage of 5.6%.¹¹

⁹ Please see: Firdausi Suffian, Arnold Puyok, Kasim Mansur, and Azmi Abdul Majid, “Political Economy of Sabah’s Economic Development: Economic Policy and Federal-State Relations, 2021, pp. 554-557; R. Idris and K. Mansur, Sabah Economic Model: An Overview”, *International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences* 10, No. 3, 2020, pp. 475-484

¹⁰ R. Idris and K. Mansur, Sabah Economic Model: An Overview”, *International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences* 10, No. 3, 2020, pp. 475-484

¹¹ Paritta Wangkiat, Reviving Sabah, *The Bangkok Post*, 28 February 2022, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2271151/reviving-sabah>

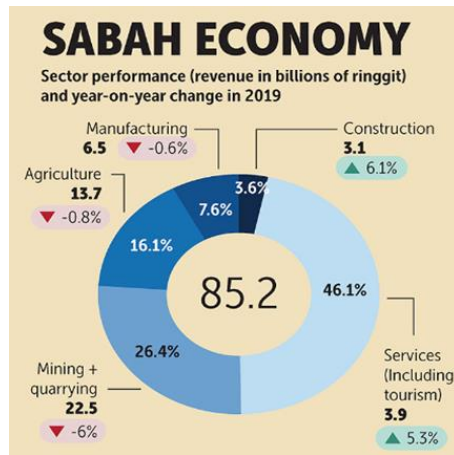


Figure 1. Sabah's Economy Performance
Source: Bangkok Post (2022)

Rafiq Idris and Kasim Mansur¹² shed light on the importance of infrastructure or enablers such as port facilities and airports in improving Sabah's economic performance. A stable water and electricity supply plays an important role to support production activities and supply, which will further attract more investment. Meanwhile, Firdausi Suffian and other scholars¹³ advocated that the bottom-up economic planning is crucial rather than a top-down approach. It is imperative, therefore, to carefully review and revamp the existing government plans, policy, and target to ensure that Sabah's development is well-achieved. The subsequent section will revolve around the issues and challenges of Sabah's development as highlighted by previous literature and studies.

¹² Rafiq Idris and Kasim Mansur, "Sabah Economic Model: An Overview", International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences 10, No. 3, 2020, pp. 475-484

¹³ Firdausi Suffian et al., "Political Economy of Sabah's Economic Development: Economic Policy and Federal-State Relations", 2021, pp. 554-557

Malaysia's Publication on SDGs

In order to provide an extensive review of the existing studies that relate to the SDGs, a database search was conducted on the SCOPUS database. Search results are examined and filtered based on the search criteria in Table 1. As illustrated in the table, a total of 58,820 articles were found by the keyword search of “sustainable development goals”. By limiting the search results to the years spanning from 2015 to 2022, the research results retrieved were 43,553. This search was further narrowed to 41,886 English-language article types. In our intention to examine the past research that has been done specifically within the local context of Malaysia from 2015 to 2022, the search finding revealed 1,194 publications.

Figure 2 displays the trend of publications conducted on the Sustainable Development Goals in Malaysia spanning from 2015 to 2022. Based on the graph, it is clear that the publications on the SDGs have been steadily growing over the years. From only 26 publications in the year 2015, the publications in Malaysia have multiplied to 396 publications by the year 2022. This could imply that there is growing awareness of the importance of the SDGs as reflected by the impressively increasing number of publications evolving on this topic. The following *Table 2* illustrates the document profiles of the publications in Malaysia on the SDGs spanning the years 2015 to 2022. A consistent growth of the publications can be observed from this review and there is a 47.56% annual growth. Based on the document profiles extracted using R (as displayed in Table 2), the average citation per document is 20.40 and the total references involved are 77,487. Most of the document types found are articles (59.38%), followed by conference papers (16.91%) and review papers (14.24%). The review in this section sheds light on the growing trend of research interest for the theme of the SDGs in Malaysia. This provides the motivation for our paper to extensively review the development state of Sabah in relation to the SDGs.

Table 1. Search Criteria

No.	Search Criteria	Number Of Articles
1.	“Sustainable Development Goals”	58,820
2.	Limit to Research Years 2015 – 2022	43,553
3.	Restrict to the English Language written publications	41,886
4.	Limit to Malaysia publications	1,194

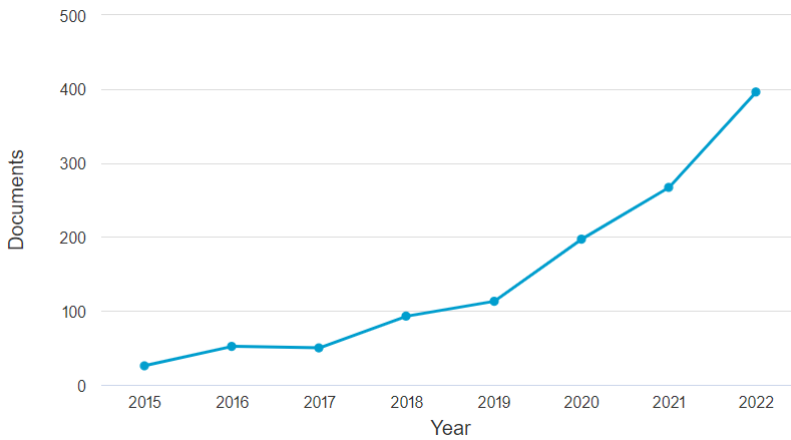


Figure 2. Number of Publications Documents by Years (2015 – 2022)
Source: SCOPUS Database (2022)

Table 2. Document Profiles

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2015:2022
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	606
Documents	1194
Annual Growth Rate %	47.56
Document Average Age	2.77
Average citations per doc	20.4
References	77487
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	5872
Author's Keywords (DE)	3690
AUTHORS	
Authors	8399
Authors of single-authored docs	43
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	45
Co-Authors per Doc	13.2
International co-authorships %	51.01
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	709
book	4
book chapter	84
conference paper	202
data paper	2
editorial	8
letter	3
note	9
retracted	1
review	170
short survey	2

Sources: Output generated from R Studio

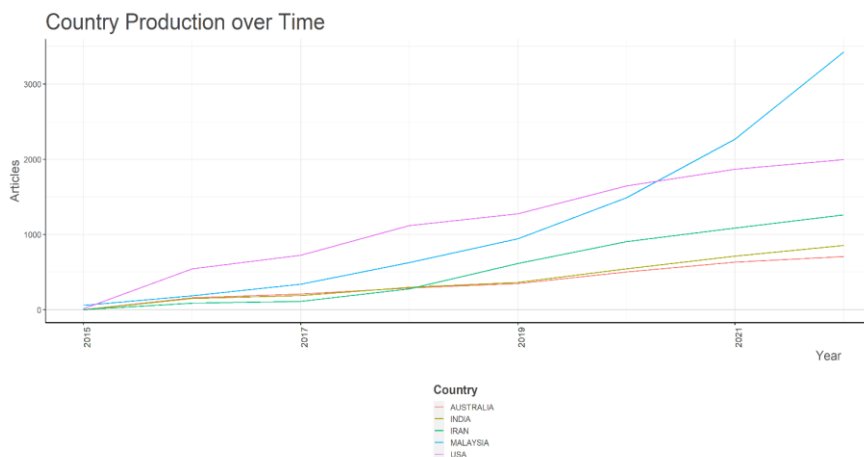


Figure 3. Country Production over Time
Source: Output generated from R Studio

By further running the data using R studio, it was interesting to highlight the trends observed in each country's production over time. An increasing pattern of production over time focusing on the topic of the Sustainable Development Goals can be found in Malaysia. This evidently demonstrates the increasing awareness of this topic especially amongst the scholars as more research has been undertaken within this context. This is not surprising, as Malaysia has already started its journey towards sustainable development as early as in the 1970s, when the *New Economic Policy* was introduced to eradicate poverty and to restructure the societal imbalances. The pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals has been an on-going continuous effort with policies such as the New Economic Model unveiled on 30 March 2010, which was developed to target achievements based on the goals of inclusivity, high income and sustainability.

The incorporation of the SDGs into the national planning framework such as in the Malaysia Plan formulation has been part of the Malaysian government initiatives in the commitment to attain the SDGs. For example, the move in mapping SDGs against the Eleventh Plan’s Strategic Thrusts (refer to *Figure 4*). Recognizing the importance of data gathering and reporting frameworks in facilitating the assessment of the country’s progress of the SDGs, there have been comprehensive evidence-based reports such as the Malaysia’s Voluntary National Review (VNR). These reviews have shed light on the history of key national achievements and progress towards sustainability. Based on these reviews, there has been the recording of Malaysia’s strong SDGs progress with a solid well-grounded commitment in both the medium and long-term development plans.

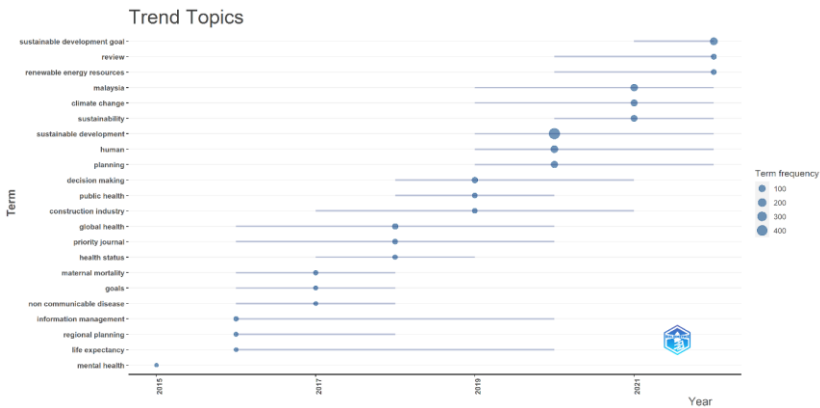


Figure 4. Trend Topics in Researches
Source: Output generated from R Studio

Meanwhile, a closer examination on the trends of topics highlights the evolution of the theme in publication. *Figure 4* illustrates the evolution of themes with the terms indicated based on the frequency that the terms appear and the more recent the terms was used, the further the terms will be displayed to the right. Based on *Figure 4*, the term “sustainable development” was recorded with the highest frequency. Meanwhile, terms such as “sustainable

development goal”, “review” and “renewable energy resources” have been used more recently. This indicates that these topics have become trending in the field that focuses on the SDGs. This reflects that the evolution of themes is centred on these three topics and this clearly demonstrates the acknowledgment of the importance of this field. The government has also recognised the need to develop a policy roadmap to ensure inclusiveness in development and the need to empower people without leaving anyone behind. In line with this, it is only paramount for us to further review the state of development in one of the poorest states in Malaysia, Sabah, which has often been associated with the problem of poverty and high poverty index records. Hence, we will shed light on the issues of imbalance development within the state of Sabah by focusing on one of the highly recognised development corridors known by the locals (known as Sabah Development Corridor), with the SDGs in the next section.

Issues and Implications: Imbalance Development in Sabah

Absolute poverty can be easily defined, as the lack of ability to meet fundamental basic human needs, for example, food, clothing, and shelter. A household would be considered as living in absolute poverty when its gross income falls below the poverty line income (PLI). Sabah Development Corridor (SDC) is a development corridor in Sabah, launched on 29 January 2008 by the Malaysian fifth Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The SDC is implemented over a period of 18 years from 2008 to 2025 and is designed to achieve the socio-economic objectives of alleviating poverty and balancing economic growth between urban and rural areas in the state of Sabah.

The first phase (2008 – 2010) mainly focuses on building the foundation for growth via infrastructure development and initiating high-impact economic and poverty eradication projects. The second phase (2011–2015) targets the acceleration of economic growth intensified by higher-order value-added economic activities.

Meanwhile, the third phase (2016 – 2025) is considered the expansion period. The SDC is guided by three key principles: firstly, to promote the higher value of economic activities; secondly, to promote balanced economic growth and distribution and lastly, to ensure sustainable development by conserving its environment. A review by Dullah Mulok, Kasim Mansur and Mori Kogid¹⁴ pointed out the increase in household income and reduction of poverty with the implementation of the SDC. Despite the positive progress reviewed, Sabah had remained the poorest state in Malaysia with a recorded high incidence of absolute poverty. To further boost the development of the state and in redefining the direction of SDC towards 2030 as a response to the pandemic crisis, a newly completed SDC Blueprint has been formulated to chart the development of the state from 2021 to 2030.

Figure 5 shows the incidence of absolute poverty across the different states over the decades. As reflected in the diagram, the incidence of absolute poverty was found declining for all states reaching less than 15 percent, except for the state of Sabah. The rate of decline for Sabah has remained slow in comparison to other states. As previously reported by the mass media, the highest increases in poverty rates for states like Sabah can be explained by the inequality and imbalanced development across the country in terms of wealth, income, and infrastructure.¹⁵

¹⁴ Dullah Mulok, Kasim Mansur, and Mori Kogid, "The Sabah Development Corridor (SDC)", *Prosiding Persidangan Kebangsaan Ekonomi Malaysia Ke-10*, 2015, pp. 406-413

¹⁵ Highest Increases in Poverty Rates in Sabah, Sarawak, Kelantan, Kedah, *Free Malaysia Today*, 16 June 2022, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/06/16/highest-increases-in-poverty-rates-in-sabah-sarawak-kelantan-kedah/>

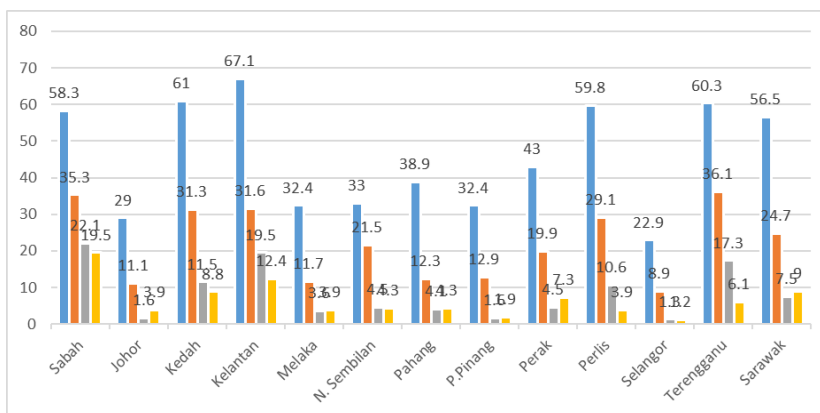


Figure 5. Incidence of Absolute Poverty by States Year 1976, 1987, 1997 and 2019

Source: Economic Planning Unit (2022)

There are many examples of cases where the people of Sabah are lagging in terms of infrastructure development. For example, the viral incident of students cramped into a boat to travel to SK Mangkapon Pitas, which was accessible through Sungai Bongkol. Another viral incident includes the SK Sibugal Besar students using a 300-meter dilapidated suspension bridge in Kampung Nelayan to cross a river on their way to school. These are only a few examples of the many cases of road connectivity problems, dilapidated infrastructure, and poor Internet connectivity issues that have gone unheard.

Here are some of the highlighted key issues with consequences on the SDGs and each issue being mapped into the relevant SDGs as illustrated in *Figure 6*. These key issues consist of:

- i) Roads
- ii) Network connectivity
- iii) Water supply and poor sanitation
- iv) Electricity supply
- v) Drainage system
- vi) Water disposal management system

For the first issue, it was highlighted that many have more profoundly discussed poor road access. Some of the rural areas do not have properly tarred roads rendering residents' movement to be restricted. There have been many reports on the poor road conditions with large potholes that damaged the vehicles traveling along the roads. From the education perspective, the poor road condition has caused students living in the rural areas to face the vulnerability of education loss. This is due to the constraints of movement that students living in the rural areas have to endure in the absence of a properly established road system. *Figure 6* shows the poor road condition in rural Sabah and *Figure 7* depicts how the students need to travel to school each day. This condition will likely lead to the consequences of failure to attract investments that limits economic growth (SDG 8), a widening gap of inequalities between those living in the urban area and those in the rural area (SDG 10), failure to provide quality education to all students (SDG 4), creating suffering on locals in being unable to have full access to economic resources (SDG 1) and a clear absence of resilient infrastructure to support human well-being (SDG 11).



Figure 6. Poor road conditions in rural areas of Sabah

Source: Borneo Post, 13 November 2020



Figure 7. Students in Sabah's Pitas district that need to squeeze into a boat to get to school. Source: Fong (2022)

The second issue is the network connectivity that highlights the poor Internet connectivity in many rural areas of Sabah. This issue became even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, with the resulting poor Internet connectivity affecting the students' online learning process. This leads to educational loss (SDG 4), lesser investments attracted (SDG 8), widening gap of inequalities (SDG 10), and absence of resilient infrastructure (SDG 11). Another issue is the problem of water supply and poor sanitation. 'The frequent water

supply disruptions in Sepanggar due to illegal pipe connections require a comprehensive and effective approach' was one of the news highlights that has been recently reported and largely discussed. However, this was not just an isolated event. There have been many other reports of water woes. Another example was the problem of an unusually high salinity level found in the water supply in the Sandakan district due to the damaged river gate, which has been reported to persist for many months.¹⁶

The fourth issue concerns the electrical supply in the state. Some residents in the state have bemoaned the unstable power supply and frequent disruption. In one such incident reported, a resident from Penampang has complained of frequent power outages that have damaged many of their household appliances.¹⁷ In addition, there has been rampant cable theft being reported in the state. The syndicate of cable theft has left the communities in distress with the malfunctioning of streetlights that endanger all road users. In addition, the cable thefts incidents have also led to power disruption in many of the affected areas. The consequences from such issue indicated that there is no universal access to affordable energy services (SDG 7), the frequent power outages are likely to affect the economic productivity (SDG 8), the absence of resilient infrastructure that can promote inclusive industrialisation (SDG 9), widening gap of inequalities with some areas reporting the absence of stable power supply (SDG 10), and the absence of resilient infrastructure (SDG 11).

The poor drainage system has often been pointed out as the main cause of the flash floods in the state. The low-lying areas in the

¹⁶ Fong, D.R., "Sandakan Salty Water Issue Expected to End after Spare Parts for Damaged River Gate Arrive Next Month", *The Star*, 8 February, 2023, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/02/08/sandakan-salty-water-issue-expected-to-end-after-spare-parts-for-damaged-river-gate-arrive-next-month>

¹⁷ S. Skinner, "Frequent Power Disruptions in Penampang", *Daily Express*, 29 June 2022, <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/194992/frequent-power-disruptions-inpenampang-/>

state are vulnerable to flash floods that have been triggered by the blocked drainage system. The frequent flash flood occurrence could harm economic productivity (SDG 8) and the poor drainage system indicated the absence of a resilient infrastructure that could promote inclusive industrialization (SDG 9) and to support human well-being (SDG 11). Another highlighted issue was the report of the poor management of waste disposal. There have been reports of the absence of proper waste management systems in certain rural areas due to crosscutting issues. Meanwhile, the water village settlements constantly face the problem of accumulating rubbish in their settlements. The poor waste disposal management will undoubtedly affect the health and well-being of the population (SDG 3), causing the absence of resilient infrastructure that can promote inclusive industrialisation (SDG 9), widening gap of inequalities between different regions (SDG 10) and reports of absence of sustainable infrastructure that can support human well-being (SDG 11).

In Sabah today, there are still significant problems with infrastructure and basic amenities such as access to clean water, electricity, roads, mobile telecommunication network coverage, and the management of solid waste. The development of the water supply system has been unequal. The availability of clean water for home and non-domestic use is a problem for rural communities, whereas urban and semi-urban areas have developed water delivery systems. Rural communities in Sabah experience poor water quality, water interruptions, and lack of treated water. Some regions with access to potable water regularly endure interruptions and poor water quality as a result of on-going operational and technical problems.¹⁸ The electrical supply also poses a problem for rural communities, for instance, a total of 66 villages in Nabawan are left with no electrical supply. This has involved about 982 houses, based on the data

¹⁸ R. Sarbatly, F. Abd Lahin, Chiam C.K., "The Outlook of Rural Water Supply in Developing Country: Review on Sabah, Malaysia", J. Borneo Sci., 41, 2020, pp. 19-43

retrieved from the Village Profile System project under The State Ministry of Rural Development (KPLB).

Rural roads frequently have uneven surfaces, large potholes, and insufficient street lighting, especially along Sabah's east coast. This is a long-standing problem for the locals, who are used to manoeuvring the rough terrain, potholes, filthy sidewalks, puddles, and damaged roadways.¹⁹ According to former Sabah Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Seri Bung Mokhtar Radin, one of the primary causes of the state's high unemployment and poverty rates stems from Sabah's infrastructure that is in disrepair, making it difficult for the state government to draw in significant investors and expand employment prospects.²⁰ Meanwhile, a study by Fang and several scholars²¹ revealed that Sabah native communities, which largely reside in rural regions, suffer from a high prevalence of digital divide, in the form of physical access that could demotivate the community from adopting ICT. Veveonah Mosibin, a student at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), from Kampung Sapatalang, Pitas, had to climb a tree to acquire internet connectivity so she could take her online exam, which illustrates how subpar the internet services are in Sabah.

Next, the current solid waste management policy is still regarded as inadequate, particularly in terms of proper waste disposal in Sabah. For instance, there is still no comprehensive waste minimisation policy in place in Kota Kinabalu, therefore garbage produced there is not effectively collected (via trash recycling, waste

¹⁹ S.N.A. Besar, M.A. Ladin, N.S.H. Harith, N. Bolong, I. Saad, N. Taha, "An Overview of the Transportation Issues in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah", IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, 476, No. 1, p. 012066, IOP Publishing, 2020

²⁰ Poor Infrastructure Behind High Unemployment Rate, Poverty in Sabah - Bung Mokhtar, *The New Straits Times*, 14 August 2022, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/08/822169/poor-infrastructure-behind-high-unemployment-rate-poverty-sabah-bung>

²¹ Fang Yi Xue, Sarjit S. Gill, Puvaneswaran Kunasekaran, Mohd Roslan Rosnon, Ahmad. Tarmizi Talib, Azureen Abd Aziz, "Digital Divide: An Inquiry on the Native Communities of Sabah", *Societies*, 12, No. 6, 2022, pp: 148

separation, and waste composting), or treated, before being disposed of in a landfill.²² Furthermore, Sabah's local government must handle both stranded and floating waste along its coastline in addition to managing waste generated on land. This is a result of the water village settlements that have been constructed along the shore and are the cause of numerous solid waste management issues. The clogged drains due to waste management issues are one of the main causes of floods in Sabah.

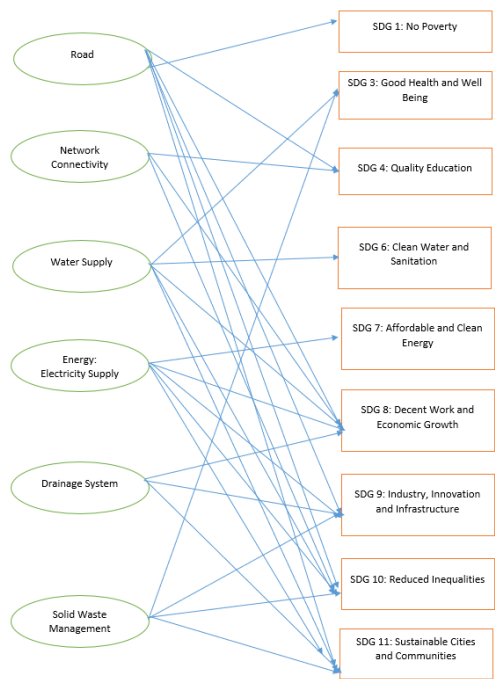


Figure 8. Issues Mapping to the relevant SDGs

²² H. H. Dusim, “A Study on the Adequacy of Kota Kinabalu Sabah’s Solid Waste Management Policy”, *Journal of Administrative Science* 18, No. 1, 2021, pp: 199-218

Strategies, Recommendations and Conclusion

The key to implementing the SDGs lies in integration.²³ For in the absence of guidance on the integration framework, there is a high risk that only certain goals will be picked to align with the government's priorities. This results in some of the assumed 'less important goals' being largely ignored. This insight is in line with the literature that visualizes SDGs as an interlinked set of policies with trade-offs and synergies.²⁴ As such, Stafford-Smith and others²⁵ advocated the following actions as in *Figure 9* that can stimulate the integrated approach as required by the achievement of the SDGs. Based on the framework discussed, an integrated undertaking of the goals would involve effective linkage across sectors, societal actors, countries, and time frames. The key 'means of implementation' includes finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy, institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data monitoring and accountability. Resources are limited, and the pursuit of SDGs is fraught with trade-offs and inconsistencies. Therefore, strategic policies are suggested to focus on socio-economic development as a short-run policy to achieve sustainable development.²⁶

²³ M. Stafford-Smith, D. Griggs, O. Gaffney, F. Ullah, B. Reyers, N. Kanie, B. Stigson, P. Shrivastava, M. Leach, D. O'Connell, "Integration: The Key to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals", *Sustainability Science* 12, No. 6, 2017, pp. 911-919

²⁴ V. Spaiser, S. Ranganathan, R. B. Swain, D. J. Sumpter, "The Sustainable Development Oxymoron; Quantifying and Modelling the Incompatibility of Sustainable Development Goals", *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 24, No. 6, 2017, pp: 457-470; R. Bali Swain and S. Ranganathan, "Capturing Sustainable Development Goals Interlinkages", Conference Paper for 8th IAEG Meeting, 5-8 November, 2018, Stockholm

²⁵ Mark Stafford-Smith et al, "Integration: The Key to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals", *Sustainability Science* 12, No. 6, 2017, pp. 911-919

²⁶ Swain and F. Yang-Wallentin, "Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: Predicaments and Strategies", *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 27, No. 2, 2020, pp. 96-106

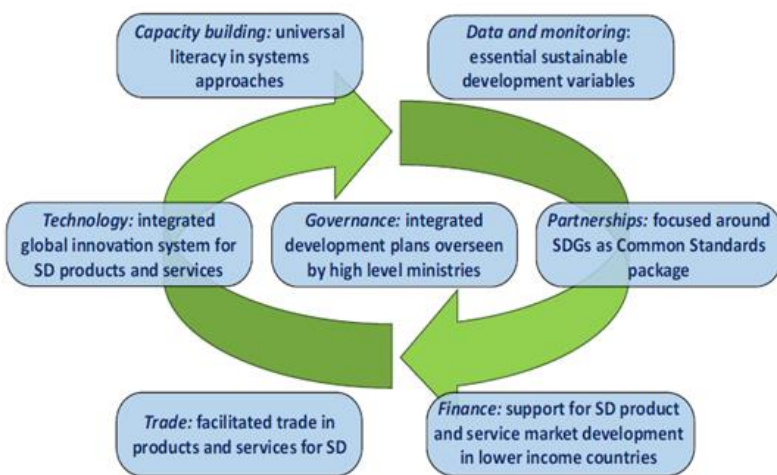


Figure 9. Means of Integration. Source: Smith et al. (2017)

A review of emerging expert literature on the SDGs highlights that an effective science-based approach to implementing the SDGs is likely to require the prioritisation of goals and targets to focus on a reduced set of highly interrelated priority targets.²⁷ According to Glaser,²⁸ experts including academia, indicators providers, and statisticians need to be fully engaged in the policy formulation phase, i.e., in the target formulations, and thus contribute to their capacity to be operated. Again, Hak and others²⁹ suggested a policy cycle as illustrated in *Figure 10* that supports the different stages from policy formulation (identifying issues, setting goals and objectives that reflect ideas, visions and formulating issues in such a way as to facilitate succeeding operationalisation), policy legitimisation, policy implementation, policy evaluation, and policy change. The approach

²⁷ C. Allen, G. Metternicht, and T. Wiedmann, "Initial Progress in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Review of Evidence from Countries," *Sustainability Science* 13, No. 5, 2018, pp: 1453-1467

²⁸ G. Glaser, "Base Sustainable Development Goals on Science", *Nature*, 491, No. 7422, 2012, pp. 35

²⁹ Tomas Hak, Svatava Janouskova, Bedrich Moldan, "Sustainable Development Goals: A Need for Relevant Indicators", *Ecological Indicators* 60, 2016: 565-572

suggested complies with the combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, in which measurement experts formalise the indicators.³⁰ Ultimately, national governments played an important role to prioritise and adapt the SDGs to national circumstances, enabling policy coherence and linkages across different sectors, and putting in place integrated action plans.³¹ New mechanisms involved in the SDGs that directly link the desirable SDG outcomes with the necessary systematic organizational changes are still a much-needed area of further research.³²

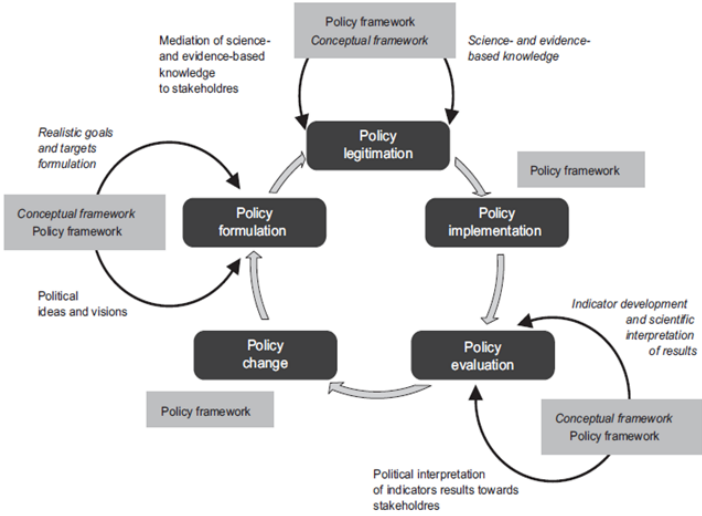


Figure 10. Policy Cycle Linked to Policy and Conceptual Frameworks
Source: Hák et al. (2016)

³⁰ I. A. Pissourios, “An Interdisciplinary Study on Indicators: A Comparative Review of Quality of Life, Macroeconomic, Environmental, Welfare and Sustainability Indicators, Ecological Indicators, 34, 2013, pp. 420-427

³¹ C. Allen, G. Metternicht, and T. Wiedmann, “Initial Progress in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Review of Evidence from Countries, Sustainability Science 13, No. 5, 2018, pp: 1453-1467

³² A. Fleming et al, “The Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study”, Marine Policy, 86, 2017, pp. 94-103

As statistically shown, Sabah consistently receives one of the largest amounts of funding from the federal budget. Sadly, Sabah continues to be ranked as the least developed and poorest state. Hence, the money granted to Sabah does not correspond to where it is in terms of development. To reduce the gap of development in Sabah, emphasis should be placed on strengthening infrastructure provision, maximising economic potential, and enhancing access to social services. First, study needs to be conducted to examine the growth of Sabah's infrastructure development and construction, particularly its roads. The same is true for infrastructure in the fields of health, education, and digital technology. Periodic evaluations must be conducted on a regular basis by the federal and state governments. To enhance dependability and transparency, independent outside reviewers can be hired. The state government must be mindful of both the quality and expense of infrastructure projects, particularly when building the Pan Borneo Highway. A larger annual budget without taking into account any external factors that could affect Sabah's infrastructure would be inefficient and costly. For instance, the political intervention or instability may cause a downturn in the Sabah economy and delayed and rising cost of Sabah's infrastructure development. It is challenging for the state government to entice major investors and therefore increase the number of job opportunities without adequate infrastructure.

Secondly, the *Sabah Maju Jaya* (SMJ) plan is a development strategy for the years 2021–2025 that covers all aspects of Sabah's growth, including agriculture, industry, and tourism. The plan also places a focus on the human model, the welfare of the populace, the infrastructural network, and environmental sustainability. It is a long-term strategy to boost Sabah's development. However, with only 5 years of plan, people want to see concrete results, and not merely pay lip service at the end of the day. Therefore, it is crucial to plan multi-faceted development that should consider economic success, environmental protection, and social equality, as well as the

practicality, taking into account the poor, vulnerable, and those who run the risk of falling behind.

Nevertheless, a sensible and effective development plan should be formulated based on accurate facts from the ground. To offer a thorough picture of socio-economic issues affecting individuals, households, or even geographical areas like remote communities, more micro data is required. To be used for more research and to promote greater transparency, this data should be made available to the public. The formulation and execution of policy also will benefit from accurate and complete data. One of the greatest challenges in tackling the state of income disparity in Sabah is the lack of data due to Sabah's unique geographical location and landscape, such as steep hills. To get compressive data, nevertheless, investments must be made without exception.

Thirdly, there is a need for differentiated policies, to differentiated needs that is highlighted at the district and state level. Factors such as socioeconomics, geographical and populated areas need to be considered in budget allocations and policies formulation. The bottom-up strategy by empowering local citizens and community organisations in decision-making processes will result in the development of policies that are more "human-centric" and relevant to local communities. These are crucial, especially in Sabah, which has more than 30 different ethnic races and is varied and culturally diverse.

Fourthly, Sabah is the state that is most geographically adjacent to its neighbours, particularly Indonesia. Due to uncontrolled urbanisation, Indonesia concurrently wants to transfer the capital from Jakarta to Kalimantan. The social and economic state of Sabah may be directly impacted by this action. Therefore, the state government must make thorough preparations to deal with any

effects of this decision, whether they be economic or social, and to create more positive spill-over effects.

Lastly, it is necessary to take action to create an environment that supports economic progress. Strong international collaboration and partnerships are required to achieve the SDGs (SDG 17). The state government must work closely with the local and global private sector to help attract higher-value investments, promote agro-tourism and rural tourism, and enhance employment opportunities in rural areas through education and training.

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CHAPTER TWO

Charting Orang Asli's Progress and the Sustainable Development Goals through the Lens of Land Rights Recognition (2015-2022)

Kon Onn Sein

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the root singular cause of poverty for the Orang Asli (OA) is non-recognition of their ancestral lands and economic development divorced from the environment. With deforestation and destruction of their natural resources, the OA face multidimensional poverty. With depleting natural resources and a rapid penetrating market economy, the OA cannot compete. The majority do not have access to fair markets and cannot access loans or attract investors to develop their lands, as they have no rights over their land. Poverty rate stands at 89 percent in 2020¹ compared with 76.9 percent in 2003.²

Education, often seen as the most effective route out of poverty, is not working out well for the OA. This is simply because education is tied to a web of interconnected social, cultural and institutional ecosystems. Further, this whole ecosystem is deeply disadvantaged, and education itself cannot be the silver bullet to solve the OA's challenges. Even with strong government support, only about 70 percent of OA students complete SPM,³ compared with a

¹ Ainin Wan Salleh and Danial Azhar, "Govt Policies on Orang Asli 'Doing More Harm than Good,'" *Free Malaysia Today (FMT)*, August 23, 2022, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/08/23/govt-policies-on-orang-asli-doing-more-harm-than-good/>.

² Dr Amar-Singh HSS, "Mortality, Morbidity & Malnutrition in Orang Asli Children," August 2008, https://jkn Selangor.moh.gov.my/hoag/images/pdf_folder/symposium/tujuh.pdf.

³ "Data Penuntut Pelajar Orang Asli di IPTA," Laman Web Rasmi Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.jakoa.gov.my/umum/data-terbuka-sektor-awam/>.

high 90 percent at the national average level.⁴ A total of 845 OA is said to be studying in universities in 2018.⁵ This is a big leap from 2004 whereby OA tertiary enrolment was almost 4 percent.⁶ Nonetheless, this represents about 10 percent enrolment of the OA student population,⁷ compared with the national average of 35 percent.⁸

As a result of non-recognition of OA's ancestral land rights and the destruction of their forest, the OA are also falling behind other communities in these inter-connected indicators: malnutrition, health, mortality, infant deaths and access to sanitation and clean water. This paper examines the changes in recognition of OA land rights that occurred from 2015 to 2022 with regard to the SDGs implementation in Malaysia towards OA development. The first part of the paper discusses the following:

1.0 Changes in recognition of OA land rights, including:

1.1 Review of SDG on land governance of the Orang Asli, and

1.2 SDGs and Land Rights Targets and Indicators;

2.0 Resistance of the State to recognise OA land and the impasse in which the State is dependent on logging concessions needed to fund their operations;

⁴ *Quick Facts 2021*, 2021st ed., Quick Facts (Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), 2021), <https://www.moe.gov.my/en/penerbitan1/4589-quick-facts-2021/file>.

⁵ Rohaniza Idris and Farhana Syed Nokman, "Segera Warta Tanah Rizab Orang Asli - Ismail Sabri," *Berita Harian*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2018/02/385849/segera-warta-tanah-rizab-orang-asli-ismail-sabri>.

⁶ "Data Penuntut Pelajar Orang Asli di IPTA," Laman Web Rasmi Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.jakoa.gov.my/umum/data-terbuka-sektor-awam/>.

⁷ "Data Penuntut Pelajar Orang Asli di IPTA."

⁸ *Quick Facts 2021*, 2021st ed., Quick Facts (Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), 2021), <https://www.moe.gov.my/en/penerbitan1/4589-quick-facts-2021/file>.

- 3.0 New evidence and recent studies give hope and new pathways out of this impasse;
- 4.0 Recent studies demonstrating financial and avoided cost or losses arising from protecting the forest that bring benefits which outweigh the revenue arising from logging concessions;
- 5.0 Intertwining of nature conservation with economic growth;
- 6.0 State conundrum and pathway to compensate States to protect the forest;
- 7.0 Projected losses in terms of GDP losses and also actual mitigation cost spent in 2022; and
- 8.0 Ecological fiscal transfer and investment in avoided cost

The second part of the paper: (9) proposes that greater benefits can be gained by partnering with the OA to co-manage the forest to enhance even greater benefits; and (10) demonstrates the OA as the best people to sustain the forest. The paper concludes that partnering the OA (SDG17) is the way forward as evidence-based studies show community-managed forestry results in more sustainable economic growth, combats climate change, and uplifts OA from poverty.

PART ONE

1.0 Changes in Recognition of Orang Asli Land Rights and consequential impact on SDG Goals

Table 1: Orang Asli Land Status, 1990-2003 (hectares)

Land Status	1990	1999	2003	Change/Loss (1990-2003)
Gazetted Orang Asli Reserves	20,666.96	19,507.4	19,222.15	-1,444.81
Approved for gazetting, but not gazetted as yet	36,076.33	28,932.2	28,760.86	-7,315.47
Total Orang Asli land with some legal status	56,743.29	48,439.6	47,983.01	-8,760.28
Applied for gazetting, but not approved yet	67,019.46	78,975.0	79,715.53	12,696.07
TOTAL	123,762.75	127,414.6	127,698.54	3,935.79

Source: Data from Colin Nicholas, "Orang Asli - Rights, Problems & Solutions," 2010, <http://www.suhakam.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Orang-Asli-Rights-Problems-Solutions.pdf>.

On 28 November 2017, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob (then the Minister for Rural Development Ministry) announced that 132,631 hectares were identified as OA land; of this, 32,779 hectares had been gazetted as OA reserve and 19,870 hectares approved but awaiting gazettelement. Another 74,838 hectares had been submitted to the state government for approval, with 5,142 hectares in the land surveying stage. He also said that it was projected that all the OA land

would be completely surveyed by the end of 2017 and submitted to the state governments for gazettelement.⁹

On 3 October 2022, the *Majlis Perundangan Orang Asli* announced that 40,600 hectares have been gazetted.¹⁰ This is commendable; gazetted reserve areas since 2003 have doubled. Whilst the remaining 92,031 hectares of the 132,631 have yet to be gazetted as OA reserve, there has been some improvement in that at least 7,821 hectares have been gazetted from 2017 to 2022.¹¹ This

⁹ Anwar Patho Rohman and Luqman Arif Abdul Karim, "Semua Tanah Orang Asli Diwartakan Sebelum Akhir 2017," *Berita Harian*, November 28, 2017, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/11/356209/semua-tanah-orang-asli-diwartakan-sebelum-akhir-2017>

¹⁰ Unit Komunikasi Korporat, "Kerajaan Memandang Serius Isu Kecipiran Pendidikan Pelajar Orang Asli," Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar, October 4, 2022, <https://www.rurallink.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/4-Okt-KERAJAAN-MEMANDANG-SERIOUS-ISU-KECICIRAN-PENDIDIKAN-PELAJAR-ORANG-ASLI.pdf>

¹¹ Please see: *Report of the National Inquiry into the Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2013

"8.54 JAKOA informed the Inquiry that on December 2009, the National Land Council approved the Dasar Dasar Pemberilikan Tanah kepada Orang Asli Untuk Kegunaan Pertanian dan Kediaman (DPTOA) or the Policy on the Alienation and Development of Land for Orang Asli for Agricultural and Residential Purposes for Agricultural and Residential Purposes, which sought to grant 29,990 Orang Asli households permanent (individual) titles to agricultural lots varying in size from 2 to 6 acres (0.8 to 2.4 hectares). Each household would also be given up to a quarter acre (0.1 hectare) for their house and orchard (dusun)."

"8.55 Under this Policy, it is envisaged that Orang Asli would be granted titles to about 50,000 hectares of land. This appears to be close to the sum of the Orang Asli reserves and the Orang Asli areas approved for gazetting in 2010 i.e., a total of 46,959.30 hectares."

"8.56 Under the new policy, Orang Asli will not be allowed to take the Government to court over those lands, nor will they be entitled to compensation. The new policy also stipulates that the newly acquired titled lands of the Orang Asli will have to be developed and managed by an external agency, and the development costs will be borne by the Orang Asli land owner himself or herself."

The DPTOA is strongly opposed by the Orang Asli as it will involve an estimated loss of 645,000 ha of OA ancestral land (Please see: Ikuiri: JAKOA Lemah Punca Kemelut Orang Asli, *Malaysiakini* 2014). In view of this, the gazettelement of the 92,031 ha OA land should not preclude the OA from proving and asserting their claims for the remaining 645,000 ha which are not yet recognised by the state.

addition of 7,821 hectares towards the gazetted OA land over the last seven years (2017-2022) compared with the earlier years of an addition of 12,113 hectares between 1990 and 2016 is very positive. This is a significant improvement rate in recognition of OA land rights over the last seven years.

However, it needs to be noted that there still remain numerous encroachment and contestations for OA lands over this same period reported in the media, and a large 92,031 hectares have yet to be protected. Despite Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri calling on the states to hasten gazetting all the 132,631 hectares to protect the OA and their land from being logged, the states are relatively slow to fully collaborate.¹²

1.1 Review of SDG on land governance for the Orang Asli

Indigenous peoples inhabit 22% of the world's land, safeguarding 80% of its biodiversity. The stewardship of land is crucial for addressing climate change and achieving sustainable development. Five of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1,2, 5 and 15) directly focus on the land's role in securing humanity's future. Sustainable land use effectively captures carbon dioxide and provides significant climate benefits. However, despite its importance, indigenous land rights are being undermined. Governments must prioritise protecting ancestral land rights to benefit everyone as achieving SDG 13 on climate change depends largely on land stewardship by the indigenous people:

"The mounting economic losses and destruction from weather and climate-related disasters have made it harder to bridge the gap on ambitious goals like ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequality and providing clean water. For example, droughts, floods and other disasters cost farmers in

¹² Rohaniza Idris and Farhana Syed Nokman, "Segera Warta Tanah Rizab Orang Asli - Ismail Sabri," *Berita Harian*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2018/02/385849/segera-warta-tanah-rizab-orang-asli-ismail-sabri>.

developing countries a staggering \$96 billion in damaged or lost crop and livestock production between 2005 and 2015. As climate impacts intensify, it is clear that making progress on SDG 13 (climate action) is essential to achieving all 17 goals.”¹³

It is in this context, securing land rights for the indigenous people is a crucial strategy for achieving much of the UN's 2030 Agenda, including SDGs 1 (end poverty), 2 (end hunger), 8 (decent work and economic growth), and 5 (gender equality) and SDG 13 (climate action.) Land, together with its natural resources and ecosystem services, is the source of livelihood and wellbeing for billions of people around the world. Safeguarding communities' and indigenous peoples' right to this land, and its environmental resources lend directly to one of the overarching and essential goals of SDG 13.

1.2 SDGs and Land Rights Targets and Indicators

The SDGs, particularly SDG 1, 2, 5, and 15, prioritise responsible land governance and secure tenure for indigenous peoples. Land is a key economic resource, interconnected with access, use, and control over other resources, making it vital for achieving the SDGs. Specific targets and indicators for indigenous land rights are outlined as follows:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Target 1.4: By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.

¹³ Peter Veit, “Land Matters: How Securing Community Land Rights Can Slow Climate Change and Accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals,” January 24, 2019, <https://www.wri.org/insights/land-matters-how-securing-community-land-rights-can-slow-climate-change-and-accelerate>.

Indicator 1.4.2: Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognized documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Target 2.3: By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

Indicator 2.3.2: Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

Indicator 5.a.1.(a): Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; (b) Share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure.

Indicator 5.a.2: Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control.

Goal 15: Life on Land

Target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.

Indicator 15.1.1: Forest area as a proportion of total land area

Forest area as a proportion of total land area in Malaysia was reported as 55.8 percent in 2015 and 55.3 percent in 2018.¹⁴ This is admirably still above the 50 percent national target. Securing land rights for communities have been proven to have numerous positive development outcomes, including increased land productivity, higher incomes for farmers, and improved social well-being. Community forests also provide employment to young people and women. In addition to these socio-economic benefits, land rights also contribute to environmental returns and support the goals of the 2030 Agenda. They play a role in regulating local climate dynamics, water cycling, providing hydrological services, pollination, nutrient retention, and supporting recreation.

However, despite some progress, the prioritisation of land rights in many countries is still lacking, highlighting the need for strong political commitment, resources, and multi-sectorial efforts to fulfil the land-related SDG indicators, as revealed in the analysis by Oxfam and the International Land Coalition of the Voluntary National Reports submitted.¹⁵

In Malaysia, there is at present no reporting in the Department of Statistics Malaysia of the above targets and indicators in their SDG dashboard. However, to move forward in this area, Malaysia could work on capturing data under indicator 1.4.2 and Target 2.3. Under indicator 1.4.2 on Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognised documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure, the classification of Orang Asli land reserve data

¹⁴ “Workbook: Goal 15,” Department of Statistics Malaysia, March 2019, https://tableau.dosm.gov.my/t/SDG/views/Goal15_15934174401430/Goal15?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y.

¹⁵ Peter Veit, “Land Matters: How Securing Community Land Rights Can Slow Climate Change and Accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals,” January 24, 2019, <https://www.wri.org/insights/land-matters-how-securing-community-land-rights-can-slow-climate-change-and-accelerate>.

would serve as a good indicator for progress in this area. Target 2.3 will also be a helpful indicator. By 2030, doubling the income of indigenous people through secure access to land. Malaysia has data on both land access in terms of OA title, OA land reservation / OA area and income of the OA.

2.0 Impasse: Resistance by State and Need for Revenue from Logging Concessions

One major reason for the slow rate of OA land gazettment is the state’s huge dependence on land-based revenues for their operational cost. As logging concessions remain one of their significant revenue sources, they are reluctant to gazette land with forest. For example, in Pahang, the 2019 logging royalty and premiums contributed about 10 percent of the state operational cost. Notably, the total 2019 revenues generated in the Peninsular Malaysia sourced from forest royalty and premium amounted to RM406,927,463 (see table below).

Forestry Revenue (RM) Collected by States in Peninsular Malaysia, 2019

	Forest Cover (%)	Royalty		Premium	Cess	Others*	Total
		Logs	Other Forest Products				
Kelantan	50.79	32,390,396	439,685	37,944,067	25,094,861	51,609,472	147,478,481
Pahang	57.07	39,392,828	-	48,347,028	34,313,060	8,012,223	130,065,139
Perak	48.13	12,865,864	7,622,168	22,800,100	9,981,486	-	53,269,618
Selangor	31.74	28,788	36,624,209	7,324,842	3,680,743	4,605,613	52,264,195
Terengganu	52.17	12,546,841	-	19,020,083	12,107,945	3,017,538	46,692,407
Johor	23.11	3,434,015	-	14,185,356	1,076,731	2,798,693	21,494,795
Kedah	36.6	3,339,115	79,448	12,280,382	2,876,846	2,601,544	21,177,335
Negeri Sembilan	23.72	1,550,593	-	894,317	1,403,675	1,835,602	5,684,187
Perlis	14.52	82,869	1,670,318	329,947	24,579	479,957	2,587,670
Malacca	3.18	11,344	517,254	126,730	518,472	214,538	1,388,338
Penang	7.52	-	157	-	321	366,610	367,088
Kuala Lumpur	7.02	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Royalty and cess are charged on volume of products harvested, and premium is charged on area used. *This includes compound and compensation payments, sale of forms and documents, and fees.

Source: "Forestry Statistics Peninsular Malaysia 2019", Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia
 © Macaranga Media; for full story, visit www.macaranga.org

Figure 1: Forestry Revenue (RM) Collected by Peninsular Malaysia States, 2019. Source: Data from Yao Hua Law, "Revenue and Power Drive Forest Area Changes," Macaranga (blog), November 30, 2020, <https://www.macaranga.org/revenue-and-power-drive-forest-area-changes/>.

The loss of revenue to states is pretty significant if they were to gazette OA land. Since member states hold jurisdiction over land under the federal constitutional separation of powers, the state has the autonomy to decide on areas designated for forest protection and the issuance of logging permits. As such, it is understandable that the states have not been fully collaborative with Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri (even when he became Prime Minister in 2022) in gazetting the 132,631 hectares of OA reserve. Without revenue from these OA forest areas, the state would have difficulty to collect enough revenues to fund their state operations.

At the same time, the federal government's inability to compensate state forest revenue has serious consequences on our planetary health. The State as key landowners traditionally depend on revenue from the extraction of natural resources such as logging, mining and development of large plantations, which are detrimental to the environment. This is the long-standing impasse.

3.0 New Pathways out of Impasse: New evidence Showing Conservation Targets Outweigh Revenues from Deforestation

However, there is now hope out of this impasse. In recent years, there is overwhelming evidence showing that conserving nature brings greater benefits than deforestation in both the long and short term. Moreover, the policy of Malaysia to maintain 50 percent forest cover is both commendable and desired.¹⁶

Waldron's comprehensive study shows that the global economy is better off with more nature protected. Also, cost benefit analysis across multiple economic sectors in addition to nature conservation outweighs the cost to at least 5- to-1 than logging:

¹⁶ Yao Hua Law, "Forest Loss: Under Whose Watch?," *Macaranga* (blog), November 26, 2020, <https://www.macaranga.org/forest-loss-under-whose-watch/>.

“In the most comprehensive report to date on the economic implications of protecting nature, over 100 economists and scientists find that the global economy would benefit from the establishment of far more protected areas on land and at sea than exist today. The report considers various scenarios of protecting at least 30% of the world’s land and ocean to find that the benefits outweigh the costs by a ratio of at least 5-to-1.”¹⁷

This would mean that the economic benefits from protecting the forest would be greater than the profits gained from logging and mining. Currently, ecosystem services like clean water and clean air are not factored in the profits and loss books. Neither are loss of livelihoods to indigenous and local communities factored into the cost equation arising from logging and extractive activities, lack of water and change of microclimates. Calculations on profit and loss should be simulated and EIAs should be mandated to factor in the cost of ecosystem services which are currently not counted in their economic equation.

Waldron’s report has also offered new evidence that the nature conservation sector drives economic growth, delivers key non-monetary benefits and is a net contributor to a resilient global economy. The experts find that “the benefits are greater when more nature is protected as opposed to maintaining the status quo”. Overall, the report summarised that the net output is greater even after taking into account the amount needed to invest in avoided cost to protect 30 percent of the world’s land and ocean:

¹⁷ “Protecting 30% of the Planet for Nature: Costs, Benefits and Economic Implications,” Conservation Research Institute, 2020, <https://www.conservation.cam.ac.uk/news/protecting-30-planet-nature-costs-benefits-and-economic-implications>.

“In the multi-sector analysis of financial outcomes, we found that total economic output is greater if the 30% target is implemented, than if it is not implemented. The projected increase in global output depends on the implementation approach taken, ranging from \$64-\$454 billion per year by 2050 in our illustrative scenarios. These figures only represent the increase in direct expenditures (revenues) and do not include multiplier effects . . . and so, the final boost to global economic output may be over one trillion US dollars per year. This figure does not include novel revenue sources, such as green investments, biodiversity and climate bonds, and increased payments for ecosystem services.”¹⁸

4.0 Financial Benefits, Avoided Cost and Non-Monetary Benefit

Waldron’s report, among others, examined two aspects: (1) financial benefits and avoided costs such as mitigation activity against floods, storms and carbon emission reduction expenses, and (2) non-monetary benefits.

Financial Benefits

In the financial component alone, the report projected a 20 percent financial benefit increase:

“For the forestry sector, implementing the 30% PA (protected area) target again increased output values (revenues), driven by increases in efficiency and the price paid to producers when the availability of exploitable tree-covered land was reduced. Total roundwood output value reached \$428 billion in 2050 under the no-PA - expansion baseline, \$450 billion in the production-focused Three Conditions scenario, and over \$500 billion (~20% higher than the baseline) for the three more

¹⁸ Anthony Waldron et al., “Protecting 30% of the Planet for Nature: Costs, Benefits and Economic Implications,” 2020, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c77fa240b77bd5a7ff401e5/t/5f05d15ea8b84f56b02509b2/1594216800710/Waldron_Report_FINAL_sml.pdf.

*biodiversity-focused scenarios (Save Species from Extinction, Biodiversity/Wilderness Consensus, and Global Deal for Nature)."*¹⁹

Avoided Cost

The report referred to avoided cost as "broad sense economic analysis" benefit which is over and above the financial benefit. This avoided cost is defined as the likely future cost of ignoring a major risk. The investment in preventing a potentially catastrophic risk is sound economic policy strategy, even if risk avoidance itself does not generate revenues. Nature supplies many defences against risks that would otherwise be catastrophic; forest can prevent storm surges or flooding and landslides from causing millions worth of damage and even loss of lives (although often, this value is only discovered after the trees have been cut down):

"In our broad-sense (non-financial) economic analysis (limited to two biomes in tropical countries only), we found that implementing the proposed 30% (planet conservation) target would generate an additional economic benefit of \$170–\$534 billion per year by 2050, over and above the financial benefit. These values reflect the way that PAs (protected areas) prevent the conversion of natural structures that are critical for defence against floods and storm surges, reduction in carbon emissions that lead to climate change, and (an incomplete list of) other services.

Beyond avoided costs, some of the values of nature are fully non-monetary, either because the value of protecting them is not yet financially recognised (e.g., many administrative areas have not yet given economic recognition to the water purification services provided by protected forests), or

¹⁹ Waldron et al., "Protecting 30% of the Planet for Nature: Costs, Benefits and Economic Implications."

because a market value would be completely inappropriate (e.g., the cultural and spiritual value of preserving a tiger or a sacred forest). To avoid confusion in this report, we refer to the impact of the 30% target on avoided-cost and non-monetary values as the broad-sense economic outcomes, to distinguish them from the financial outcomes.”²⁰

Non-Monetary Cost

In a sense, the hidden cost of nature in our economic growth has not been taken up in the books and there are victims to such missing accounts. Malaysia has experienced high levels of economic growth in the last two decades; yet this economic growth has come at the cost of a significant loss of biodiversity and natural capital in the country. This has an immediate impact on our present generation and no doubt on our future generations; probably the most vulnerable victims are the OA who have to bear this cost when their forest is damaged.

To be fair, investment in such avoided costs should be factored as necessary to reflect the cost of true economic growth and to safeguard the vulnerable parties. If not, our natural wealth capital will continue to be depleted, giving us a false sense of actual growth and depriving the future generations and the OA of a healthy planet.²¹

5.0 Nature Conservation Intertwines with Economic Growth and Contributes 55 Percent towards Global GDP

In another recent study by Re Swiss Institute (2020), it is reported that nature conservation is intertwined with economic growth and that nature contributes as much as 55 percent towards global Gross Domestic Product. The huge direct link between economic growth

²⁰ World Bank and Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), *An Exploration of Nature-Related Financial Risks in Malaysia* (World Bank, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1596/37314>.

²¹ World Bank and Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), *An Exploration of Nature-Related Financial Risks in Malaysia*.

and environment is inextricably interconnected; to sustain economic growth, it is imperative to protect our forest and environment:

“Countries across the world are reliant on a range of services that are based around their natural ecosystems. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (BES) include such necessities as food provision, water security and regulation of air quality that are vital to maintaining the health and stability of communities and economies.

Over half (55%) of global GDP, equal to USD 41.7 trillion, is dependent on high-functioning biodiversity and ecosystem services. However, a staggering fifth of countries globally (20%) are at risk of their ecosystems collapsing due to a decline in biodiversity and related beneficial services, reveals a new study by Swiss Re Institute.”²²

Traditional market mechanisms typically fail to reflect in their accounting books the alarming erosion of the natural capital which sustains economic growth, such as the loss of forest watershed areas and wetlands, or the pollution of the atmosphere. This conceals the disappearing reserves of national assets and natural capital as a trade-off to seemingly rising GDP. In response, economists are developing new ways to measure wealth and well-being that better reflect the health of the planet as well as of people and economic systems. More governments have begun to use these metrics to guide their development strategies and economic policies.

²² Swiss Re Institute, “A Fifth of Countries Worldwide at Risk from Ecosystem Collapse as Biodiversity Declines, Reveals Pioneering Swiss Re Index,” Swiss Re, September 23, 2020, <https://www.swissre.com/media/press-release/nr-20200923-biodiversity-and-ecosystems-services.html>.

6.0 State Conundrum and Pathway to Compensate States to Protect Forest

The conundrum is that the State needs revenue from land transactions and cannot rely on just non-monetary eco benefits to fund their expenses. This challenge, thus, merits innovative solutions. Federal government enjoys taxes and economic growth that flows directly from an enabling green environment. Studies show nature conservation contributes very substantially to both sustain and grow the economy. It is only right that the federal government uses the taxes that it enjoys from this economic growth to invest in protecting the forest. This necessarily means providing funding to compensate the state to protect the forest.

This gap of RM406,927,463 based on 2019 sums to compensate the States in Peninsular is not as large as it appears (more will be needed to factor in East Malaysia states). Firstly, we have already noted the immediate cost benefit analysis of 5 to 1 in all the measures and increased financial benefits of 20 percent in the forestry economic sector. Secondly, *Avoided Cost Investment* will prevent natural disasters like flooding and haze, whereby the focus is on mitigating the risk of catastrophic economic and social outcomes. This avoided cost will also enable the economic sectors of agriculture, fisheries and forestry to generate more sustainable revenues:

“Deforestation or the damage to nature will result in top soil erosion, flooding, scarcity of water, climate change and will have direct adverse financial impacts on economic sectors like agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The experts in the Waldron report found that across all multiple economic sectors, the benefits are greater when more nature is protected as opposed to maintaining the status quo.”²³

²³ Anthony Waldron et al., “Protecting 30% of the Planet for Nature: Costs, Benefits and Economic Implications,” accessed April 22, 2023, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c77fa240b77bd5a7ff401e5/t/5f05d15ea8b84f56b02509b2/1594216800710/Waldron_Report_FINAL_sml.pdf.

7.0 Projected Losses

The need to invest in avoided cost is all the more compelling when we look at our local projected losses arising from development divorced from nature. In a study jointly conducted in March 2022 by the World Bank and Bank Negara, it is reported that Malaysia could face a 6 percent GDP loss by 2030. Even if we were to use the 2021 GDP of RM1.514 trillion, that 6 percent loss of RM90.84 billion would far exceed 200 over times the compensation of RM406,927,463 computed in 2019 for the States:

“A recent World Bank (WB) together BNM study found that, in a worst-case scenario of partial ecosystem collapse, Malaysia could experience a 6 percent gross domestic product (GDP) annual loss by 2030 compared to a baseline scenario (Johnson et al. 2021). In Malaysia, the losses would be driven by a decline in export demand and adverse impacts of the partial collapse of forestry and fishery ecosystem services.”²⁴

Actual Losses in Mitigation Cost

In Malaysia, RM6.1 billion was spent on flood mitigation in 2022 with 500,000 people displaced and 55 lives lost. It is thought that over-development and deforestation have exacerbated the huge impact of the torrential rains and flooding:

“Deputy Environment and Water (KASA) Minister Datuk Dr Mansor Othman reported in the Dewan Rakyat on 17 March 2022: ‘. . . the total amount of losses caused by the floods that took place in several states in the country from end-2021 until early-2022 amounted to RM6.1 billion These include losses of properties, vehicles, manufacturing sector,

²⁴ World Bank and Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), *An Exploration of Nature-Related Financial Risks in Malaysia* (World Bank, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1596/37314>

businesses and agricultural sector,’ he said in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.”²⁵

This cost itself justifies and far supersedes the total sums needed to compensate all the states for their logging concessions.

8.0 Ecological Fiscal Transfer and Investment in Avoided Cost

The case for setting up an avoided cost fund is clearly the smart way to go, as it will more than make up for this pay-out from the bigger losses it will otherwise incur from natural disasters. It will also yield greater financial gains from across all the economic sectors of agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Credit has to be given to the federal government that this avoided cost is already being implemented. In Budget 2021, the federal government allocated RM70 million to state governments to protect their forest through a mechanism called ecological fiscal transfer (EFT).

On 26 April 2022, the government announced an increase in incentive for states to preserve forest and marine areas from RM70 million to RM100 million, and the Tahap Payout Plan of RM330 million: “Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said under the ecological fiscal transfer (EFT) plan, the government would fund states that gazette new protected areas from development . . . Ismail also announced funding of RM330 million to all state reserves under the Tahap payout plan, with plans to be revealed by the Treasury later.”

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²⁵ “December, January Flood Disasters Cost RM6.1b Losses,” *The Malaysian Reserve*, March 17, 2022, <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2022/03/17/december-january-flood-disasters-cost-rm6-1b-losses/>.

²⁶ F. M. T. Reporters, “Incentive to States to Preserve Nature Upped to RM100mil,” *Free Malaysia Today (FMT)*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/04/26/incentive-to-states-to-preserve-nature-upped-to-rm100mil/>.

Carbon Credits

On top of the GDP growth, Malaysia is also able to take advantage of its favoured position to obtain Carbon Credits or payment for ecosystem services. Malaysia has a 50 percent forest cover policy and has arguably the 5th largest area of protected forest in the Asia-Pacific region. So, we should innovate to get the best out of this competitive advantage and capitalise on the carbon credits and eco-tourism haven that can be created from this vantage point.²⁷

There are huge opportunities to tap on a fast-growing eco-tourism market and the increasing availability of global funding for conservation and carbon credits. A renewed and strong push in this direction alone could help us raise or grow the economy by another RM406,927,463. Banks and large corporations that depend on highly functioning ecosystems should also be contributing towards this cost. Creative financial instruments can be created to raise this shortfall needed by the states to protect the forest.

PART TWO

9.0 Enhancing Benefits: OA Best Partners to Slow Down Deforestation

In addition to the benefits of financial and gains from avoided cost, the financial returns and social impact can be further enhanced. This can be actualised through forming partnerships with the OA to co-manage the forest.

A strong body of growing international studies show the indigenous people are the best people to protect the forest more than any other group. In other words, the indigenous communities living and working within the forest are proving to be the best line of defence against deforestation. According to a study by RAISG (The Amazon Network of Georeferenced Socioenvironmental

²⁷ Yao Hua Law, "Forest Loss: Under Whose Watch?," *Macaranga* (blog), November 26, 2020, <https://www.macaranga.org/forest-loss-under-whose-watch/>.

Information), “Deforestation has been found to be five times higher outside of indigenous territories and conservation units.”²⁸ Meanwhile, a report by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) further concluded: “And no one stewards the land better: Research shows that Indigenous peoples achieve conservation results at least equal to those of government-run protected areas - with a fraction of the budget.”²⁹ According to the World Resources Institute (WRI), “Another study shows that from 2000 to 2012, the annual deforestation rates inside tenured Indigenous forestlands across the Amazon were 2-3 times lower than outside of them.”³⁰

The message is clear: the Indigenous peoples know best how to protect the forests.

10.0 OA Way of Life Sustains the Forest

By examining the OA way of life, we can better appreciate why the OA do indeed take care of the forest better than anyone. Let me share a story of how the Jakuns near Tasik Chini have actually conserved their forest and how important the forest is for them.

Lost beauty and richness of their forest and clean rivers. They were able to drink from the river, bath in it and catch fishes. It was a favourite place for families and the community to assemble, have fun together and strengthen bonding. The OA collectively going into the forest to gather fruits, picnic, hunt or fish and enjoy themselves. Today, the hills of the watershed areas have been logged and

²⁸ “Deforestation in Amazonia 1970-2013 (Atlas),” RAISG, 2015, <https://www.raisg.org/en/publication/deforestation-in-amazonia-1970-2013-atlas/>.

²⁹ Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Janis Alcorn, and Augusta Molnar, “Cornered by Protected Areas,” Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), June 2018, quoted in “What Are Natural Climate Solutions?,” Rainforest Alliance, November 15, 2019, <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/insights/what-are-natural-climate-solutions/>

³⁰ Katie Reynter and Peter Veit, “5 Maps Show How Important Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Are to the Environment,” December 20, 2017, <https://www.wri.org/insights/5-maps-show-how-important-indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-are-environment>.

replanted with oil palm or are mined. The neighbouring large-scale commercial project has encroached into their watershed areas, dwindled and contaminated their water source. Today, the children have lost the opportunity to experience the richness of their environment and suffer from health issues related to lack of safe water and lack of food.

Their way of living is based on an indigenous worldview of respect for nature and taking only what is needed. Their culture sustains nature and for hundreds of years, they have lived without damaging nature. For example, they are only allowed to cut appropriately sized trees and not allowed indiscriminate felling of trees. They are to take only enough for building their houses and not for commercial purposes. Their customs forbid them to fish during the breeding season. They cannot hunt young or pregnant wildlife. They do not cut down trees next to the river as it will hurt the river and fishes. Burn and slash farming is limited to very small areas. This is not significant to carbon emissions as this method mimics the way old trees fall during storms and forest is regenerated when their trees are old. These are their customs embodied in their oral traditions and protocols. The OA think in terms of seven generations such that the environment can continue to provide for their future generations. There is also a spiritual connection to nature and the destruction of nature, amounts to a desecration of their sacred connectedness. This understanding of how the OA view and treat the forest with respect supports the studies that infer that the OA know best how to protect the forest.

CONCLUSION

Partnering with the OA, the Way Forward

Since, OA tenured lands often have lower rates of deforestation, making investment and partnering with the OA in developing local green economies is a smart thing to do. We all need the forest to slow down climate change and who else better to partner than the OA who

are the leaders in nature economics. Partnering with the OA to co-manage the forest is one of the most cost-effective solutions to conserve forests, protect biodiversity, mitigate climate change, build food security, uplift poverty, create jobs and grow the economy. Many of the SDG goals are intertwined and achieved in this partnership paradigm. As climate impacts intensify, it is clear that making progress on SDG 13 (climate action) is essential to achieving all 17 goals.

In the largest study of its kind, a research team comprising the collaboration of various countries found that community-forest management in Nepal has led to a 37 percent relative reduction in deforestation and a 4.3 percent relative reduction in poverty. The research, authored by an interdisciplinary team of ecologists, economists and political scientists, overcomes previous data limitations by using rigorous techniques to analyse publicly available data on the forests, people and institutions. The team combined satellite image-based estimates of deforestation with data from Nepal's national census of 1.36 million households and information on more than 18,000 community forests:

“Our study demonstrates that community forest management has achieved a clear win-win for people and the environment across an entire country. Nepal proves that with secure rights to land, local communities can conserve resources and prevent environmental degradation Reductions in deforestation did not occur at a cost to local well-being. The study found that areas with community forest management were 51% more likely to witness simultaneous reductions in deforestation and poverty.”³¹

³¹ “Community Forest Management Reduces Both Deforestation and Poverty in Nepal, New Study Shows,” *Michigan News*, University of Michigan, 6 May 2019, <https://news.umich.edu/community-forest-management-reduces-both-deforestation-and-poverty-in-nepal-new-study-shows/>.

This is where there is a huge potential to achieve all three targets of sustaining the economy, combating climate change, and uplifting OA poverty, simultaneously. In this regard, it will be strategically important for the Department of Statistics Malaysia to create SDG targets and indicators notably 1.4.2 and disaggregate 2.3 for the Orang Asli and Anak Negeri of East Malaysia. This will provide the necessary road map and key indicators that can provide a more impactful action plan to address the most vulnerable and capitalise on their strengths and culture in achieving our climate action goals and the 2030 SDG goals.

By partnering with the OA to sustain the forest, the watershed areas will be protected to ensure ample supply of water for irrigation and microclimates reduction, making it easier for local communities like FELDA to grow their crops. Secondly, by promoting OA green livelihood activities, growth is spurred, and revenues generated for the state. By this very nature, the forest and biodiversity are conserved, and carbon credit payments can be tapped onto. Another bonus is that the OA could conserve their culture and identity as people of the forest, in line with the SDGs.

All it takes is for the federal government to, firstly, find innovative ways to increase the ETF from RM100 million to RM406,927,463, and make it conditional for the states to use this fund for gazetting the OA reserves. Also, it would be good if the federal government supports the OA to develop legally enforceable protocols to ensure that their forest is sustained in line with their culture and values. Secondly, the government can invest in green infrastructure to promote added-value eco-tourism and green agriculture. The return of investment in these sectors will be high and the sharing of 50 percent revenue from this tax with the state is a good move. Poverty is uplifted, jobs and food security for more are provided, the environment is protected, local economy is sustained and grown, and climate risk reduced. Moreover, the government

saves from needing to spend on welfare support for diminishing poor, and on costly natural disasters. *A win for the OA is a win for everyone and for the world.*

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CHAPTER THREE

Leave No One Behind: SDG 4 for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Malaysia

Norani Abu Bakar and Thirunaukarasu Subramaniam

INTRODUCTION

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) acknowledges the status of around 18,960 refugees and asylum seekers (RAS), with 85% from Myanmar and the rest from another 50 countries.¹ They are among the estimated 3.2 million non-citizens that are residing in Malaysia.² Refugees are often referred to as those who involuntarily fled their country of origin for fear of persecution and violence. In any Malaysian legislation, the word “refugee” has never appeared or existed.³ In UNHCR’s context, the term “refugee” refers to those whose Refugee Status Determination (RSD) has been approved while an “asylum seeker” is a person whose RSD is yet to be processed.

Malaysia does not ratify UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol. Its Section 6 (1) Immigration Act 1959/63 stated that all entries without valid permit or travel document are considered ‘illegal immigrant’. As the law does not distinguish refugees, asylum seekers, irregular migrants, undocumented or stateless, those who fall within these labels are considered illegal immigrants.⁴ They are susceptible to arrest, detention, deportation, and whipping and could not access basic services such as healthcare and formal education.⁵

¹ UNHCR Malaysia, “Malaysia. Figures at a glance,” 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/figures-at-a-glance-in-malaysia.html>

² DOSM, “Current population estimates, Malaysia,” 2020, <https://pqi.stats.gov.my/>.

³ Dina Imam Supaat “Refugee children under the Malaysian legal framework” (2014). UUM Journal of Legal Studies, 4. Page 118-148.

⁴ Tharani Loganathan, et al., “Undocumented: An examination of legal identity and education provision for children in Malaysia.” Plos one 17, no. 2 (2022): e0263404

⁵ Imam Supaat Refugee children Malaysian legal framework

As a signatory to the United Nations 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and a supporter of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4 “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, Malaysia does not prohibit humanitarian efforts towards refugee education (RE) advancement. UNCRC does not explicitly state any core obligation to signatories. Thus far, Malaysia reserves its commitment to undocumented and RAS children and youths.

Hence, refugee learners are streamlined to enrolment at Alternative Learning Centres (ALCs) or Community Learning Centres (CLCs) set-up primarily through interagency collaboration. Among the refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia, 41,127 are School-Going-Aged (SGA) children and teens: 21,885 (53%) are studying at primary education level (6 to 13 years old) and 6,246 (15%) are at secondary education level (14 to 17 years old). Around 30% of these SGA children are currently attending 145 ALCs in East Malaysia,⁶ and among them 36 ALCs offer secondary education. So far, only 48 youths were reported attending tertiary education.⁷

Two of the lingering predicaments in integrating locals and refugees into one mainstream education system is the constantly changing national and regional political landscape and society’s view towards refugees. For example, in 2019, 45% of Malaysian respondents for Ipsos’ online survey agreed on closing its border entirely to refugees. This result increased to 82% in 2021.⁸ Their concerns can be eased through greater awareness of refugees’ talents and potential contributions. For example, refugees could contribute RM3 billion to Malaysia’s gross domestic product by 2024

⁶ UNHCR, “Malaysia Education,” 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/education-in-malaysia.html>

⁷ UNHCR, “Malaysia Education,” (2022)

⁸ Ipsos. “Global attitudes towards refugees: World Refugee Day,” 2021, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/world-refugee-day-2021>

and increase tax revenues by RM5 million each year if given the right to work.⁹

Malaysia's experience from hosting refugees from Vietnam in Pulau Bidong, Terengganu in 1970s and global historic incidences evidence an average prolonged refugee stay of about 20 years in the first asylum country prior to resettlement or repatriation.¹⁰ This circumstance needs to be considered in planning for RE in Malaysia. Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, the biggest three host countries for Syrian refugees, for example, had their policies and nationwide RE implementation shifted to anticipate such long-term stay.¹¹ From 2011 to 2015, Turkey gradually moved its policies from a separate to an integrated education system for refugee and local SGA children and teens. On the contrary, Jordan shifted from its preference on an integrated education system towards a separate education system.¹² Thus far, the experiences from other first asylum countries such as Turkey and Jordan revealed that careful consideration and thorough planning is required prior to undertaking any national actions for RE.

The two foremost questions on Refugee Education for SDG 4 (RE-SDG4) are the country's current stage and progress since 2015 and the improvement that can be implemented. In response to the first question, this research conducted a desk review RE-SDG4 progress from 2015 to 2022. For the second question, this paper provides suggestions for RE improvement based on the insights drawn from Systematised Literature Review (Systematized-LR) and

⁹ Laurence Todd, Adli Amirullah, and Wan Ya Shin, (2019), "The Economic Impact of Granting Refugees in Malaysia the Right to Work. Malaysia: IDEAS Policy 60"

¹⁰ Shelly Culbertson and Louay Constant Louay, (2015), "Education of Syrian refugee children: Managing the crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan."

¹¹ Nihan Aylin Unlu, and Ergul Hatice. "A Critical Evaluation of the Education Policies on Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Jordan." *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* 13, no. 2 (2021): 1694-1708. & Onur Unutulmaz, K, "Turkey's education policies towards Syrian refugees: A macro-level analysis." *International Migration* 57, no. 2 (2019): 235-252.

¹² Unlu and Hatice, Refugee Education Policies in Turkey Jordan

thematic analysis from Key Informant Interviews (KII). Data from KII were gathered from a wider study on secondary education refugees' social well-being approved by the Research Ethics Committee of University of Malaya under the code UM. TNC2/UMREC_1186.

METHODS

This desk review refers to literatures from indexed bibliographic databases and grey literature (GL). The latter is necessary to reduce bias in publication and to complement findings¹³ relevant for a greater audience, including non-academic readers.¹⁴ Data collection among unregistered or "hidden" groups, such as the homeless people, substance abusers, and refugees, are challenging and are often undertaken by agencies that have access to them through official relations and the resources to take on challenging research tasks.¹⁵ In searching and selecting "hard to find" literature on "under the radar" individuals, this study mindfully evaluates the literatures trustworthiness and its relevance to refugee context by applying Tyndall's AACODS checklist: Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Date, and Significance.¹⁶

For recommendation of RE-SDG4 implementation, qualitative data and insights were derived from KIIs and Systematized-LR.¹⁷ The latter involved analysis on RE at another six first countries of asylum: Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. The review process (Figure 1) follows Preferred

¹³ Samantha Tillett and Elizabeth Newbold. "Grey literature at The British Library: revealing a hidden resource." *Interlending & document supply* 34, no. 2 (2006): 70-73.

¹⁴ Tillett and Newbold. Grey literature British Library.

¹⁵ Joanne Enticott et al., "A systematic review of studies with a representative sample of refugees and asylum seekers living in the community for participation in mental health research." *BMC medical research methodology* 17, no. 1 (2017): 1-16.

¹⁶ Jess Tyndall, "AACODS Checklist". Flinders University, (2010), <http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/>

¹⁷ Maria J. Grant, and Booth Andrew, "A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies." *Health information & libraries journal* 26, no. 2 (2009): 91-108.

Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 – 27 Item Checklist.¹⁸

The searched literatures are grouped into two categories: Peer-Reviewed Literatures (PRLs) and GLs (Figure 2). Citations from PRLs using the term “refugee AND education AND Malaysia” were searched at Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, University Malaya’s library database, and 34 peer-reviewed Malaysian journals that fall under Social Science category in SCImago Journal and Country Rank. For Malaysian journals, the search terms in Malay language, “pelajar OR remaja AND pelarian di Malaysia AND pendidikan” and in English, “refugee AND education”, were used. For GL, the first 10-page search results at Google Scholar using the term “refugee AND education AND Malaysia” were recorded. This was followed by individual search using the same keywords and the above-mentioned six countries. Results from the first 5 pages were noted. Approximately 30 minutes was also spent on searching for information from the UNHCR websites. At the final phase, 14 PRLs and 28 GLs were selected (Figure 2).

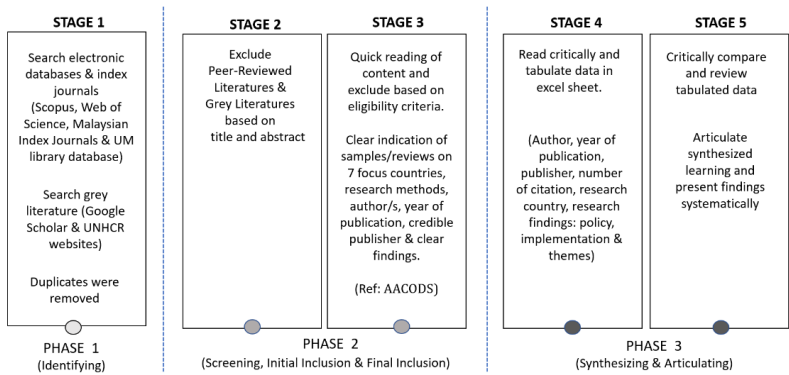


Figure 1 The Five Stages for Systematised Literature Review

¹⁸ BMJ 2021;372: n160

For KIIs, 15 individuals that have general and minority opinions (Kumar 1989) were purposely sampled according to some selection criteria. The informants were ALC/CLC directors (5), principals (3), teachers (3), and parents (4), i.e., Malaysian, and non-Malaysians including a few refugees. Typically, 15 informants were considered sufficient for interview data collection.¹⁹ The transcripts were rigorously analysed following six phases of thematic analysis.²⁰

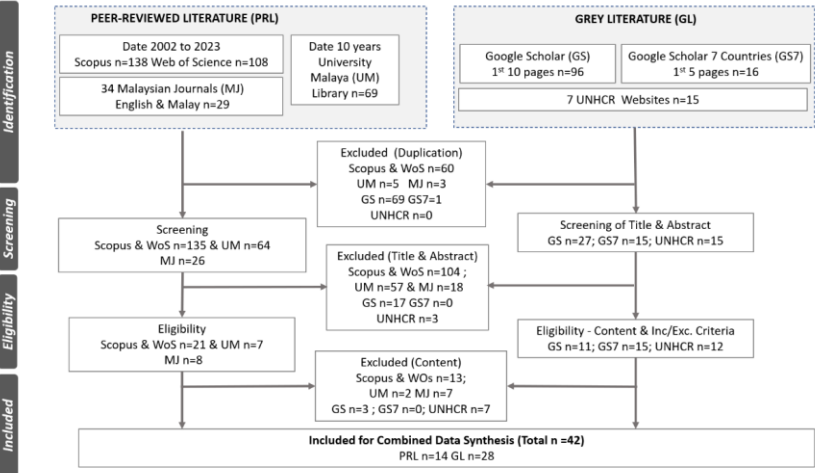


Figure 2 Flow Diagram of Strategies to Identify Peer-Reviewed Literatures and Grey Literature

FINDINGS

A Brief Overview on Global and Malaysia’s SDG 4 Progress

From 2015 to 2019, the average SDG Index Score reported global SDG progress of 0.5 points per year (APPENDIX). This slow progress and the decline in SDG progress from 2020 to 2022 consequent to COVID 19 pandemic and multiple security crises means greater challenge in

¹⁹ Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson. "How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability." *Field methods* 18, no. 1 (2006): 59-82. & Saskia Muellmann et al., "How many key informants are enough? Analysing the validity of the community readiness assessment." *BMC research notes* 14, no. 1 (2021): 1-6.

²⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative research in psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.

meeting Agenda 2030 deadline.²¹ To date, National SDG Council of Malaysia has submitted two SDG Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) to the UN via High-level Political Forum (HLPF), i.e., in 2017 and 2021. Malaysia’s 2022 SDG Scorecard point is 70.4 and is ranked 72 out of the 163 participating countries.²²

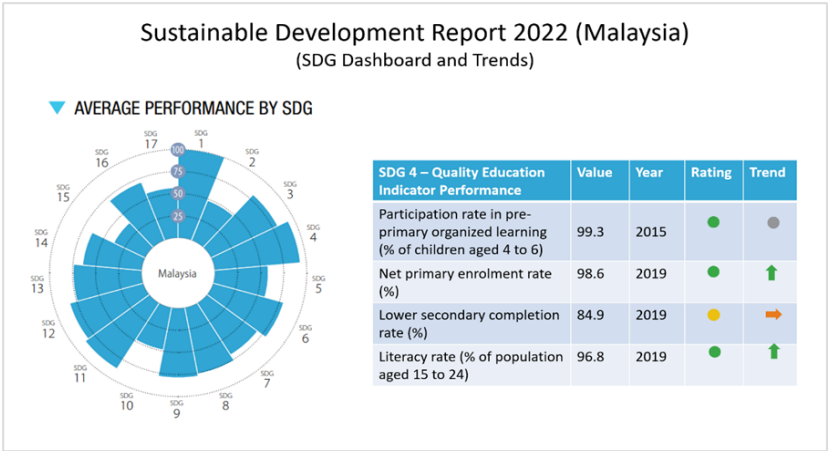


Figure 3 Sustainable Development Report 2022
Source: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/malaysia>

The yearly survey by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) on ‘Governments’ Commitment and Efforts for the SDGs’ showed the country’s SDG nominal performance score of around 54 (APPENDIX). Malaysia has 146 available national indicators and from that 12 are related to SDG 4.²³ The 2022 SDG Index reported its SDG 4 progress as moderate and insufficient in meeting this goal (Figure 1). Only four of twelve SDG 4 indicators were presented in this index. More data for the country’s SDG 4 Indicators, however, are

²¹ Sustainable Development Report, “Executive summary – Summary of Key findings and recommendations,” (2022), <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/chapters>
²² Sustainable Development Report, “Malaysia – East and South Asia,” (2022), <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/malaysia>
²³ DOSM/Department of Statistics Malaysia, “Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators, Malaysia, 2021,” (2022) https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cone&menu_id=UFkzK2xjRE04OVVRKzhOeXd6UWk2UT09

available at DOSM SDG website and Global Change Data Lab’s SDG-Tracker website. For the latter, Malaysia had submitted 14 out of 36 statistical data related to the UN SDG 4 eleven Indicators.²⁴

SDG data collection meetings had been taking place since April 2015 under the supervision of DOSM, including six SDG 4 meetings with SDG 4 key enablers such as MOE, MOHE and INTAN. The enablers for SDG 4 indicators are: Ministry of Education (MOE) - 9 Indicators, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) - 1 indicator, DOSM – 2 Indicators, and Public Service Department Malaysia (PSDM) – 1 Indicator. The indicator data source and data collection status, either available, not available, partially available and proxy, are illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Malaysia’s SDG 4 Indicators’ Availability Status and Data Source. Source: Adapted from Prime Minister’s Office DOSM Newsletter (DOSM/SDG/BPTMS/4.2022/Series 4) and Malaysia’s source of indicators and availability (DOSM, 2022)

²⁴ SDG Tracker, “Sustainable Development 4 Ensure Inclusive and Quality Education for All and Promote Lifelong Learning,” (2022), <https://sdg-tracker.org/quality-education#targets>

The two consecutive years of SDG results (APPENDIX) for 2018-2019 or 2019-2020 revealed an increase in scores for most indicators.²⁵ Data collection instruments, and process revealed the complexity and extensiveness of national SDG implementation through central governance. This will be more challenging for RE-SDG4 due to the “hiddenness” of the sample population. The silver lining is that the national framework and experiences can be a starting reference point for progressing RE-SDG4. The current performance also reveals areas of strengths and resources that can possibly be tapped on for RE advancement.

Framework for Monitoring Progress on Refugee Education in Malaysia

It is of no doubt that many partners have been advancing SDG 4 consistent with SDG ethos, ‘Leaving No One Behind’. Agenda 2030, however, paves a thrust towards strategic partnerships and synchronized work instead of work in silo. At the macro level, the RE national progress can be monitored by mapping its performance to Malaysia’s National SDG Implementation framework developed by Economic Planning Unit (EPU). EPU’s enabler initiatives are institutional framework; policy framework; monitoring and evaluation; financing mechanisms; training and advocacy; and reporting. So far, no national roadmap and RE steering committee has been reported.

As RE is currently segregated from the national education system, varied parameters are needed for its development and monitoring. One potential reference is the macro-level framework for RE as proposed by UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and UNHCR in “Refugee Education Statistics: Status, Challenge and Limitations” as illustrated in Figure 5 (2021). The document highlighted that

²⁵ Prime Minister’s Office DOSM Newsletter (DOSM/SDG/BPTMS/4.2022/Series 4), (2022), <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/document-list/sustainable-development-goals>

challenge of poor integration of RE data into national statistical frameworks and potential solutions for improving data collection, and coordination between these agencies to avoid duplication.²⁶ In comparison to EPU’s initiatives, UIS and UNHCR’s framework proposes two parameters that are uniquely relevant for RAS, i.e., safety/protection and certification. Examples relevant to safety issues are legal matter and prejudices;²⁷ physical and mental abuse by parents, teachers, or centre’s staff;²⁸ direct discrimination by teachers and peers;²⁹ abuse by local authorities;³⁰ and abuse by citizens.³¹



Figure 5 An Overview of Conceptual Framework for Refugee Education

²⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNHCR, “Refugee education statistics: status, challenges and limitations,” (2021), UIS and UNHCR.

²⁷ Misha Cowling and Joel R. Anderson. "Teacher perceptions of the barriers and facilitators of education amongst Chin refugees in Malaysia: A qualitative analysis." *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2021): 161.

²⁸ Coleen O’Neal et al., "Removal of Refugee Protections: Impact on Refugee Education, Mental Health, Coping, and Advocacy." *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* (2022): 1-34.

²⁹ Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “The educational experiences of refugee children in countries of first asylum,” (2015), British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

³⁰ Linda Lumayag, "A question of access: education needs of undocumented children in Malaysia." *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (2016): 192-210.

³¹ Dryden-Peterson, Education refugee children in countries of first asylum.

Certification process involves assessing education certificates produced by education provider from country of origin and endorsing certificates for education attainment from the existing ACLs/CLCs. The latter is also problematic as not all ALCs/CLCs are registered with UNHCR or Malaysian government and the curriculum offered varies across the refugee education providers. UIS and UNHCR's governance framework, does not include two EPU enablers, namely policy framework, and training and advocacy. Both are key in ensuring quality and equitable education for refugee learners. The document highlighted the challenge of poor integration of RE data into national statistical frameworks and potential solutions for improving data collection, and coordination between these agencies to avoid duplication.

UIS and UNHCR also proposed indicators for RE (Table A1 APPENDIX). This research paper mapped the RE indicators that they proposed to SDG 4 indicators. Proposals for adapting the current SDG 4 indicators or creating new ones for RE-SDG4 purpose are tabulated in the rightmost column of Table A1. This paper also proposes identifying the stakeholder of the RE-SDG4 indicator and that each team works under the guidance of the respective national SDG 4 data stakeholders, e.g., MOE for SDG 4.1.1. This charting exercise also revealed SDG 4 indicators that were not included in UIS and UNHCR's indicators. Two examples are, (1) SDG 4.3.1 participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex and (2) SDG 4.4.1 the proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skills.

For review of RE status in Malaysia prior to SDGs' inception, this paper refers primarily to report on "Mapping Alternative Learning Approaches, Programmes and Stakeholders in Malaysia" that was commissioned between May to September 2015 (UNICEF, 2015). Then onwards, some of the country's RE-SDG4 key progress was

presented briefly in “Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion” (UNHCR, 2019). This document as well as Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, “Migration, Displacement & Education: Building Bridges not Wall” by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019) are two key references for sound frameworks and guidelines for progressing RE-SDG4. Rigorous recommendations and evidence-based local solutions for advancing RE is also elaborated by a 2022 Refugee Report by The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) Malaysia and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and this paper’s Systematized-LR presentation at Discussion and Recommendation sections.

2015-2022 Progress in Refugee Education in Malaysia

The progress in RE in Malaysia after UN SDGs were launched is elaborated under two sections. The first part reports on the top-down national education implementation relevant to RE, and the second part, elaborates on the progress at two education levels: (A) primary and secondary education, and (B) tertiary education. Two case studies that model good practices SDG 4 for primary and secondary education titled, “El-Shaddai Refugee Learning Centre and its SDG 4 Partners” and for tertiary education, “Brickfields Asia College and its SDG Flagship Programs” are presented at APPENDIX. Evaluating national RE-SDG4 progress in Malaysia is challenging as there is no overarching framework and comprehensive data. Unlike Malaysia’s SDG 4 official portal hosted by DOSM, there is also no centralized portal for RE-SDG4. Plausible reasons for the government indifference and little progress towards RE is that refugees are only in Malaysia temporarily and the country’s reservation on investing into RE due to the potential stretch of finance and other form of national educational resources.

Nevertheless, according to the GEM Report, the right for migrant and refugee education in Malaysia was increasingly recognized on paper despite slower progress compared to other refugee host countries like Turkey, Lebanon, Chad, and Uganda (UNESCO, 2019). Among the scholars, there seems to be an increased awareness and concern towards RE and RAS well-being. For example, search results on citations on ‘refugee and education and Malaysia’ at WoS and SCOPUS databases on 23 April 2025 for 2012 to 2022 revealed an increase of PRLs on RE in Malaysia (Figure 6).

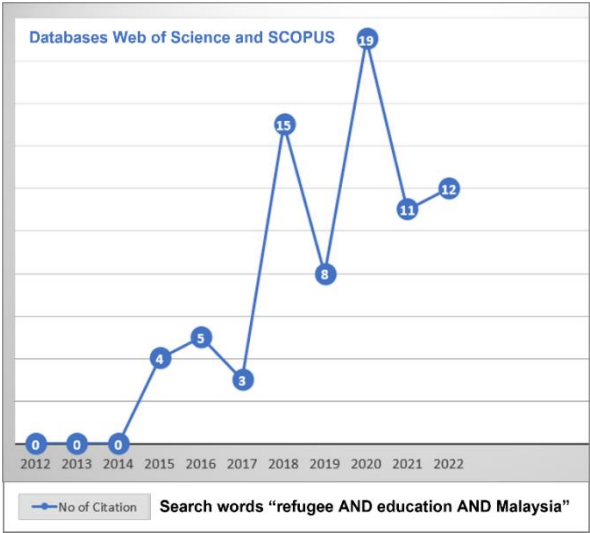


Figure 6 Total Citation at WoS and SCOPUS (2012-2022)

A review on various literatures related to RE in Malaysia reveals multiple changes in Malaysia’s education policy and system, and this impacted RE. Education Act 1996 made primary education compulsory to all and school fees were imposed to all students. In 2012, it was made free for citizens and admission annual fees of RM120 and RM240 were imposed to non-Malaysian primary and secondary students respectively from 1995 onwards. Between 1996 to 2002, refugee learners were given free access to state schools. In

2002, the Education Act of 1996 (Act 550) was amended, and only those that could present their birth certificates could be enrolled in public schools. Children of foreign workers and RAS were impacted as the total school expenses would also include school uniform, books, and transportation.³²

At the tertiary education level, a few higher learning institutions and UNHCR were successful in signing Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) for refugee registration in 2014. Regrettably, today, the situation regresses whereby RAS birth certificates and/or UNHCR cards are also no longer accepted to demonstrate learners' identity/status, barring their admission to the public education system. Thus far, for tertiary education, refugee students can participate in short modules at local high learning institutions. However, for any degree programs, their only option is to enrol into on-line degrees offered by tertiary education providers from abroad.

The progress from 2015 onwards, i.e., after UN SDGs were launched, has also been very slow. In 2017, National Education Policy announced compulsory primary education (6 to 12 years) including non-citizens. This progress affirmed Malaysia's alignment to UNCRC Article 28 on making primary education compulsory and free to all. This positive turn-around came about with the launching of Zero Reject Policy (ZRP) by MOE in 2018 emphasising on education for all children in the country, including children with disabilities and undocumented children.³³

Following this announcement, School Management Division deputy director, Mr. Pesol Md. Saad, through a press statement at New Straits Times clarified that for undocumented children, the parents or the guardians need to present relevant documents and pay

³² Imam Supaat "Refugee children in Malaysian legal framework" (2014). 118-148.

³³ Lee Chong Hui, 'Dr Maszlee: Over 10,000 special needs children enrolled in schools under Zero Reject policy' The Star (7th May 2019).

the required amount of fees when registering. He elaborated that there are three categories of non-Malaysian children who are allowed to study at public schools. They are undocumented children who have one Malaysian citizen parent, children who are adopted by Malaysian parents, and children of those who did not register their marriage legally, e.g., one parent is a citizen.³⁴ In the same year, MOE acknowledged through a written parliamentary reply that RAS SGA children could learn at ALCs that are registered under the ministry.³⁵

In March this year, the current Education Minister, Ms. Fadhlina Sidek confirmed the standing of Circular No. 1/2009 on admission of children without citizenship that are certified born to a Malaysian parent can attend government or government-aided schools. This letter or certificate must be obtained from the village chief. If this certification cannot be resolved in two years, the parents or guardians need to submit a copy of the identification application status from the National Registration Department to allow the child to continue schooling.³⁶

The choice of language of instruction and curriculum at ALCs/CLCs has also been directly impacted by multiple reformations in Malaysia's national education system. Two examples were the phasing out of its Standard English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) and English for teaching Mathematics and Science.³⁷ Currently, Malay language is the primary medium of instruction in schools and English is placed as its second language (L2). All schools

³⁴ Nor Affizar Ibrahim, Dec 21, 2018

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/12/442608/stateless-children-can-enrol-school>

³⁵ Malaysiakini, "Rohingya refugees have 'no rights', but children can access education – minister", 4 August 2020.

³⁶ Jenifer Laeng, "Fadhlina: Stateless kids with one parent Malaysian, certified born to Malaysian can attend school," 23 March 2023, The Borneo Post

³⁷ Anna Lynn Abu Bakar et al., "The English Language in the Malaysian Education System," *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling* Volume 6 Issue 43 (November 2021) PP. 122-130

have a common curriculum and central administration of public examination. Despite English medium schools being ended in the 1970s,³⁸ English textbooks of national education were still widely used by CLCs up to 2013. As an example, in 2013, Taiwan Buddhist Tzu-Chi Foundation Schools and Rohingya Community School Puchong were still using Malaysian syllabus using books given by UNHCR.³⁹ When the medium of instruction in national schools was changed to Malay language in 2013, all publishers halted printing books in English and stopped supplying books to UNHCR.⁴⁰

Then onwards, UNHCR encouraged ALCs/CLCs to adopt national curriculum, provided classes in Bahasa Malaysia and administered end of primary school achievement tests using the Malaysian Primary School Evaluation Test template. This initiative was discontinued from 2019 onwards. Today, UNHCR Guidelines for Refugees, available online since July 2022, centralise coordination and set operational standards for primary and secondary levels RE despite variability in ALCs' curriculum, i.e., national curriculum, IGCSE and GED, and the medium of instructions, Malay Language for the national curriculum, and English for IGCSE and GED curriculums.

A. Primary and Secondary Education Levels

Briefly, 14% (1,234) refugee children aged 3-5 are enrolled in pre-school education; 44% (5,046) in primary education and 16% (874) in secondary education.⁴¹ The comparison between the number of students attending the primary and secondary levels in 2022 and 2015 indicated a very minimal growth in their enrolment rate (Table

³⁸ Abu Bakar et al., The English Language in the Malaysian Education System

³⁹ Hema Letchamanan, "Myanmar's Rohingya refugees in Malaysia: Education and the way forward," *Journal of International and Comparative Education (JICE)* (2013): 86-97.

⁴⁰ Letchamanan, Rohingya education the way forward

⁴¹ UNHCR Malaysia, "Figures at a glance," (2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/figures-at-a-glance-in-malaysia.html>

1). This performance is also far below 2018 to 2021 RE average enrolment rates of 40 countries (Table 2).

Table 1 Comparison on Enrolment Rate for Refugee Children in Malaysia

Year	No. UNHCR registered Refugees & Asylum Seekers	Total no. of school-aged children (primary& secondary)	No. of ALCs	% Of enrolment rate	No. of students enrolled at ALCs	No. of school-aged children out of school
2022	182,960	28,131	145	30	5,910	17,913
2015	152,830	21,555	126	27	5,755	15,800

Sources: Data for 2015 from UNICEF (2015) & data for 2022 from UNHCR (2022)

Table 2 Refugee Education Percentage of Enrolment versus Malaysia's Enrolment

Year	Pre-primary %	Primary %	Secondary %	Tertiary
Malaysia 2022	14	44	16	48 students
2020/21*	42	68	37	6 %
2019/20*	34	68	34	5 %
2018/19*	-	77	31	3 %

*Sources: Malaysia 2022 – UNHCR Malaysia (2022); * - Enrolment in 40 countries from 2018 to 2021 - All Inclusive Campaign for Refugee Education (UNHCR, 2022b)*

Table 3 provides data for comparison of global and Malaysia's enrolment rate for citizens and refugees at three different educational levels. Some refugee host countries boost refugees' enrolment by providing access to their public education system. It is important to note that SDG 4.1 target thrives not only for the primary and secondary education enrolment, but also for the completion and achievement in minimum proficiency level in literacy and mathematics (4.1.1 Indicator).

*Table 3 Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education Enrolment Rates
2020/21*

Category	Year	Primary %	Upper Secondary %	Tertiary % or persons
1. Global	2020	102	77	40
2. Global Refugee	2021	68	37	6
3. Malaysia (National)	2020	104	82	43
4. Malaysia (Refugee)	2021	44	16	48

Sources: (1) UNESCO Institute of Statistic (2022) & The World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRR>); (2) All Inclusive – The Campaign for Refugee Education (UNHCR, 2022);(3) Education in Malaysia (UNHCR, 2022 <https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/education.html>);(4) UNESCO Institute for Statistic (Malaysia) <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/my>

SDG 4 performance must also go beyond indicators' numerical figures as the outcomes from Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is the transformation of learners' cognitive/head, socio-emotional/heart and behaviours/hands. UNESCO's ESD

document proposed fifteen Learning Objectives (LO).⁴² An example of LOs for SDG 4 is given in APPENDIX. Awareness, and integration of ESD-LOs is very lacking in the formal and alternative education systems. The decentralised ALCs management from the National Education System, however, gives an advantage of faster response to ESD-LOs integration into the RE curriculum.

B. Tertiary Education Level

RE at tertiary level achieved promising milestone from 2011 to 2015, i.e., prior to SDGs period. In September 2011, UNHCR signed the first MoU with HELP College of Arts and Technology in anticipation of 100 refugee graduates annually. With RM2 million fund, the project was planned to provide skills on automotive, hospitality, animation and multimedia, construction and culinary for about 28,000 refugee youth apprenticeship.⁴³ Table 4 listed data relevant to tertiary education achievement in 2015. Later, another five higher learning institutions (HLIs) that signed MOUs with UNHCR, and they were Lim Kok Wing University; International University of Malaya-Wales; Brickfields Asia College (BAC); University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus; and International Innovative College. Even though, some were concerned on the legal status of refugee youths, this partnership created opportunities for enrolment to short-courses certificate programs, foundation program, bachelor's degree, and master's degree. In support of their financial needs, their tuition fees were waived and support for living were offered. This progress halted when MOE imposed requirement for study visa and only short courses continue to be offered by most HLIs today.

⁴² UNESCO, "Education for Sustainable Development Goals: learning objectives," (2017), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>

⁴³ The Edge, (2011), HELP, UNHCR offer skills training for refugees and asylum seekers. <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/help-unhcr-offer-skills-training-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

Table 4 Level of Education for Young Refugees between 18-30 Years as of July 2015⁴⁴

Young refugees 18-30 years	Young refugees completed secondary education	Young refugees completed or on-going university or post university education	Young refugees with Technical Degree Certificates
59,978	1,505	1,238	198

Source: UNICEF 2015 based on UNHCR data

To support RE at tertiary level, CERTE (Connecting and Equipping Refugees for Tertiary Education) Bridge Course was introduced in 2016 by UNHCR Malaysia, Fugee, and Open Universities for Refugees (NST, 2020)⁴⁵. CERTE trains refugees on basic research skills, writing and presentations training, application, and exposure to university. From 93 participants, 19 were accepted to private institutions in Malaysia in 2019.

Even though, the progress from the above-mentioned MOU was halted when MOE imposed requirement for study visa, a white paper, “Towards Inclusion of Refugees in Higher Education in Malaysia” was submitted to the Education and Foreign Ministries, and the Prime Minister’s Office in December 2020 asking for recognition of the UNHCR Refugee Card for HLI’s application. This proposal is still pending for approval until today. After the COVID-19 pandemic, refugee enrolment to online tertiary education programmes increased. Some of the education providers are University of People, University Corridors for Refugees and Coursera for Refugees.

⁴⁴ UNICEF, (2015). Mapping alternative learning approaches, programmes and stakeholders in Malaysia, <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/2161/file/Mapping%20alternative%20learning%20in%20Malaysia.pdf>

⁴⁵ Rozani Sani, “Providing university access for refugee youths,” New Straits Time (March 18 2020)

DISCUSSION

This discussion is presented in two parts. The first part focuses on the challenges in advancing RE and the second part presents brief overviews on RE policy and models/frameworks to support the Malaysian government in making informed decisions on the way forward for RE. The referred insights and data were drawn out from this paper's Systematized-LR.

A. Challenges in Advancing RE in Malaysia

Among the 42 PRLs and GLs that were reviewed, six papers, all using qualitative research methods, delve around the topic of accessibility and challenges to RE in Malaysia with emphasis on specific research populations. Letchamanan touched on Rohingya issues⁴⁶; Cowling and Anderson on Chin refugees⁴⁷; Loganathan et al. qualitative on undocumented children in general⁴⁸; Lumayag on undocumented Philippine children in East Malaysia⁴⁹; and Loganathan et al.⁵⁰ on non-citizen children. Thuraisingam et al. did a general systematic literature review on 14 PRLs that were conducted in Malaysian⁵¹. Among the GLs, significant contributions on RE barriers and recommendations came from the 2022 Refugee Report published by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This comprehensive study, conducted by Diode Consultancy and Wan Ya Shin using mixed-methods, qualitative and quantitative, presents barriers to education from refugees' and ALCs' perspectives prior and during COVID 19 pandemic. This desk review paper focuses mainly on the report from the pre-COVID 19 pandemics due to its similarities to the post-pandemic period context.

⁴⁶ Letchamanan, "Rohingya education the way forward"

⁴⁷ Cowling and Anderson, "Barriers to education Chin refugees Malaysia"

⁴⁸ Loganathan, et al., "Undocumented children Malaysia identity and education"

⁴⁹ Lumayag, "Access education undocumented children Malaysia"

⁵⁰ Tharani Loganathan et al., "Education for non-citizen children in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative study." *PloS one* 16, no. 12 (2021): e0259546. Education non-citizen children Malaysia COVID-19

⁵¹ Thavamalar Thuraisingam et al., "A Systematic Review of Refugee Education in Malaysia." *Jurnal El-Riyasah*, Volume 13 No. 2 (2022).

The thematic analysis by Thuraisingam et al. presented seven Barriers for RE (BRE): (1) undocumented and deemed illegal; (2) unregistered and unregulated learning centres; (3) lack of parental support; (5) lack of resources at learning centres; (6) in-group and out-group discrimination; and (7) safety concerns. This rigorous literature review details examples and synthesised knowledge on challenges of RE at the national, communal, and personal levels in East and West Malaysia. One pressing issue related to RE in East Malaysia is the unexpected closing down of learning centres in urban Sabah for not meeting authority's minimum requirements for a school.⁵² This is very disconcerting as the affected children, many who are undocumented and stateless, are already under extreme deprivation of quality education. There seems to be an unsynchronized effort with national governance in progressing SDG 4 in the East and West Malaysia as closure of ALC/CLC in the peninsular is rather uncommon.

BRE (2) highlighted an alarming incidence of physical and mental abuse cases at some CLCs that went unchecked. Eliminating violence and life threats over children who are voiceless and dependent must be prioritised in RE advancement. Imam Supaat elaborated, "equality in Article 8 does not mean that each and every citizen shall be treated equally, but every similar case should be treated alike". Those who are highly abused are to be treated according to Child Act 2001 (Act 611) of UNCRC whose principles include their right for life and survival.⁵³ Thus far, making ALC/CLCs registration mandatory as suggested in (2) should be one of the foremost tasks for progressing RE. This compulsory registration should also include those that could not meet UNHCR's minimum requirements for ALC/CLC protection letter. Coordination between

⁵² Tharani Loganathan, et al., "Undocumented identity and education for children in Malaysia." (2022)

⁵³ Imam Supaat "Refugee children in Malaysian legal framework" (2014). 118-148.

MOE and UNHCR in this area is urgently required to protect vulnerable children.

Among the selected literatures (Figure 2), UNICEF Refugee Report is the only research conducted using mixed-method research. Its quantitative finding contributes towards gauging the significance of each RE barrier so that strategic direction and resources can be planned accordingly. However, this task cannot be supported by qualitative approach. UNICEF qualitative findings revealed the two main BREs as “poverty and lack of financial resources” (46%) and “burden of earning a livelihood” (20%) (2022). Both are interrelated. These two factors did not surface in the 14 PRLs that was systematically analysed by Thuraisingam et al. Hence, in producing non-bias findings, any study related to RAS in Malaysia will need to consider GLs such as reports from UNHCR, UNICEF, and NGOs.

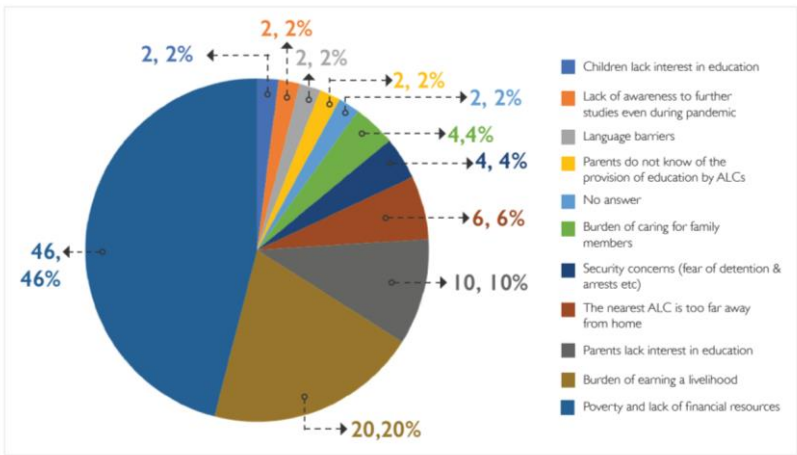


Figure 7 Main barriers to education prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: UNICEF (2022)

In line with UNICEF (2022) finding, Kok et al. qualitative research writing also indicated finance as one of the three main challenges faced by Myanmar youth in Malaysia. The paper revealed that working hard for any jobs to meet family's needs was a form of coping strategies among the SGA refugees (2016). Dropping out percentage for working as a reason is higher among the boys.⁵⁴ These findings validate that vocational and job preparedness training; opportunity to earn when studying, e.g., through apprenticeship programs; and provision of scholarships could help those around 15 and older to continue their studies.

Kok et al. findings also uncovered that youth religious and traditional values, and social support, physical and online, significantly influence their coping strategies. By adhering strongly to their traditional ethnic and communal values, refugees buffer struggles from exclusion and rejection.⁵⁵ Half of the focus group discussion participants who shared on seeking divine intervention for hope reaffirmed this conclusion.⁵⁶ These findings rationalise the establishment of faith based ALCs/CLCs in Malaysia. Each ALC/CLC can provide a mean for collective healing through its own cultural context.⁵⁷ Therefore, creating room for faith practices and/or religious subjects to enhance belongingness and spirituality that then translates to hope, and inner peace is important for every ALCs/CLCs.

On this note, ALCs need to also consider subject/s that promote cultural and religious understanding for their diverse students as most refugees in Malaysia come from a homogenous

⁵⁴ Diode Consultancy & Wan Y.S., Refugee Report 2022

⁵⁵ Low Sew Kim, Jin Kuan Kok, and Wan Ying Lee. "Perceived discrimination and psychological distress of Myanmar refugees in Malaysia." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 4, no. 3 (2014): 201-205.

⁵⁶ Kok Jin Kuan, Mah Ngee Lee, and Sew Kim Low. "Coping abilities and social support of Myanmar teenage refugees in Malaysia." *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 12, no. 1 (2017): 71-80.

⁵⁷ Dilara Özel and Özgür Erdur-Baker. "Struggles of Refugee-Receiving Schools in Turkey." *Social Sciences* 12, no. 4 (2023): 231.

ethnic or religious population. For example, a study on Iranian adolescent life reported various challenges faced when shifting from monoculture to multicultural Malaysia. Five themes were identified: (1) meeting initial expectations; (2) differences in ethnicity, religion, and beliefs; (3) communication barriers; (4) differences in personal evaluation; and (5) psychological issues.⁵⁸ Discrimination, however, can happen with co-ethnic peers (micro-system) as well as with refugee students, staff, and volunteers of diverse backgrounds (meso-system).

Most refugees in Malaysia prefer to live close to their co-ethnic community for social support and connection.⁵⁹ Hence, CLCs are often set-up close to co-ethnic refugee community settlement areas. This pattern widens the students' cross-cultural interaction gap. It also emulates ethnic segregation of their country of origin. Mixing students of diverse backgrounds can be challenging due to cultural and language barriers. These two elements, however, impose minimal BREs (Figure 7) as compared to the student financial constraint. Similarly, the major BREs at ALC/CLC management level are its financial shortcoming (Figure 8). It leads to insufficient teaching materials, improper learning premise, and inability to employ trained teachers.⁶⁰ The interview with the teachers revealed teachers' salaries and rental as ALC/CLC two major operating costs. Consequently, the management is pressured to fund-raising due to the insufficient provision from school fees. This responsibility adds more workload to their existing administration and teaching tasks.

⁵⁸ Khatereh Arbabi, et al., "From monocultural to multicultural: Adaptation of Iranian immigrant adolescents in Malaysia." *Journal of Adolescent Research* 32, no. 3 (2017): 371-402.

⁵⁹ Low SK, Jin KK, and Wan YL, "Perceived discrimination and distress Myanmar refugees Malaysia"

⁶⁰ Diode Consultancy & Wan Y.S., Refugee Report 2022

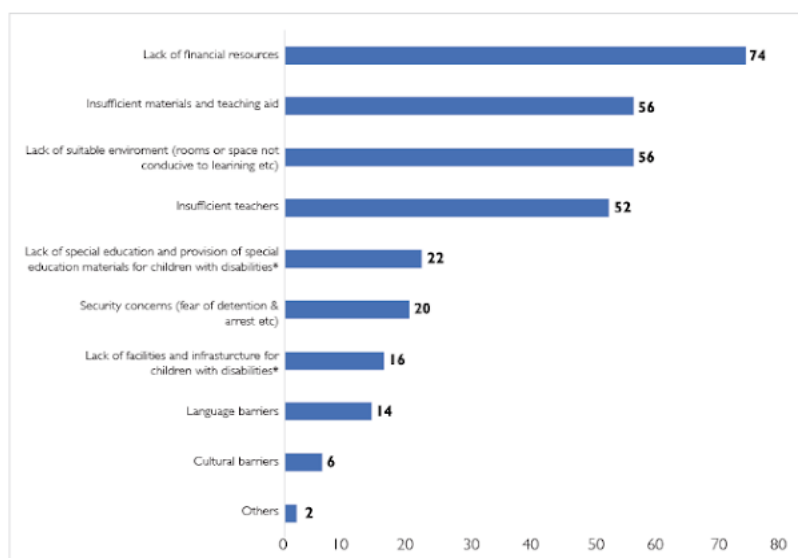


Figure 8 Challenges faced by ALCs in providing education for refugee and asylum seeker children prior to the COVID 19 pandemic (%)

B. Framework and Models for Refugee Education

Integration to national schools brings the advantages of longer funding cycles, a more consistent teacher quality, and recognised certification.⁶¹ The majority of the 15 KIIs expressed their opinion on the unreadiness for such implementation. Thematic analysis of their interviews uncovered three prevalent themes at macro level: (1) long-term strategic direction; (2) gradual implementation; and (3) partnerships. At the micro-level, the themes are: improvement of the (1) school internal management; and (2) school external management. Director 4 expressed his concern on the readiness of RE synchronized effort and the challenge of social integration such as prejudice and discrimination. While Director 5 highlighted that the existing ALC system is already running and any changes for a forecasted better solution needs to have longer term roadmap.

⁶¹ Dryden-Peterson, Education refugee children in countries of first asylum

“Theoretically, the idea is good, and it seems that we can do this, but I am not sure if we are ready. To be ready, every party needs to be involved... I think that it is already good that the government approves alternative learning education for refugees. For mainstreaming refugee education, there will be the challenge of xenophobia.” (Director 4)

“The system can’t be interrupted, so the refugee students can’t be forced into the national curriculum. There is no easy answer. If the priority is for the benefit of those coming into the system, then a continuous way of studying must be provided.” (Director 5)

Letchamanan also proposed advancement of RE in Malaysia in the existing ALC/CLC performance by referring to Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) for providing quality education guidelines (2013). INEE Minimum Standards (2010) covers four domains; (1) access and learning environment; (2) teaching and learning (3); teachers and other educational personnel; and (4) education policy. The fifth domain, coordination and community participation are to be applied for all domains. The author raised a pertinent point on “education with purpose” for refugees in Malaysia. He suggested that this should lead to an internationally recognized pre-university certificate or job preparedness through skill development. Awarding certificates upon the completion of each grade should also be considered in ALC education policy. She also stressed that children could end up not learning anything at ALCs and years of education without purpose or unknown outcomes disadvantages the student and the family (IIEP-UNESCO, 2009). Letchmanan stressed that all parties need to attend to Malaysia's Rohingya refugee's situation realistically and that formulation and implementation of education policies uniquely for Rohingya refugee children should be led by UNHCR. This task force is needed due to their statelessness and the protracted stay in Malaysia.

Among the first asylum countries under-studied, i.e., Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, Turkey is the only country that accedes 1951 Refugee Convention, and Malaysia is the only country that imposes a barrier to national education to refugees. In Indonesia, all refugees can attend public school upon payment of school fees.⁶² Those that live remotely and have language barriers attend CLCs. Language classes are offered by UNHCR and its partners. Since 12 May 2022, its MOE also has instructed the award of “Graduation Letter” to refugee students that completed education at all levels.⁶³ In Thailand, “Education for All ” policy allows school-aged-learners to formal and free education regardless of his/her nationality and legal status, including refugees that live in the nine temporary campsites (95%) on Thai Myanmar border and in the cities (5%). By 2021, 55% of refugee children aged 6 to 17 years old are attending Thai’s public schools. Thai language classes are provided through UNHCR facilitation or other NGOs.⁶⁴

Bangladesh has the highest number of Myanmar refugees, close to 1 million, and 99% live at refugee camps. Through UNICEF leadership, the Bangladesh government has now allowed access to its formal education to Rohingya refugee children.⁶⁵ Prior to this, education offered at the camps were following Myanmar curriculum. The training for Myanmar curriculum was provided to respective RE staff by Bard College, BRAC University and UNHCR, through their Master Trainer professional development program.⁶⁶

⁶² Bilal Dewansyah and Irawati Handayani. "Reconciling refugee protection and sovereignty in ASEAN member states: law and policy related to refugee in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand." *the Central European Journal of International and Security Studies (CEJISS)* Vol 12 (2018).

⁶³ UNHCR Indonesia, <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/indonesia>

⁶⁴ UNHCR Thailand, <https://www.unhcr.org/countries/thailand>

⁶⁵ M.Mahruf C. Shohel, "Education in emergencies: challenges of providing education for Rohingya children living in refugee camps in Bangladesh." *Education Inquiry* 13, no. 1 (2022): 104-126.

⁶⁶ Shohel, Education Rohingya children Bangladesh.

Turkey, the largest refugee hosting country, hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees. From 2011 to 2019, the country shifted from having a relaxed attitude towards RE (2011-2014), to greater control and partnership (2015-2016), and full integration into the public education system (2016 onwards).⁶⁷ Like Bangladesh, curricula of other countries were initially taught in Turkey. The policy shifted from permitting Syrian private schools, to temporary learning centres and later to national school after realising Syrian refugees' prolonged stay in its country. UNHCR reported that, "At the start of the 2019/20 school year, 684,253 Syrian children under temporary protection were enrolled in Turkish public schools and Temporary Education Centres (63% of school-aged Syrian children). Approximately 94 percent of those enrolled are attending public schools including 3.6 per cent of them enrolled in open schools."⁶⁸ At tertiary education level, 744 refugees received scholarships to study at its university and 128 graduated by the end of 2019.⁶⁹

Jordan offers its public education to all refugees that are staying in camps and cities, and are registered with UNHCR or Jordanian Ministry of Interior.⁷⁰ The country has had four models: (1) camp schools – Jordan curriculum but all Syrian students (2) second shift schools – morning Jordanians and afternoon Syrians (2) host community school – Jordanians and Syrians attending the same classes, and (4) regular school – all Jordanians.⁷¹ The limitations and challenges of each model impede social justice and equitable education. Moreover, many public schools in Jordan are under-resourced and were stretched to accommodate integrated education. The concerns on the quality education of both, the locals,

⁶⁷ Unlu and Hatice, Evaluation Refugee Education Policies in Turkey and Jordan

⁶⁸ UNHCR, "Education Turkey," (2019), <https://reporting.unhcr.org/education-43>

⁶⁹ UNHCR, Education Turkey

⁷⁰ Alice Beste, (2015), Education provision for Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey: Preventing a "Lost Generation". UNU-GCM.

⁷¹ Linda Morrice and Hiba Salem. "Quality and social justice in refugee education: Syrian refugee students' experiences of integration into national education systems in Jordan." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2023): 1-21.

and the refugees, eventually led Jordan to shift its preference from integrated to separated education system.⁷²

In Lebanon, most refugees self-settled in the cities. The SGA refugees have access to public schools, and face common challenges for RE such as transportation, tuition fees, language barriers, safety concerns, and curriculum challenges. Young Syrian refugees also find mixed-sex education⁷³ and changing gender norms and relations challenging.⁷⁴ Many of the girls were also married at an early age and in 2014, around 91% of female refugee students drop-out.⁷⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

UNICEF (2022) elaborated four recommendations for greater access to RE: (1) improvement in legal and policy (2) financial sustainability, quality of education, and capacity building of ALCs (3) programmes for increasing awareness and demand for education, and (4) partnership and engagement. For (1), the study proposed increasing pathways to academic and vocational certification, participation in Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), and increase in location and methods for UNHCR registration. The first point, purposeful education⁷⁶ should be tailored to meet two needs: (1) for better livelihood and/or employability (2) tertiary education. Other good suggestions are for (2), financial incentives that can promote their attendance and participation, and for (4), connecting RAS students to internship opportunities with industry and private sectors.

⁷² Morrice and Sakem, "Syrian refugee integration to national education"

⁷³ Beste, "Education Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey"

⁷⁴ Joselyn DeJong, et al., "Young lives disrupted: gender and well-being among adolescent Syrian refugees in Lebanon." *Conflict and Health* 11 (2017): 25-34.

⁷⁵ Beste, "Education Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey"

⁷⁶ Letchamanan, "Rohingya education the way forward"

It is important to note that UNICEF's recommendations were not in purview of integrating RAS learners to the public education system. Under existing circumstances, this approach is realistic as decision is yet to be made in integrating RAS learners to the public education system despite some progress has been made for undocumented children education.

"Our children have adapted to the environment. Our life has been a struggle, so we adjust to the environment. Maybe one or two weeks at a public school or university may not be easy. But they will get used to it." (Parent 2)

"We should do a benchmark study on how other countries use the school building during weekends and afternoons. Can the space be utilised for refugee students? A gradual approach is needed, and a sudden move may lead to a backlash. For example, the locals may say, you can give your home then." (Director 4)

All parents that were interviewed shared positive view on refugee enrolment into the national education system. The excerpt from Parent 2 reflects her confidence on refugee learners' ability to face challenges when studying at public education system. However, lessons from other first asylum countries' experiences revealed that RAS enrolment at public education can impact local and refugee learners positively as well as negatively. With this backdrop, Director 4 suggested a benchmark study that helps Malaysia learns from other refugee host countries is conducted prior to upscaling RE program.

Jordan's experience with Syrian refugees demonstrated a challenging experience despite Jordan-Syrian similarities in language, religion, and culture. In Malaysia, the Rohingya community is the majority refugees. Those that have been in Malaysia for more than one to two decades and tend to have their Malaysia born children

grew up speaking Malay and acculturated to the local culture. However, a significant percentage of SGA refugees cannot speak Malay since the language is not taught at their ALCs. Parent 4 commented that there is “no problem for children to go to public school. But they need to speak the same language as in the school.”

For parallel education consideration and employability at informal sectors in Malaysia, RAS learners need to have sufficient Malay language skills. Director 1 suggested selection and preparation of only few public schools for RE integration. With proper planning, a double shift school, as suggested by Director 4, could be doable. This action must be rationalized, as the born-in-Malaysia refugee population will continue to increase. This initial pilot project experience will give public schools and ALCs/CLCs management, and Malaysian and refugee children enough time to accommodate their differences.

This paper as such proposes eight parallel improvements for advancing education among the refugees while ensuring locals' education is not interrupted: (1) public school pre-enrolment national language course and test for refugees (2) cross-cultural workshop for students and teachers, both locals and refugees of pilot schools (3) permission to take Malaysia's National Education Examination as private examinees (4) acceptance of UNHCR card/letter for RAS registration (5) certification on minimum level of literacy and numeracy (6) program for enhancing parental roles in RE (7) mandatory registration for all ALC/CLC with Malaysian government and UNHCR, and (8) standardisation of management of ALC/CLC coordinated through UNHCR Guidelines for Refugees Learning Centre webpage.

These suggestions are to be added to the current prerequisites for ALC/CLC in getting UNHCR's “protection letter”: (1) A minimum enrolment of 25 students; (2) Pupil-teacher ratio no more

than 30:1; (3) Submission of data related to enrolled students and teachers; (4) Maintenance of regular attendance; (5) A well-developed curriculum; (6) A physical premise that meets basic requirements; (7) Establishment of child protection procedure and policy; (8) Formation and regular meetings of the parents' committee; (9) Financial sustainability; and (10) Successfully organised UNHCR's introductory visit assessment. Partnership between UNHCR Education Division and Malaysia National Education System in forming centralised RE-SDG4 governance will be initial step for the way forward prior to identifying other key players. Evaluation, integration, and implementation of any suggestions, such as those listed above, should be steered by this governing body.

CONCLUSION

From 2015 to 2022, RE governance at the national level in Malaysia has been rather slow and uncertain. However, significant progress is taking place through collaborative humanitarian work in advancing RE through ALC/CLC and online learning platform. In the last ten years, there has also been an accelerated increase in publications of academic and grey literatures related to this topic. They include general guidelines, challenges and recommendations, and indicators for advancing RE for 2030 Agenda. Localising a framework for a comprehensive data collection and reporting is timely for evidence-based policy advocacy and implementation. This task must be integrated with the National SDG Plan to leverage and complement the capacities and experiences of all SDG players. The formation of a RE-SDG4 steering committee is needed for deciding the way forward and for implementing RE systematically. Regional collaboration and support must also be raised to resolve regional forced migrant issues. Active engagement from the refugee and local communities is also fundamental for RE-SDG4 advancement. Their insights on the transformed life, well-being, inclusivity, and development of refugee learners are key in assessing SDG 4 progress for RAS and local students. This top-down and bottom-up governance and multilateral

partnerships will be challenging. Nevertheless, with such strategic partnership, the future is brighter.

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APPENDIX

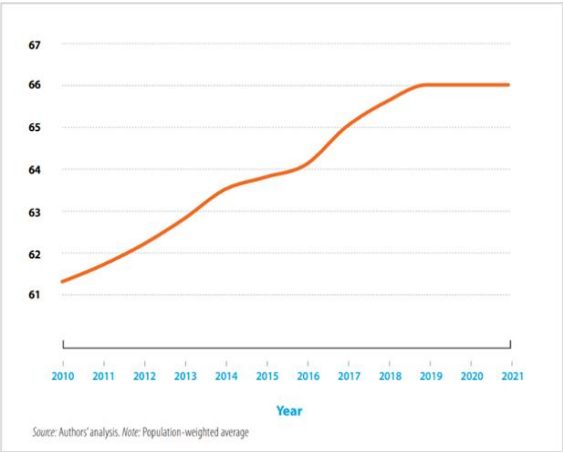


Figure A1 SDG Index Score overtime, world average (2010-2021)
Source: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/chapters>

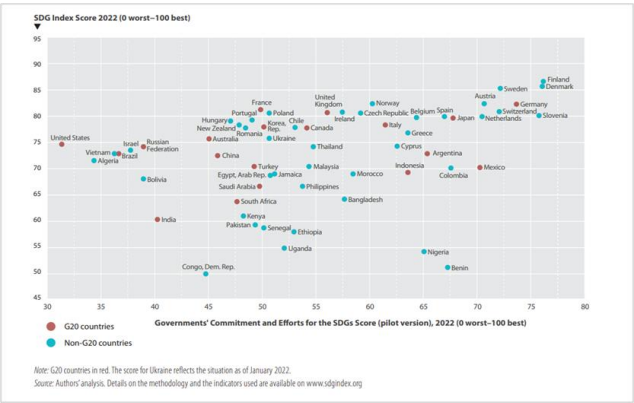


Figure A2 Governments' Commitment and Efforts for SDGs Score (pilot version) versus SDG Index Score
Source: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/chapters>

Table A1 Overview of Education Indicators on Education in Refugee Contexts

Source: Authors' own elaboration, UNESCO UIS and UNHCR (2021)

Area	Focus	Refugee Education Indicators (UNESCO UIS & UNHCR, 2021)	SDG 4 Indicators*/proposed RE-SDG4 new indicators
Attainment	Prior educational completion	Self-reported highest level of educational completion	Standardized self-assessment placement test (on-line) – Adapt 4.2.2 (MOE)
Literacy and numeracy	Self-reported literacy and numeracy	Self-reported literacy and numeracy	Standardized self-assessment test (online) – prerequisite to SDG 4.1.1 (MOE)
Access and enrolment	Participation and inclusion in education	Enrolment; attendance; participation in host country language classes; access to non-formal programmes; school type; inclusion type; infrastructure for access	Standardized Malay language subjects & test; SDG 4.7.1 (MOE & MOHE); Enrolment & completion SDG 4.1.2 (MOE)
Quality and learning	Learning	Foundational skills (reading, basic math); higher level learning	SDG 4.1.1 (MOE) & SDG 4.6.1
	Inputs and infrastructure	ICT infrastructure; number of textbooks per pupil; curriculum; number of pupils per classroom	Add RE-SDG4 indicator to 4.A.1 (MOE) under adapted infrastructure and materials
	Teachers	Number of trained teachers; number of teachers trained in psychosocial support; female teacher ratio; pupil-teacher ratio; number of headteachers trained; presence of multi-grade teaching; number of teachers trained for multi-grade teaching; refugee teacher integration	SDG 4.C.1 (MOE)
Safety and protection	Safety of school infrastructure	Condition of schools; presence of WASH infrastructure; attack on school; transportation safety	SDG 4.A.1 (MOE); Online report platform for attack; Transportation safety guideline
	Protection	Number of students experiencing peer violence; number of students experiencing corporal punishment; number of students experiencing abuse	Add RE-SDG4 indicator to SDG 4.5 Eliminate all discrimination in education (MOE & DOSM)
	Well-being & Social-Emotional Learning	Psychosocial well-being; access to counselling, social and emotional learning	Adapt 4.2.1 (MOH)

Case Study (Tertiary Education)

Brickfields Asia College and its SDG Flagship Programs

Brickfields Asia College (BAC) began in 1991 by offering three programmes, Cambridge A Levels, the University of London law degree, and the Certificate of Legal Practice (CLP). From less than 50 students, today, BAC has produced more than 1000 students. Committed to SDGs, BAC Tower also achieved “Gold” rating for Green RE Index for being a sustainable and environmentally friendly building. BAC Gives BACK social outreach platform thrives to meet the pressing needs of the communities including providing tertiary level courses to refugees. This commitment was demonstrated with the MoU signing between BAC and UNHCR in 2015. With MOE’s refusal to acknowledge UNHCR card and requirement for study visa, refugee youths can no longer enrol to its degree program.

Despite this set-back, the college launched UPLIFT to provide equitable access to education to all children regardless of their backgrounds. This initiative, structured around 7 SDGs, is designed to catalyse interagency collaboration for mobilising shared resources and championing social, economic, and humanitarian outreach. UPLIFT has two flagship programs, BACFlix and ‘Back To School’ that work towards increasing access to digital devices and free online tuition platforms. BACFlix, launched in 2017, provides six online learning portals which include tuition for Malaysia’s national primary and secondary examinations, “UPSR” and “SPM”, and IGCSE. The online platform provides national school syllabus in Malay and English. ‘Back To School’ program provides free online school for refugees, stateless and children from disadvantaged communities.

During the MoU ceremony with UNHCR, BAC Co-founder and Managing Director, Mr. Raja Singham announced that “the college will use its resources to train volunteer teachers at refugee schools in Malaysia” (Afterschool.my, 2015). This is now rolled out by Veritas University College, a member of the BAC Education Group, through its comprehensive Train the Teacher (TTT) Programme. The course is offered for free to teacher volunteers (BAC, 2022)..

Providing ICT support is required for advancing BACFlix as the COVID 19 pandemic experience revealed many online learning challenges experienced by refugees (Loganathan et al.,2021). UNICEF survey revealed the main challenge to access education during the pandemic was the lack of devices and internet access (48%) (Figure 3). The study also revealed that 6.6% of the teachers lack capacity in teaching online (UNICEF, 2022). In this post COVID 19 pandemic time, priority for ICT support can perhaps be given to the centres to benefit a larger number of students and teachers. However, financial support from the community at large is needed to spill-over the value of Uplift’s online platform. These sponsorships can perhaps be directed to Uplift’s project sharing resources channel.

Case Study (Primary and Secondary Education)

El-Shaddai Refugee Learning Centre and its SDG 4 Partners


Established in 2008, El-Shaddai Refugee Learning Centre (ERLC) is currently working with 18 refugee education centres in Klang Valley providing primary and secondary education to 1800 RAS learners. Its centre in Klang which was started with 22 Rohingya students is currently hosting refugee students from many countries of origin. ERLC has about 100 teachers, 40% of the fulltime staff are refugees, and 25% are semi-volunteers. The latter are mainly retirees. The community celebrates the rich culture of its diverse staff and students. Its founder, Andrew Ng said that “the school’s diversity is the greatest reward our school offers. It exposes our students to diverse perspectives on others’ thinking”

Its community engagement programs in healthcare, social enterprise, social work, and vocational skill training facilitate social integration and experiential learning opportunities for its students.

In enhancing social cohesiveness among its team and refugee students, the centre co-organized a peace workshop with its module curator, The Blue Ribbon (TBR) Global in 2017. From 2018 onwards, ERLC has been running Peace and Unity in Diversity Education (PUDE) as a subject for its secondary education students. PUDE integrates a lesson on SDGs and UNESCO’s ESD-learning objectives for SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution into the teaching-learning content. TBR has also integrated SDG 13 Climate Action ESD learning objectives into its Education for Climate Action for Peace (E4CAP) program. PUDE and E4CAP have been attended by around 300 secondary refugee learners, various ALCs/CLCs, and private and public university students since 2017 and 2020 respectively. About 20 students from ERLC and E4CAP programs have had internship opportunities with TBR and various departments of UCSI University, its key tertiary education partner for SDGs.

Last year, the centre celebrated the graduation of 35 E-graduate students that were enrolled in various programs with E-Graduate College in London. ERLC’s commitment and creative approach to SDG 17 Partnership has also paved many learning opportunities for college and university students, local and abroad. Its involvement with ESD has also increased the community’s capacity in SDG reporting and in 2022, the organisation was recognized as ‘The Best of the Best’ of the JCIM Sustainable Development Award (National).

Today, ERLC continues to create SDG awareness by promoting the PUDE module to other ALCs and CLCs. Two main challenges in running PUDE in other ALCs/CLCs is the homogenous demography of their students that limits diverse opinions, and the lack of trained facilitators. During the COVID 19 pandemic, ERLC was forced to shift to online PUDE sessions leading to mixing of some ERLC refugee students with TBR’s local and international participants. Many refugee parents and students prefer physical lessons over online lessons (IDEAS, 2022). Nevertheless, PUDE virtual experience spilled over discovery on the use of online platforms for connecting diverse backgrounds students, i.e., refugees and locals, into a common learning space. This program can be upscaled through greater support from public schools and ALCs, as well as endorsement from relevant ministries of the Malaysian government.



PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS MALAYSIA

NEWSLETTER

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Goal 4: Quality Education

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

12
Indicators

Number of indicators for Goal 4

List of Indicators for Goal 4: Quality Education

SDG 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics

(a) Grades 2/3

(b) End of Primary

(c) End of Lower Secondary

	2018	2019	2020
Reading	98.0%	95.0%	82.2%
	2017: 98.3%	2018: 94.5%	2018: 78.3%
Mathematics	98.6%	83.1%	56.4%
	2017: 98.8%	2018: 80.5%	2018: 42.3%

Note: Classroom assessment will be used to measure SDG 4.1.1 (a) and (b) starting 2021

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia

SDG 4.2.1 Proportion of children aged 24-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being

2016: 97.2%

Note: Data is available for Health domain only

Source: Ministry of Health Malaysia

SDG 4.2.2 Participation rate in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex

	Total	2020P: 87.5%	2019: 89.7%
Male	2020P: 86.7%	2019: 89.0%	
Female	2020P: 88.3%	2019: 90.4%	

Note: P Preliminary

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia

SDG 4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex

	Total	2020: 10.5%	2019: 9.9%
Male	2020: 9.5%	2019: 9.0%	
Female	2020: 11.6%	2019: 10.9%	

Note: Data is available for formal education only

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia

SDG 4.4.1 Proportion of youths and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill

Selected sub indicators SDG 4.4.1:

i. Connecting and installing new devices

	Adults	2020: 72.0%	2019: 70.3%
Youths	2020: 75.4%	2019: 74.1%	

ii. Transferring files between a computer and other devices

	Adults	2020: 68.3%	2019: 62.4%
Youths	2020: 83.4%	2019: 67.3%	

Source: ICT Use and Access by Individuals and Households Survey, Department of Statistics Malaysia

SDG 4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated

Gender parity index for education indicators

Indicators	2019	2020
SDG 4.2.2 Participation rate in preschool	1.02	1.02
SDG 4.3.1 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal education and training in the previous 12 months	1.22	1.22
SDG 4.6.1 Proficiency in literacy skill (15 years old and over)	0.97	0.98
Proficiency in literacy skill (aged 15-24 years old)	1.00	1.00

Note: Gender Parity Index (GPI) refers to ratio of female to male values of a given indicator. A GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 indicates parity between the genders. A GPI below 0.97 indicates a disparity in favour of males. A GPI above 1.03 indicates a disparity in favour of females.

Source: i. Ministry of Education Malaysia
ii. Labour Force Survey, Department of Statistics Malaysia

4 Quality Education

List of Indicators for Goal 4: Quality Education

SDG 4.6.1 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex

Literacy Skill	Total	Male	Female
15 years old and over	2020: 95.5% 2019: 95.0%	2020: 96.6% 2019: 96.2%	2020: 94.3% 2019: 93.6%
Aged 15-24 years old	2020: 97.4% 2019: 96.8%	2020: 97.3% 2019: 96.6%	2020: 97.5% 2019: 97.0%

Note: Proxy using Labour Force Survey (refers to individual age 10 years and over who have ever been to school that is, those currently schooling or completed schooling)

Source: Labour Force Survey, Department of Statistics Malaysia

SDG 4.b.1 Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study

Total	2020: 37	2019: 39
PhD	2020: 2	2019: 5
Master	2020: 34	2019: 29
Certificate	2020: 1	2019: 5

Note: Proxy indicator based on number of scholarships recipients from international organisations.

Source: Public Service Department, Malaysia

SDG 4.7.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment, 2020

Policies	0.88	Teacher education	0.90
Curricula	0.88	Student assessment	0.83

Source: Global SDG Indicators Data Platform (Ministry of Education Malaysia)








SDG 4.c.1 Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level

	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary
2020 ^P	100.0%	98.2%	97.9%
2019	99.8%	99.2%	97.8%

Note: ^P Preliminary

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia

SDG 4.a.1 Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service

Type of Access	2020	Type of Access	2020
Electricity 	99.9%	Basic drinking water 	96.1%
Internet 	99.3%	Single-sex washing facility 	99.6%
Computer 	89.4%	Basic handwashing facilities 	98.3%
Adapted infrastructure and materials 	18.1%		

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia

CHAPTER FOUR

Human Security and the Sustainable Development Goals: Malaysia's Experience Linking the Global Framework to the Local Context

Rashila Ramli and Sity Daud

INTRODUCTION

In developing a country, policy makers can adhere to various development models. At times, a global framework is transplanted into the country. It might be an adapted model, or a homegrown model befitting the needs of a country. Another important element in developing a country is the security of the country. The Human Security (HS) approach where development is seen as a peace promoting mechanism (minimising insecurity) provides a conceptual foundation in understanding and applying the Global Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals.

This paper focuses on the relationship between HS and SDGs in three ways. First, it presents an in-depth discussion on the relationship between HS and the principles of SDGs. Second, it reviews the Malaysia VNR 2017 and 2021 from the framework of HS and the SDGs principles. Third, using empirical data from the APPGM-SDG Impact Evaluation Program, it will showcase Malaysia's efforts in localising SDGs in 10 Parliamentary constituencies with the intention of enhancing development.

Linking HS and SDGs - the HS-SDG Matrix for Analysis

When we talk about security, the general understanding is that the government and its machineries (ministries, police, court of justice) are responsible for the protection and well-being of the people. The term national security is another important one to keep in mind since the government of the day must do all that it can to protect the country. National Security is usually associated with the national interest of the country. Human Security, known as non-traditional

security, focuses on the individual and the communities, unlike national security that focuses on the state. At the heart of the matter, is the enduring universal principle that all humans should be free from fear, free from want and free from indignity. The normative strand here is the values upheld by proponents of the HS Approach.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 66/290 of 2012 stated that:

... human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to survival, livelihood and dignity of their people. Based on this, a common understanding on the notion of human security includes the following:

- (a)** The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential;
- (b)** Human security calls for people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities;
- (c)** Human security recognizes the interlinkages between peace, development and human rights, and equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights...”¹

These core ideas combine concerns with fulfilling priority human needs and preventing deprivation, and addressing the specific threats that in situations of vulnerability can damage attainment of important values. Where the two concerns intersect, they cover threats to survival, livelihood and dignity for persons in their everyday

¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly*, 25 October 2012, A/RES/66/290.
<https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/N1147622.pdf>.

life, notably for the more marginalised.² The SDGs, like the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), appear more oriented to dealing with basic deprivations and less oriented to understanding and responding to threats, although compared to the MDGs they include some steps in relation to threats arising from unsustainability.³

These values are closely related to the principles of SDGs that are universality, leaving no one behind, interconnectedness and indivisibility, inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder partnerships. HS and the principle of leaving no one behind are two sides of the same coin: they seek to benefit all people and commit to leave no one behind by reaching out to all people in need and deprivation, wherever they are, in a manner which targets their specific challenges and vulnerabilities. People must live in dignity by having their basic needs met.

Furthermore, the 17 SDGs can be mapped to the seven dimensions of HS espoused by UNDP in 1994. The seven dimensions are Economic, Food, Health, Environment, Personal, Community and Political. All 17 SDGs are also classified under 5Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership). For example, SDG 8 falls within the economic dimension, while SDG 13, 14 and 15 are within the scope of the environment. SDGs 16 and 17 can be linked to community and political dimensions. The final goal is to have sustainable development for all.

² Des Gasper and Oscar A. Gómez, "Evolution of Thinking and Research on Human and Personal Security 1994-2013," in *Safeguarding Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities, Building Resilience*, ed. Khalid Malik (New York: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2014), 365-401.
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/evolution-thinking-and-research-human-and-personal-security-1994-2013>.

³ Des Gasper and Oscar A. Gómez, *Human Security Guidance Notes: A Thematic Guidance Note for Regional and National Human Development Report Teams* (UNDP Human Development Report Office, 2013),
<https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/humansecurityguidancenoter-nhdrspdf.pdf>.



Figure 1 The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 goals may seem to be standalone goals. However, it is important to bear in mind that the goals are interconnected. For example, the issue of SDG 4 on Quality Education. The ability of a child to receive knowledge is linked to the health of the child. A child's health is further linked to getting nutritious food.



Figure 2 The 5Ps of the Sustainable Development Goals

The crosscutting nature of the goals are categorised into 5Ps. Each category shows linkages between the goals. To reiterate, the basis of the principle of leaving no one behind are two sides of the same coin: They seek to benefit all people and commit to leave no one behind by reaching out to all people in need and deprivation, wherever they are, in a manner which targets their specific challenges and vulnerabilities.

Linkage between HS tenets and SDGs Core Principles

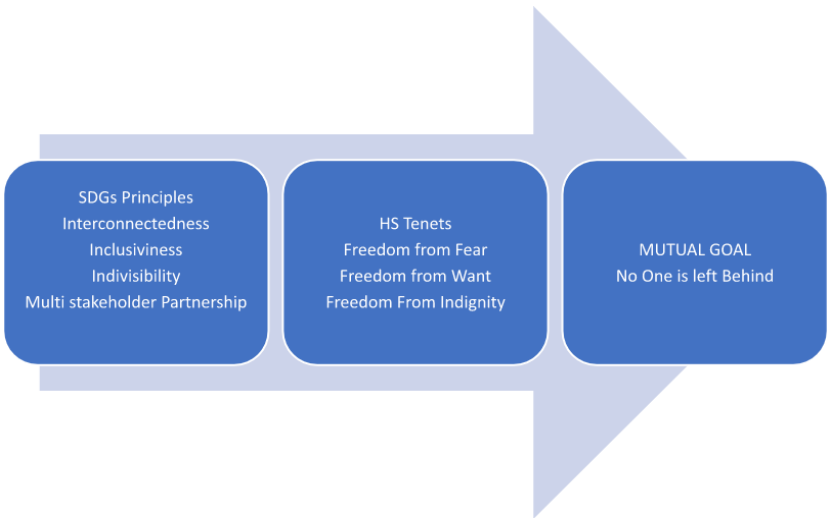


Figure 3 Linking SDGs Principles and HS Tenets

We argue that the three tenets of HS can be an impetus as well as the ultimate impact towards leaving no one behind. The SDG principles underlie the process towards reaching the Mutual Goal. Freedom from fear focuses on the environment where one feels secure to walk about, where children can play outdoors. It is a situation with minimal crime being committed and reliable law enforcement is available. Freedom from want indicates that one is able to provide for one’s self and family. There is a roof over the head; children are getting necessary education and there is an accessible healthcare system in place. Finally, freedom from indignity takes into account elimination of discrimination, adequate services for persons with disability, the elderly and other marginalised groups.

Table 1 The Proposed HS-SDG Matrix

HS/SDGs	Planet	People	Prosperity	Peace	Partnership
SDGs	6, 12, 13, 14, 15	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	7, 8, 9, 10, 11	16	17
HS-Economy			8, 9	16	17
HS-Food		1, 2		16	17
HS-Health		3		16	17
HS-Environment	6, 12, 13, 14, 15		7, 12	16	17
HS-Personal		4, 5	10	16	17
HS-Community		5	10, 11	16	17
HS-Political				16	17

The proposed HS-SDG Matrix can be used to prioritise policy issues because it can indicate possible levels of threat faced by beneficiaries or communities. If there is a higher level of threat in the areas of needs, want and dignity, then, there is a need to include these issues for policy consideration.

Review of VNR 2017 and 2021 in relation to HS

VNR is a voluntary process for governments to report the progress and challenges in implementing SDGs. Malaysia submitted the first VNR in 2017 as part of the country's commitment to the SDG process. In 2017, SDG 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, 15 and 17 were covered whereas in 2021, the focus was on SDG 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17. In Malaysia, the

Economic Planning Unit (EPU) was the lead agency that started the process in February 2021 and completed it in May 2021. The Consultants are from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) and Galen Centre. Consultations were done with many sectors including academia and those from the MYSDG Academic Network.

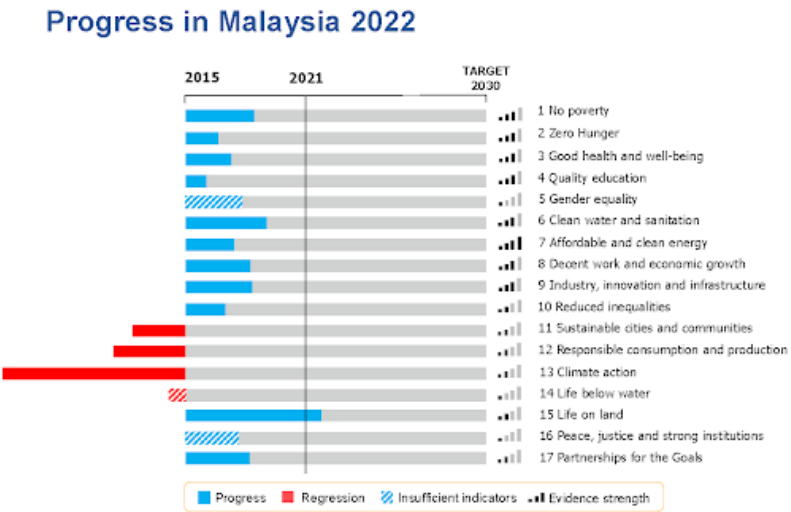


Figure 4 Progress of SDGs in Malaysia 2022. Source: ESCAP SDG Progress Report 2016-2021⁴

Based on the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) report, only SDG 15 - Life on Land is seen to have achieved the targets. However, the achievement is also questionable because the evidence strength is not strong. SDG 1 and SDG 6 came close to the 50% achievement. In the case of gender equality and Strong institutions, there is an indication that there was insufficient data. However, three SDGs that did not meet the targets are SDG 11,

⁴ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2023: Championing Sustainability Despite Adversities* (United Nations, 2023), <https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/5279/ESCAP-2023-FS-SDG-Progress-Report.pdf>.

12, 13. Two of these goals (SDG 12 and 13) are reviewed in VNR 2021. With the availability of regional data, we translated it to the national level. At this level, the VNR 2017 and VNR 2021 can provide some insights on the indicators provided by ESCAP.

Table 2 Comparisons Between VNR 2017 and VNR 2021

VNR	2017	2021
Theme	“Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing World”	“Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic”
SDG Focus	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 14, 15 & 17	1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 & 17
Highlight	Poverty	Progress of the SDGs Post Covid-19 Pandemic
Reporting	Government-driven initiatives	Whole-of-nation approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-Private reporting/ implementation SDG initiatives supported by NGOs, CSOs and private entities
Recommendations	From VNR 2017 Malaysian Report: On participation, non-Government actors are included in the SDG implementation process in the National SDG Council, the National Steering	From VNR 2021 Malaysian Report: Addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in the near term, which has exacerbated poverty, nutrition and health challenges, especially in

	<p>Committee (NSC) and the Cluster Working Committees (CWCs). The challenge of ensuring that the spirit of the 2030 Agenda trickles down to local levels and makes real impacts remain.</p> <p>Moreover, ensuring the comparability of these indicators globally while also balancing the needs and costs of collecting the data and information, will be needed.</p> <p>Localising, mainstreaming, promoting ownership and partnership.</p>	<p>the most vulnerable communities.</p> <p>Addressing poverty and building an inclusive society. This includes the development of existing metrics and analytics to better track key deprivations, including across groups and regions. Enhancing and expanding TVET provision to offer the right skills to current and future workers.</p> <p>Promoting greater women’s participation in the labour force including in digital economy.</p> <p>Accelerating the implementation of circular economy and improving waste management.</p> <p>Promoting development of green and resilient cities and townships as well as enhancing green mobility.</p> <p>Strengthening national security, unity and social cohesion and ensuring access to justice for all.</p>
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		<p>Enhancing well-being by ensuring people's rights are protected.</p> <p>Leveraging key CSOs and other non-governmental partners – the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the SDGs to enhance localising SDG initiatives.</p> <p>Enhancing participation of local governments in localising SDGs.</p>
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Malaysia presented the Voluntary National Review 2017 at the High-level Political Forum, themed, “Eradicating poverty and promoting Malaysia’s prosperity in a changing world”.⁵ The report presents the achievements of Malaysia on selected SDGs. Some of the achievements are listed below:

- SDG 1 & 2: Absolute poverty reduced from 49.3% (1970) to 0.6% (2014) with no reported cases of hunger. (Freedom from want)
- SDG 3: Child and maternal mortality rates are almost at the level of developed countries; eradicated endemic small pox and polio and reversed the spread of HIV/AIDS. Drastic reductions in water-borne diseases, deaths from treatable childhood diseases and malaria (freedom from want). The government has been taking ownership of the national

⁵ Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017: High-level Political Forum* (Putrajaya: 2017), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf>.

response towards non-communicable diseases (NCDs) while working strongly with non-governmental partners.

- SDG 4 & 5: More than 90% enrolment rates for primary and secondary school levels for both boys and girls and 33% for higher education with a gender ratio slightly in favour of girls. Education is a tool to foster unity and national harmony, greater emphasis to inculcate good values, promote tolerance and nurture respect for fellow human beings, also for the law and the constitution. (Freedom from want)
- SDG 6: Over 95% coverage for water and sanitation, and electricity supply at national level, achieved through developing mechanisms to coordinate engagements and empower non-government stakeholders and communities. (Freedom from want)
- SDG 7, 12 & 16: Laws, regulations, policies and plans in place to better protect and ensure sustainable use of natural assets. (Freedom from fear)
- SDG 8: Full employment since 1992, at the workplace, various laws have been amended to improve work conditions, anti-discrimination and various aspects of industrial relations. (Freedom from fear and want)
- SDG 10: Income inequalities reduced, as indicated by lower Gini Coefficient from 0.513 (1970) to 0.401 (2014). The government protects workers via a minimum wage policy and provides better labour market information and voluntary separation schemes. Policies were formulated, which include improved labour migration management including a commitment to phase out outsourcing agencies, clearer statutory responsibility of employers, a minimum wage law that covers migrant workers and bilateral MOUs with countries of origin to limit the fees charged to workers. (Freedom from fear, want, indignity)
- SDG 13, 14, 15, & 17: As of 2015, Malaysia maintained more than 50% forest cover, 10.76% as terrestrial protected areas

and 1.06% as marine protected areas. Carbon intensity reduced by 33% since 2009 and renewable energy capacity increased. (Freedom from want)

Malaysia also presented the Voluntary National Review 2021 at the High-level Political Forum, themed, “Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic”.⁶ The report presents the achievements of Malaysia on selected SDGs. Some of the achievements are listed on the next page:

- Malaysia has successfully transformed its economy, raised living standards, and moved from a low-income to an upper-middle- income economy within a generation. The gross national income (GNI) per capita expanded about 29-fold, from US\$347 in 1970 to US\$10,118 in 2020. (Freedom from want)
- Among the significant achievements are in eradicating poverty and narrowing inequalities as well as providing better quality of life for the people. The incidence of absolute poverty reduced from 7.6 per cent in 2016 to 5.6 per cent in 2019. Hard-core poverty has almost been eradicated, though pockets among selected groups, and multi-dimensional deprivations remain. (Freedom from want and indignity)
- The COVID-19 crisis resulted in some vulnerable households within the B40 income group falling into higher incidence of poverty and widened the inequality. In response, the Government has implemented a series of special economic recovery packages to boost growth and protect the vulnerable.
- Malaysia has also enhanced its food production, where the self- sufficiency levels of 10 major agro-food commodities

⁶ Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021*, (Putrajaya: 2021), https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia_Voluntary_National_Review_%28VNR%29_2021.pdf

continue to improve. However, the nutritional aspect of food security has become more pertinent as Malaysia faces a double burden of malnutrition, particularly involving vulnerable groups and in times of unexpected emergencies. (Freedom from want)

- Malaysia has been successful in providing quality, accessible and affordable healthcare, on par with those in more developed countries, based on the principle of universal health coverage. The country's health security preparedness was demonstrated by successfully managing the COVID-19 outbreak. (Freedom from want and indignity)
- However, health burdens are rising due to an ageing population, demands for better healthcare, and the increasing NCDs, which is currently responsible for more than 70% of deaths. Initiatives to enhance the healthcare delivery system to promote a better and healthier lifestyle through a multi-sectorial nutrition framework are currently being implemented.⁷

The VNR 2017 and 2021 indirectly took the three pillars of HS into consideration. The Covid-19 pandemic intensified the increased insecurity. The possibility of lessening the freedom from fear, want and indignity especially among vulnerable groups relevant is much higher.

Application of HS-SDG Matrix to SDG Localisation Efforts in Malaysia

In order to see the application of the HS-SDG Matrix, we can map it to the preliminary findings on identified vulnerable groups.

First, saturated findings of the same target groups that are left behind in 2020-2022 are the fishers, farmers (paddy, vegetables [*kontang*]), tappers, *Orang Asli* (OA), squatters, single mothers, youth, and migrants. Specific target groups predominantly faced the following:

⁷ EPU Malaysia, VNR 2021, 10.

- **Unemployment of single mothers** (unemployed or working in informal sectors): negligence, lack of support
- **Youth**: drug usage, dropouts, lack of employment opportunities (mismatch of degree and demand of jobs)
- **Farmers** (paddy and vegetables): price hike of fertilisers and pesticides, poor maintenance of irrigation
- **Fishers**: trespassing of zones and state borders, pollution
- **Orang Asli**: land ownerships, integration
- **People with disabilities**: Employment mismatch, social stigma and bullying
- **B40 group**: Squatters and Projek Perumahan Rakyat (PPR), living conditions and social security
- **Rural communities** in Sabah & Sarawak: Lack of infrastructure are major concerns

Table 3. Targets Groups and Crosscutting Issues

Who are left behind?	Cross-cutting issues
1. Farmers	Increasing cost of production, pollution, poor maintenance of irrigations, lack of interests among the younger generations Place: Kangar, Jerlun, Parit Buntar, Kuantan, Setiu, Tangga Batu
2. Fishers	Obtaining licenses, environmental pollution and exploitations (destruction of mangrove forests), trespassing of fishing areas, illegal fishing activities, drugs Place: Kangar, Parit Buntar, Tampin, Setiu, Tangga Batu
3. Youth	Lack of employment opportunities, Place: Kangar, Jerlun, Merbok, Parit Buntar, Kuantan, Tebrau, Beaufort, Setiu, Tangga Batu

4. Single Parents	<p>Mostly involved in informal economic activities. Involved in entrepreneurship but not registered. Some chose to give up business registrations for Bantuan Rakyat 1 Malaysia (BRIM).</p> <p>Lack of social protection from Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia (JKM) and lack of healthcare subsidies, specifically elderly single mothers.</p> <p>Place: Kangar, Jerlun, Merbok, Parit Buntar, Sungai Buloh, Cheras, Tampin, Kuantan, Kalabakan, Setiu, Tangga Batu, Tenom</p>
5. People with Disabilities	<p>Employment, social stigma, lack of social protection</p> <p>Place: Kangar, Tampin, Beaufort, Cheras, Tangga Batu</p>
6. Senior Citizens (including single mothers)	<p>Employment, lack of social protection</p> <p>Place: Kangar, Jerlun, Merbok, Parit Buntar, Sungai Buloh, Cheras, Tampin, Kuantan, Kalabakan, Tangga Batu</p>
7. <i>Orang Asal/Asli</i>	<p>Land ownership, employment, pollution</p> <p>Place: Sungai Buloh, Tebrau, Tampin, Tangga Batu, Gua Musang</p>
8. B40	<p>Poor living conditions (cleanliness, congestion, lack of security, poor maintenance of facilities), drug use</p> <p>Place: Beaufort, Kangar, Jerlun, Parit Buntar, Sungai Buloh, Cheras, Kuantan, Kuala Krai, Tenom</p>

The groups are then located within the HS-SDG Matrix.

Table 4. The HS-SDG Matrix with Target Groups

HS/SDGs	Planet	People	Prosperity	Peace	Partnership
SDGs	6, 12, 13, 14, 15	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	7, 8, 9, 10, 11	16	17
HS-Economy	Farmers	Farmers Youth	Single mothers	16 Youth (social protec tion)	17
HS-Food		1, 2		16	17
HS-Health	Single parents	3 Fisherm en		16 Fisher men	17
HS-Environment	6, 12, 13, 14, 15		7, 12	16	17
HS-Personal		4, 5 Single mothers	10	16 Single mothe rs	17
HS-Community		5 Orang Asal	10, 11	16 Orang Asal	17
HS-Political		B40		16 B40	17

From the above preliminary analysis from the SDG's 5Ps, it is apparent that the policy focus can be taken on specific HS-Dimensions by asking and answering these questions:

- What are the threats to major values in people's life?
- Who is affected?
- How are they affected?
- How can one prevent and/or counteract the threats and their effects?

CONCLUSION

The SDGs document, United Nations (2015), makes little or no use of the terms 'threat', 'hazard', 'downturn', 'downside', 'crisis', or even 'risk' or 'security'. It makes much more use of 'vulnerable', but almost always only as a partner term for 'the poor', and of 'resilient', which applies more often to ecosystems, habitats, buildings, cities and other infrastructure than to people and communities.⁸

As we work towards preparing for the VNR 2024, there are a number of issues that we need to consider for the following vulnerable groups:

- **Women:** 64% of women experience physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partner over their lifetime
- **Children:** 32 million are affected by the lack of education. Girls in rural areas and poor households are being more disadvantaged
- **Refugees and migrants:** Asia Pacific hosts 19% of the world's total refugee population. Death and disappearance of migrants increased in 2020

⁸ Des Gasper, "Human Development Thinking About Climate Change Requires A Human Rights Agenda and An Ontology Of Shared Human Security" in *Sustainability, Capabilities and Human Security*, ed. Andrew Crabtree. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 135-168.

- **People with Disabilities:** Only 21.6% of persons with severe disabilities obtained disability cash
- **Older persons:** Universal coverage with some form of pension has not been achieved in most countries

The HS-SDG Matrix is a flexible tool to map out threats to target groups. The seven dimensions of Human Security have been mapped out with the 5Ps of SDGs. The understanding of the three pillars of HS: freedom from fear, want and indignity, can provide a guideline on the achievement of SDGs. There are still a number of issues that must be thought through in order to increase its usability in localising SDGs.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Successes and Challenges in Implementing SDG 3 in Malaysia

Amar-Singh HSS

INTRODUCTION

The UN SDGs have set a benchmark for all nations and one that allows a comparison between countries. The SDG Goal 3 for Health aims to 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.'¹ The Goal addresses major health priorities including maternal and child health, communicable and non-communicable diseases, access to affordable medicines and vaccines for all, and universal health coverage. Childhood mortality is an important indicator of socio-economic development as well as the health status of any population or nation.

This paper focuses on SDG 3 (especially Goal 3.2) and looks at successes and challenges in reducing preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age.

SDG 3.2 Target by 2030:²

- Reduce neonatal mortality to at least 12 per 1,000 live births.
- Reduce under-5 mortality to at least 25 per 1,000 live births.

Note that the latest data availed for Malaysia is for the year 2020. Data in 2020 to 2022 will be significantly damaged and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. I have elected to use data from the UNICEF database, as it is a more accurate reflection of the situation.

¹ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*, (New York: United Nations Publications, 2020), <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>.

² United Nations Statistics Division, "SDG Indicators - Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 2021, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>.

Current Achievements

Table 1 shows the change in under-five and neonatal mortality rates for Malaysia from 1950 to 2020. Malaysia has made significant improvements in mortality rates over the past 70 years and appears to have achieved the SDG mortality targets.

Table 1: Under-Five Mortality and Neonatal Rates for Malaysia, 1950-2020

Mortality Rate	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015	2020
Neonatal	25.8*	21.5	16.3	12.8	7.6	4.9	4.2	4.2	4.6
Under 5	166.3	92.6	53.3	30.2	16.6	10.2	8.1	8.1	8.6

Source: UNICEF database, updated January 2022;³ *Refers to 1955

Figure 1 compares Malaysia with other countries in the South East Asian region. It should be noted that nations with higher gross domestic products (GDPs) have lower rates.

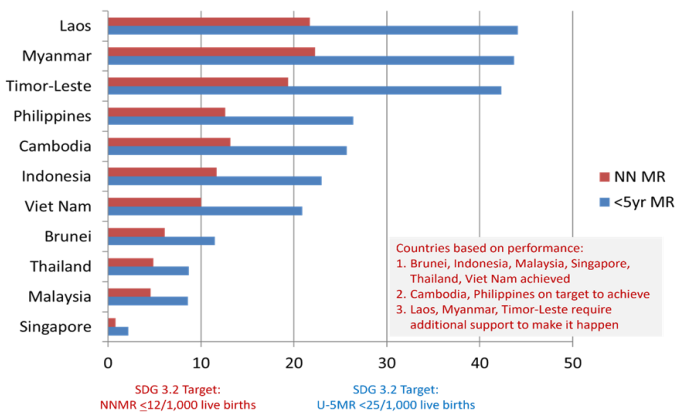


Figure 1: Under-Five and Neonatal Mortality Rates for South East Asian Countries, 2020. Source: UNICEF database, updated September 2020⁴

³ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “Under-five mortality,” 2023, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-survival/under-five-mortality/>.

⁴ UNICEF, “Under-five mortality.”

Due to SDG targets, the focus is often on the under-5, especially the neonatal period. However, there is also a need to look at all under-18 deaths as they are not insignificant and are often related to injuries (predominantly road and drowning), which are preventable. 40% of childhood deaths occur in the neonatal period, and another 40% from age 1 month to 5 years and the remaining 20% from 5 to 18 years.

The top three categories of under-5 deaths in Malaysia are prematurity (and associated neonatal problems), congenital abnormalities and lower respiratory tract infections (pneumonia). It is surprising that road traffic injuries do not appear in the top five causes of death. Injuries (drowning and road) are a poorly recognised and under-reported cause of death for children; they require more attention and better data collection. There are close to 1,000 road deaths and 500 drowning events for children under 18, every year in Malaysia. Malnutrition also remains an important hidden cause of death; as a result of how cause of death is classified (underlying cause of death is not used). Not all deaths are medically certified. In 2019, 37.2% of the 173,746 total deaths (adult and children) were not medically certified.⁵ Note that discussions with the Royal Malaysia Police have resulted in police officers being required to inform the nearest hospital/clinic and get assistance to determine the cause of death for children under 5 years before issuing a burial permit. In addition, the percentage of unreported deaths is uncertain. Some regions, for example, Sabah, in the 2001 to 2010 decade, were still grossly underreporting deaths due to vast rural communities. This has improved and hence resulted in the under-5 mortality rate remaining stagnant as reporting improves.

⁵ New Straits Times, "Heart disease top killer of Malaysians in 2019," November 26, 2020, [https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/11/644515/heart-disease-top-killer-malaysians-2019#:~:text=Chief%20Statistician%2C%20Datuk%20Seri%20Dr,\)%20non%2Dmedically%20certified%20deaths.](https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/11/644515/heart-disease-top-killer-malaysians-2019#:~:text=Chief%20Statistician%2C%20Datuk%20Seri%20Dr,)%20non%2Dmedically%20certified%20deaths.)

Immunisation rates in any nation are a marker of child well-being and the quality of any health service. SDG Goal 3.8 speaks of achieving universal health coverage, access to quality essential health-care services and access to vaccines for all. Target 3.b.1 specifically monitors the ‘Proportion of the target population covered by all vaccines included in their national programme.’ Table 2 shows the latest available data on national childhood immunisation coverage. Coverage for all primary childhood vaccines remains good.

Table 2: Immunisation Coverage (%) for Malaysia, 2020

BCG	HepB3	DTP3	Hib3	Polio3	MMR2	HPV
98.8	97.7	97.7	101.2	97.7	97.4	95.7

Source: Health Facts, MOH, Malaysia 2021;⁶ based on completed primary immunisation doses

In line with the SDG Goal 3.8 of achieving universal health coverage and access to quality essential health care services, Table 3 shows selected maternal and new-born health indicators as a reflection of health coverage and access. There is a high percentage of antenatal care visits and institutional deliveries. The continued persistence of high teenage pregnancy rates is of concern and is monitored in indicator 3.7.2 of SDG 3 (adolescent birth rate per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years). The maternal mortality ratio is an indicator of overall socio-economic development, quality of healthcare services and possibly female empowerment.

⁶ Health Informatics Centre, *Health Facts 2021* (Putrajaya: Ministry of Health, 2021), 19, https://www.moh.gov.my/moh/resources/Penerbitan/Penerbitan%20Utama/HEALTH%20FACTS/Health_Facts_2021.pdf.

Table 3: Selected Maternal and New-born Health Coverage for South East Asian Countries

At least 4 Antenatal Care Visits during Pregnancy (%) *	Deliveries in a Health Facility (%) *	Postnatal New-born Visits by HCW (%) * (Within 2 days of delivery)	Women aged 20-24 who Gave Birth Before Age 18 years (%) *	Adolescent Birth Rate (Births per 1,000 adolescent girls, 2018)	Maternal Deaths (per 100,000 live births, 2017)
97 (2016)	99 (2014)	NA	NA	10	29

Source: UNICEF database, updated September 2020 and State of the World's Children Report 2019⁷

Note: *Year of data source indicated in brackets; NA indicates that data is not available from this dataset; HCW refers to healthcare worker.

Making Sense of the Data and Understanding What Impacts SDG 3

There are some clear messages we can obtain from the data.

1. Malaysia has made initial progress

We can see that initial continued progress was made until the year 2000.

2. Malaysia has stagnated in Neonatal and Under-5 mortality rates

Our childhood mortality rates have stagnated in the past 15 to 20 years. We have had difficulty reducing mortality rates further without significant resource inputs.

⁷ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2019. Children, Food and Nutrition: Growing well in a changing world* (New York: UNICEF, 2019), <https://www.unicef.org/media/106506/file/The%20State%20of%20the%20World's%20Children%202019.pdf>.

3. What is the biggest impact on SDG 3 improvement?

It would be tempting to infer that improvements in health services have brought about this change. However, we are aware that while advances in health services have some impact, particularly immunisation and access to primary health services (maternal-child clinics), the major decrease in child mortality is related to improvements in socio-economic status, infrastructure, utilities and transport. Figure 2 (log scale) compares under-5 mortality with GDP per capita and clearly illustrates the significant association between a nation's wealth and under-5 mortality.⁸ Every doubling of the GDP reduces the under-five mortality rate by more than half. The amount governments invest in health will also have an effect on child mortality as shown in Figure 3 (log scale).⁹ Hence, a similar relationship is seen when comparing child mortality with per capita total health expenditure.

⁸ Our World in Data, "Child mortality vs GDP per capita, 2016,"

<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/child-mortality-gdp-per-capita>.

⁹ Our World in Data, "Child mortality vs per capita health expenditure, 2019,"

<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/per-capita-total-expenditure-on-health-vs-child-mortality>.

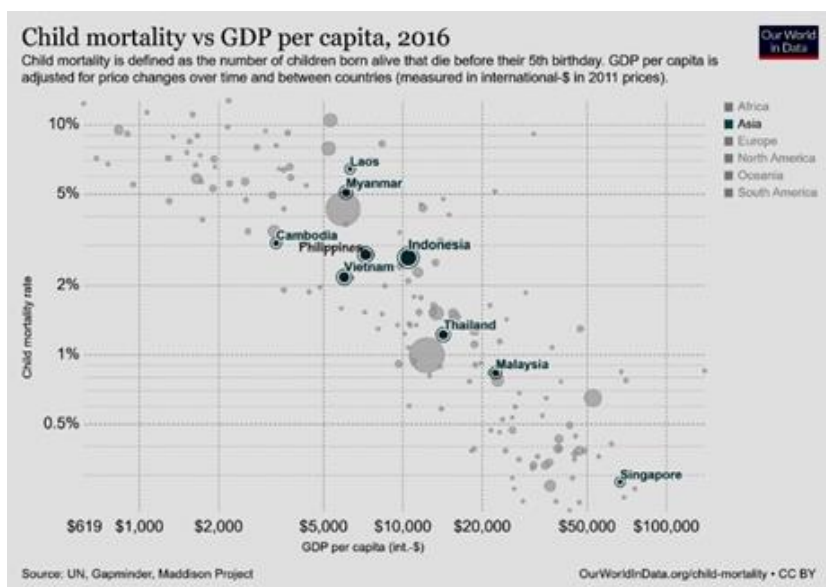


Figure 2: Child mortality vs GDP per capita, 2016

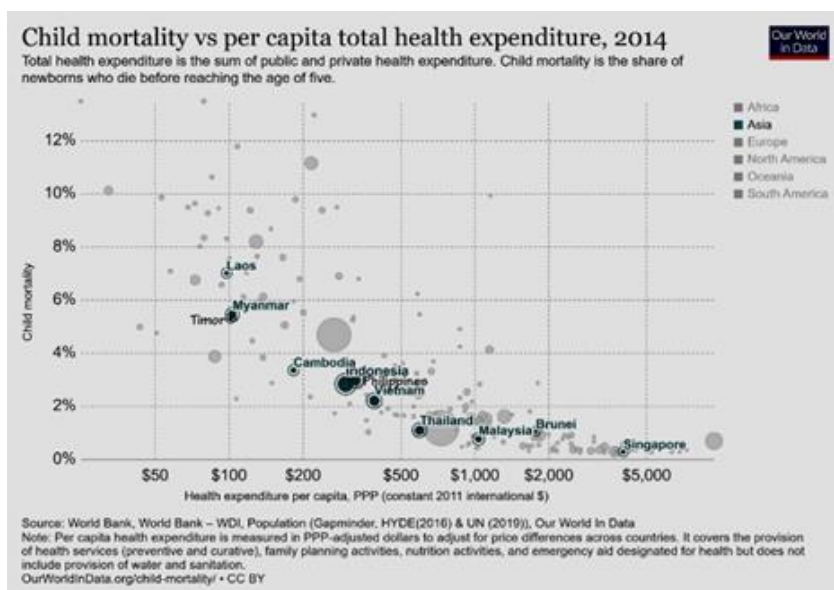


Figure 3: Child mortality vs per capita total health expenditure, 2014

What the Data Does Not Show

Gross data on childhood mortality and health indices do not reveal regional, social-class or ethnic differences within a country. **We must be careful about the facade of averages.**

1. The Lack of Disaggregated Data Hides the Marginalised Communities

While Malaysia appears to have achieved the SDG 3.2 target, we are well aware of the social determinants of health; that childhood mortality is related to family income. The government rarely shows disaggregated data, which is data broken down by detailed sub-categories (indigenous, marginalised groups and level of income), and this is a glaring omission in the SDG achievement. What we require is data showing the under-5 mortality rate by social class or income bracket. We would then see that many communities within Malaysia have a disparately high mortality rate, outside the SDG 3.2 target, even when the overall national target has been met. We can get a glimpse into this by using data on indigenous children as a proxy. For example, in Figure 4, using under-5 deaths in Malaysia for 2016,¹⁰ the age-specific mortality rate by ethnic group for Peninsular Malaysia indigenous children (Orang Asli) was 11 times that of major ethnic groups; while the mortality rate for indigenous ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak was 1.7 times that of major ethnic groups.¹¹

¹⁰ Hung Liang Choo and Aina Mariana Abdul Manaf, *A Study on Under Five Deaths in Malaysia in the Year 2016*, Technical Report (Putrajaya: Family Health Development Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2020).

<https://hq.moh.gov.my/bpk/index.php/component/jdownloads/?task=download.send&id=1043&catid=20&m=0&Itemid=101>.

¹¹ Amar-Singh HSS, *Malnutrition and Poverty among the Orang Asli (Indigenous) Children of Malaysia*, Submission for UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty (June 2019),

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/VisitsContributions/Malaysia/IndigenousChildren.pdf>.

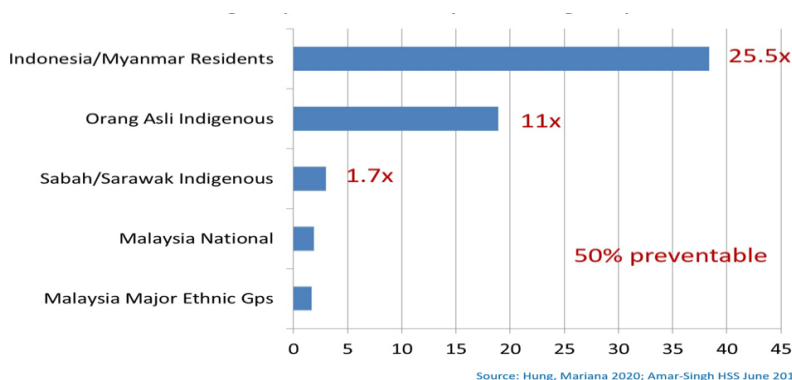


Figure 4: Under-5 Age-Specific MR by Ethnic group, 2016

Hence, Malaysia appears to be developing toward a high-income nation but has many pockets of unresolved poverty. We must therefore address the mortality in indigenous and ethnic minority communities in the country. Indigenous children, inner city children in slums and poor rural communities (especially in Sabah) often have 2 to 5 times the under-5 mortality rate than those in the middle- or upper class of society.

Therefore, SDG 3 goals must never be viewed as a national average but the goal of the bottom 20% of the society's social class. Improvements in SDG 3 are very closely linked to SDG 1 on the eradication of poverty. While 'leave no one behind' has become the rally call for our generation, we have not done enough to close the gap, and in reality, the gap has widened. Ideally, resources should be allocated disproportionately to meet the need. However, we continue to perpetuate the 'inverse care law', where those with the greatest need are ones least likely to get adequate support.

2. Identifying Preventable Deaths

Just because a nation has achieved or is on target to achieve the SDG 3.2 target, does not mean that preventable deaths do not occur. A study looking at under-5 deaths in Malaysia for 2015 showed that at least 48.7% were preventable, often due to family factors (lack of

awareness of severity of illness and delay in seeking treatment) and quality of medical care issues (failure to escalate care to a higher level of expertise, failure to appreciate disease severity, limited human resources).¹² This rate was higher than the self-reported preventable rate of 27.2%. We need to monitor preventable deaths and work to reduce this rate, rather than focus on having 'achieved' SDG target status.

3. Hidden Deaths – Children Victimised by the System

It is uncertain whether all non-citizen child deaths (economic and undocumented migrants) are reported in our data. Under-5 mortality rates among these communities are much higher than the national average as they have difficulty accessing healthcare due to financial constraints or a reluctance to access healthcare due to legal issues. The under-5 age-specific mortality rate by ethnic group (2016) for children from Indonesia and Myanmar residing in Malaysia was 25.5 times higher than the national average (Figure 4). The government is not proactively concerned with meeting the healthcare needs of migrants; it does not provide basic healthcare without payment. Another 'hidden' community is children of refugees, asylum-seekers, those in detention and the stateless. Table 4 attempts to provide data on this issue. Malaysia has received large Myanmar refugee populations. Stateless persons have limited access to health, education and social services for their children and this impacts SDG 3. There is limited data on refugees in detention; this can be families in detention, parents taken into detention (children left to fend for themselves) or children in detention without guardians. Detention perpetuates the cycle of poverty with the loss of education and adequate nutrition.

¹² Amar-Singh HSS et al., *Preventable under-5 deaths in Malaysia*, Technical Report (Putrajaya: Family Health Development Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2018).

Table 4: Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Stateless in Malaysia, 2020

Refugees & Asylum-seekers			Stateless
Total	Children	Details	
178,450 (2020)	46,730 (2020)	153,800 from Myanmar (mainly Rohingyas & Chins), others from conflict-affected areas or fleeing persecution. > 756 children in immigration detention centres (without guardians).	290,000 children (2016 data, Home Minister) 108,332 (another 55,000 'of concern')

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2020)¹³

Morbidity not Just Mortality

The SDG 3 health goals can only be achieved with significant improvement in other SDG areas. In addition, quality of life is not merely a reduction in death rates but living a childhood and adult life free from disability and the effects of deprivation. Improving SDG 3 must come with an alleviation of the morbidity that food deprivation and limited education impose on children for a lifetime. Table 5 shows selected morbidity indicators among children in Malaysia.¹⁴ Our stunting rates are high for the region and we have significant poverty. Research by the Merdeka Centre suggests that Covid-19 has pushed another 8 to 10% of the population into poverty.¹⁵ Current conservative estimates suggest that 3 to 4 million children live in

¹³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Figures at a Glance in Malaysia," March 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/my/what-we-do/figures-glance-malaysia>.

¹⁴ UNICEF, "The State of the World's Children 2019."

¹⁵ CNA, "Can the poor in Malaysia cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?" February 23, 2023, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cnainsider/poor-malaysia-cope-challenges-posed-covid-19-pandemic-poverty-692066>.

poverty in Malaysia. Growth stunting can result in a lifetime of irreversible physical and cognitive impairment. Interrupted education affects long-term financial abilities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty across generations. Children from the poor and marginalised communities are often significantly impacted by malnutrition.

Table 5: Selected Morbidity Indicators among Children in Malaysia

Percentage of Moderate & Severe Stunting [#] as a Proxy Indicator of Malnutrition*	Education Percentage Completed Upper Secondary Education ⁺	Living in Poverty
21 (2016)	2% drop out in secondary education. However, it does not take into account the majority of students who leave during the transition phase (from Year 6 to Form 1).	405,441 households (2019) 5.6% of all households

Source: UNICEF database, updated September 2020 and State of the World’s Children Report 2019

Note: [#]Stunting is children under 5 years of age in the surveyed population that fall below minus 2 standard deviations from the median height-for-age of the reference population; ^{*}Year of data source indicated in brackets; ⁺Data based on latest available year 2013;

Poverty is a lifetime trap that is very difficult to come out of and has devastating impacts. As UNICEF clearly articulates *“the legacy of child poverty can last a lifetime. Very often children experience poverty as the lack of shelter, education, nutrition, water or health services. The lack of these basic needs often results in deficits that cannot easily be overcome later in life. Even when not clearly deprived, having poorer*

opportunities than their peers in any of the above can limit future opportunities.”

More issues related to ‘new’ morbidities and current and emerging child health care challenges are outlined in the **Appendix** (Amar-Singh HSS 2019).

Key Challenges to Achieving SDG 3

The UN SDGs have been very meaningful in bringing governments back to a focus on health, environment and social justice. However, the impact of the SDGs has not permeated the health services as effectively as intended and especially failed to impact clinicians.

Some key challenges to achieving SDG 3 in Malaysia are summarised below:

1. Loss of Focus and Conflicting Interests

In healthcare, often the loudest voices dictate resource allocation and development. Specialisation and sub-specialisation have engulfed healthcare and clouded the issues. Medical schools enamour students to curative fields and most healthcare professionals, especially doctors who hold much of the ‘power’, have lost a prevention focus. The ‘brightest and best’ of our medical personnel tend to opt for a hospital-based profession and career.

We no longer run a Ministry of Health (MOH) but a Ministry of Disease (MOD); an institutionalisation of medicine. Sadly, Public Health has not made the distance to adequately advocate for a growth in preventative services. The early primary care success of antenatal and child health clinics with a focus on immunisation, growth and development has not been sustained and not duplicated especially in urban settings. Hence, hospitals ‘eat’ a large proportion (60 to 70%) of health resources in terms of funding, manpower and development. In recent decades, there has been an "explosion" of

tertiary level specialised services as means to 'meet' the health needs of the community.

This model is doctor and illness focused, expensive, fragmented and institutional-based. Hence, we tend to focus on disease (Paediatrics) and not health (Child Health). This 'curative' model is however, inappropriate for the majority of the population, is not financially viable and a never-ending thirsty black hole.

2. A Public Addicted to Curative Services

We have nurtured our public to depend on doctors and the curative health services. The cry of the public is for more hospitals nearer their homes, more specialists at their door-step and more quick-fixes for their medical problems. Our public has been weaned on a diet of curative services offered by doctors and focused on specialists. They are now addicted to this model - specialist care and curative care. They have little concept of prevention. They desire to live as they choose and ask us to fix their health problems with drugs or procedures.

3. The Damage of Private Health Services

The Private-Public divide also worsens our health services. The private sector is totally dedicated to treating disease; they thrive on the non-communicable disease (NCD) epidemics. They are profit-driven, so there is no major incentive to promote preventative health. The commercialisation of healthcare and the use of healthcare as a means of obtaining financial wealth has undermined the trust of individuals and communities in healthcare professionals and even governments. We currently have a major trust-deficit of the community in healthcare systems and professionals.

Governments have begun investing in private healthcare, a serious conflict of interest. There may also be a subtle opposition from the private sector and big businesses (private hospital groups)

to a preventative approach as they thrive on a curative model and on sick people.

4. Inadequate Financial Resources and Health Spending by Governments

The percentage of the GDP spent on health is currently at 2.6% of the GDP. Malaysia has among the smallest public health care budgets among middle-income countries. This inadequate government spending on health limits SDG 3 improvement. We can see this also in the relative reduction in the MOH paediatric budget over time (data extracted from the respective annual estimated federal expenditures) (Table 6).¹⁶

Year	Paediatric Budget	Total Health Budget	Percentage of Total
2023	610,506,300	36,139,861,200	1.7%
2022	591,088,200	32,409,629,800	1.8%
2021	578,878,900	31,941,504,300	1.8%
2020	660,210,700	30,602,080,900	2.2%
2019	630,411,000	28,678,743,500	2.2%
2013	384,920,300	19,227,189,500	2.0%

Source: Annual budget reports, MOF, Malaysia

Table 6: Proportion of the Total Health Budget Allocated to Paediatrics

5. Failure to Deal with Social Determinants of Health

This key major challenge has been outlined in the earlier discussion. Families that are poor, disadvantaged, marginalised or have poor access to healthcare are the ones whose children have the highest mortality and morbidity. Unfortunately, many of our services are urban-based and focused on those that have wealth (Inverse Care Law).

¹⁶ Ministry of Finance, Malaysia, “Estimated Federal Expenditure” (2023), <https://budget.mof.gov.my/en/>.

Note that I have chosen not to discuss the ‘elephant in the room’ – corruption. Institutionalised corruption and corrupt practices in some of the countries have a significant impact on the healthcare system in terms of spending and development.

Special Focus on the Impact of Covid-19 on SDG 3

Covid-19 is an enormous spanner in the works; a great distractor that has siphoned off resources, energy and focus on SDG 3. It is anticipated that the impact of Covid-19 will set us back by decades. It is likely that we will continue to see worsening malnutrition, psychological morbidity, demographic change and limited educational outcomes for many generations to come. Childhood immunisation efforts have been interrupted in a number of countries.¹⁷ It is expected that gains in child mortality will be halted or slowed down. A summary of the key impacts on SDG 3 include:¹⁸

1. Downward Poverty Spiral

It is anticipated that the loss of income and jobs will push more of the population into poverty. In Malaysia, this has been estimated as an additional 5 to 8% of the population, which translates into an additional 2 to 3 million children pushed into serious poverty.

2. Worsening Childhood Malnutrition

The increasing poverty, decrease in non-governmental organisation support, decrease in charity and corporate giving, and loss of schooling means that malnutrition in children has worsened with long-term consequences on height growth. For example, a sizeable proportion of children in Malaysia, with poor food security, who depended on the school-based Supplementary Food Programme, lost this resource in 2020 to 2022. In addition, support services and

¹⁷ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*.

¹⁸ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “Covid-19 and children,” October 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/>; Amar Singh HSS, *Covid-19 and its Impact to Future Generations* (2019), <http://bit.ly/39EkAkH>

community feeding programmes for indigenous children have been impaired or retarded in growth.

3. Interrupted Education

Schools were closed intermittently for 2 years and attempts have been made to move schools to online classes. There is a huge digital divide (unequal access to technology) and disparity between different social groups, worsening the access to education. Data is emerging that children from poorer communities are losing interest in schooling. Children with disabilities have been the hardest hit by a loss of education and therapy. The Asian Development Bank (April 2021) suggests that Malaysia has had one of the highest learning losses among Asian developing nations. Education poverty will have enormous lifetime implications, not just for children, but also for the Malaysian economy and SDG goals¹⁹ (Amar-Singh HSS, Ong Puay-Hoon, Gill Raja, et al April 2022).

4. A Generational Scar/Gap

Due to Covid-19, many couples are delaying getting married or postponing having a child. This reduction in planned births will take its full effect in 2022 where we will see a major change in birth rates. The reduction in yearly birth volume may last much longer after Covid-19 due to increased poverty and the need to rebuild lives. In Malaysia, the annual reduction in total births of 1.5 to 2.5% has accelerated to 10.1% in 2021 (487,957 births in 2019 and 438,774 births in 2021). The impact of this 'lost generation' will be seen in the education system (reduction in students/classes), long-term manpower needs and health considerations (increased later age pregnancies).

¹⁹ Amar-Singh HSS et al., *A National Emergency – Our Children's Learning Loss: Keys to Post-Covid-19 School Recovery in Malaysia* (2022), <https://bit.ly/3kQws7K>.

The Looming Impact of Climate Change

It is estimated that 26% of childhood deaths and 25% of the total disease burden in children under-five could be prevented through the reduction of environmental risks such as air pollution, unsafe water, sanitation and inadequate hygiene or chemicals.²⁰

No discussion on SDG 3 would be appropriate without pointing out that climate change, the impending climate emergency that threatens to engulf us, will reverse all SDG 3 gains.

This may prove to be the major health challenge of our time and children will be the most affected.

Transformative Approach to Achieving SDG 3

While Malaysia has made progress to achieve the SDG 3 goals, the current progress has not been achieved at a regional or community level. Our national achievement belies the many we have left behind – many of the marginalised communities in our nation are poorly served.

If we are serious about child health in our country, then we require radical changes in our approach and not ‘more of the same’.

The children of Malaysia need us to achieve SDG 3 goals for ALL, not as an average or for a portion of the community. The SDG 3 goal is not a figure for these children but a lifeline of hope, if we are prepared to truly invest in their health.

We can no longer rely on traditional and incremental approaches to improve health. We require a transformative approach that focuses on inclusive growth to achieve equality. What

²⁰ Annette Prüss-Üstün et al., *Preventing Disease Through Healthy Environments: A Global Assessment of the Burden of Disease from Environmental Risks* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2016), https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/204585/9789241565196_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

does a transformative health service look like? Some key aspects include:

1. A healthcare system which focuses on community care

The cornerstone for developing community care will be enabling and empowering the community to care for themselves. We need to move away from a mindset of delivery of healthcare to the community and work towards the development of capability within the community for self-care. We need a healthcare system that is developed for children and families, and not one that is developed for managers and the healthcare professional.²¹

2. A healthcare system which focuses on preventative services

We need to revolutionise the training of our healthcare professionals and move away from a disease approach. We need to provide incentives for our brightest minds to work in the community and in prevention activities. We need to encourage clinicians to spend at least 40% of their working time in the community. We need to dramatically increase funding and manpower resources for public health. We need to develop and enlarge mobile health services to meet urban child health needs (70% of our population are in urban environments).

3. A healthcare system which focuses on marginalised communities

For true change to occur, we require disaggregated data, broken down by detailed sub-categories (indigenous, marginalised groups, level of income, gender). We then need to map communities with high child mortality rates and allocate sufficient resources on those with high rates. For this to happen, we need compulsory death registration and mandated medical certification of deaths by law.

²¹ Amar-Singh HSS, *Current Child Health Care Challenges & Suggestions: Improving Child Health Services in Malaysia* (September 2019). [Please refer to the Appendix]

4. A government committed to adequately funding the healthcare system

Recognising the problem and what needs to be done for child health is half the battle. We need to advocate with the government to allocate sufficient health resources to meet the needs of the community. Funding for the national health service for Malaysia needs to be doubled. This must be the agenda of any good government and advocating for it should become the mandate of all political parties.

5. A government committed to ending child poverty and malnutrition (achieving SDG 1 & 2)

Working on health alone will not result in the dramatic change in SDG 3 child mortality and morbidity that we hope for. For this to happen, there is a need to end child poverty and hunger. The achievement of SDG 1 and 2 will go a long way to help achieve SDG 3.

Some Closing Remarks

While we may look to governments to provide strong leadership, direction and funding to develop such a health system described above, the real transforming movement might be from the community itself – a grassroots, ground-up advocacy and development.

The paediatric professional community has been ‘clouded’ by many issues and failed to adequately advocate for the poorest children in each of our nations. We cannot leave this task to others. These children and families have no voice; we have the data and the capability to lend them ours. What is required is a willingness in our hearts to choose to do so.

As a nation we must never compare with other nations and think that we are doing better. Every preventable child death in our country is a travesty. Every child that continues to live in (relative) poverty is our nation's shame.

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APPENDIX

Current Child Health Care Challenges & Suggestions:

Improving Child Health Services in Malaysia

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This brief overview looks at the challenges faced in child health in Malaysia and some solutions to overcome them (written for the RMK 12 plan and submitted to MOH Malaysia).

Health challenges have changed over time and now relate more to health care delivery systems, lifestyle diseases, genetic disorders, environmental problems and urbanisation. In the past, health systems were more concerned with mortality. With the rapid decline in perinatal and child mortality, problems that cause significant morbidity have emerged as more important. As a society, we have moved from mortality to morbidity to new mortalities and morbidities. There is a need to move away from just a focus on under 5 years of age to the entire paediatric population (0 to 18 years).

Some of the key health challenges faced by the paediatric population are summarised in the table below:

Table: Current Child Health Care Challenges & Suggestions

Problem	Size of the Problem (one example)	Key Initiatives that Work
Unreached/Poorly reached indigenous & rural populations	Indigenous people (Orang Asli, Penans) and rural poor especially in Sabah. Mortality rates in excess of 10x national average. Worsening health and socio-economic status over many years. A “silent genocide” of our people.	<p>National community re-feeding programme for the indigenous with uninterrupted funding.</p> <p>Improved health access and community trained healthcare workers.</p> <p>Remove or revamp JAKOA.</p> <p>Development work (uplifting communities) with NGOs but based on Orang Asli opinion</p>
Unreached/Poorly reached urban populations	75% of the population lived in urban environments in 2018. Urban poor, local migrants, immigrants face poor access to healthcare, environmental risks, air pollution, unsafe water, sanitation issues, heat-stress, injuries, unhealthy housing. WHO 2016 estimates that 26% of childhood deaths and 25% of total disease burden in children under 5 years are due to this.	<p>Improved housing for low-income sectors of cities and slum upgrading for urban health equity.</p> <p>Mobile healthcare delivery systems.</p> <p>Rights-based United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) services for immigrants</p>

		<p>National agenda to reduce vehicular air pollution.</p> <p>Revise national poverty line to RM 3,000.</p>
Unintentional Injuries (especially Road & Drowning)	<p>Road traffic injuries and Drowning are a leading cause of death and burden of disease for children and adolescents. Injuries account for more than 1,500 deaths per year and 4 times as many become permanently disabled.</p>	<p>Mandatory car seat programme that is enforced</p> <p>Affordable, extensive, bus-based, public transport system is critical to reduce motorbikes</p> <p>Drowning awareness for families, child-care minders, children/teens</p> <p>Child-proof medication dispensing of all MOH drugs to reduce poisoning (blister packs, child-proof cap (CPC))</p>
Lifestyle-related adult illnesses with an onset in childhood and behavioural problems	<p>Obesity, mental stress and smoking impact large segments of the population. Obesity and mental health are associated with sedentary lifestyles and screen addiction due to</p>	<p>A national campaign to move adults away from screens, so as to support children - promote screen free days weekly for families</p>

	<p>limited, safe urban green lungs for play.</p> <p>Mental health problems with increasing depression, anxiety, suicides, drug addiction and gender confusion are very common among teens (20 to 30% obesity or overweight, 38% internet addiction, 1:5 of boys smoke, 3 to 4% of teens currently on drugs, 10% of Form 1 students say they have attempted suicide, NHMS 2017).</p>	<p>Routine obesity screening programme at 2 years of age</p> <p>Investment in mobility: Bus rapid transit (BRT), walking & cycling</p> <p>Major need to address parenting</p>
Disability and Genetic disorders	<p>15% of the community comprise children with disability requiring assistance.</p> <p>Current services are limited, too late, do not reach rural communities and often not rights-based. Too much focus and funding of services in the Klang Valley. Also, many parents refuse to register children as disabled as the OKU term is viewed as demeaning and inhibits inclusive education.</p>	<p>Partner with and fund NGOs to expand services throughout the country</p> <p>Dramatically revamp the community-based rehabilitation (CBR) centres and remove them from Welfare oversight to MOH (they should become vibrant, community-based NGOs)</p> <p>Train trans-disciplinary therapists to meet the needs</p> <p>Advocate for MOE to have a truly inclusive education policy</p>

Intentional Injuries (Child Abuse)	Epidemiological studies done locally on community prevalence of child sexual abuse show rates of 8 to 26% of all children (Amar 1996, Kamaruddin 2000, Choo 2011). Current services are extremely poor & Child Act has not been implemented fully since developed (1991).	There are no easy solutions for this but a national pre-school and primary school training programme to teach all children protective sexual behaviours would help reduce abuse All MOH, Welfare staff and police to implement Child Act fully to protect children
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Some ideas taken from: Amar-Singh HSS. Editorial: Current Challenges in Health and Health Care. Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health, 2004, Vol 16(2)

It is important to recognise that a major issue is the 'Social Determinants of Health'. Families who are poor, disadvantaged, marginalised or have poor access to health care are the ones where the children have the highest mortality and morbidity. Health services need to be targeted at reaching these populations. Unfortunately, many of our services are urban-based and focused on those that have some wealth. The Private-Public divide also worsens our child health services. Within MOH, Paediatricians and managers tend to focus on disease and not health (Paediatrics not Child Health).

We need to move away from the present 'curative' model of health services where the model is doctor and illness focused, expensive, fragmented and institutional-based. We need to move to develop a 'wellness' service as opposed to 'illness' service. This includes a lifetime health plan that aims at keeping the child and family well. It focuses on prevention issues and includes visits to health

professionals on a regular basis, from conception right through childhood and adolescence to adulthood.

Child health is critical for the nation's health. If we do not take care of and invest in children we will have 'failed' adults. It is important that the government recognise and respond to the serious health changes posed by rapid socio-economic mal-development. Solutions for change often lie beyond the health sector, and require the engagement of many different sectors of government and society. In this era, individuals and communities have the capacity to take the initiative to advocate for change and work to improve child health and secure a future for their children.

**Finally, there is a need to address the impending climate
emergency,
as that is the major health challenge of our time
and children will be the most affected.**

Citation for Appendix: Amar-Singh HSS. Current Child Health Care Challenges & Suggestions: Improving Child Health Services in Malaysia. September 2019. Malaysia. Note that this was written for the 12th Malaysia Plan (RMK 12) and submitted to the Ministry of Health Malaysia.

CHAPTER SIX

SDG 5 and SDG 16 in Review: Relating the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Malaysian Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) through Feminist Governance

Sharifah Syahirah Syed Sheikh

INTRODUCTION

Women's rights were globally recognised after the adoption of the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the United Nations in 1979. It is briefly mentioned earlier in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Yet, it was a marginalised right due to the patriarchal structure, system and practices. Therefore, after 31 years of human rights declaration, CEDAW has been adopted to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. As of 2022, there are 180 countries that have ratified CEDAW. This has developed into a form of feminist governance mechanism, supported by a myriad of international-regional initiatives, particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) then, and now, the SDGs in SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Malaysia acceded to CEDAW in 1995 with reservations to Article 2(f), 5(a), 7(b), 9 and 16. Malaysian government has sent four (4) government reports on 2004¹, 2016², 2018³ and 2022⁴. Meanwhile for SDGs, Malaysia together with 192 countries adopted the 2030 Agenda at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 25 September 2015. Both CEDAW and SDGs are a part of global governance that refers to institutions that coordinate the global agenda and transcend national boundaries. Global governance mechanisms like CEDAW and SDGs empower not only governments but also private organisations to participate at the global platforms to agree upon global standards, in this paper's context, gender equality.

This topic will discuss how SDG5, SDG16 and CEDAW play a role as the main global governance mechanisms that promote feminist values, namely, substantive equality, inclusiveness, empowerment and intersectionality. Secondly, this paper will apply the tenets of feminist governance that refers to values, mechanisms and networks that advocate and monitor gender equality. The third objective of this paper is to evaluate the implementation of gender equality in Malaysia by analysing the Malaysian VNR and CEDAW reports. The focus will be to examine the extent CEDAW and SDGs are

¹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: State Party Report, Malaysia*, 12 April 2004, CEDAW/C/MYS/1-2. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/41174e424.html>.

² UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention, Combined third to fifth periodic reports of States parties due in 2012: Malaysia*, 17 October 2016, CEDAW/C/MYS/3-5. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5880c92e4.html>.

³ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Concluding observations on the combined 3rd to 5th periodic reports of Malaysia: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, 14 March 2018, CEDAW/C/MYS/CO/3-5. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1627641?ln=en>.

⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Sixth periodic report submitted by Malaysia under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2022: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, 16 May 2022, CEDAW/C/MYS/6. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3978685?ln=en>.

harmonised within national laws, policies and standards to achieve gender equality and parity.

MAIN PROVISIONS, TARGETS AND INDICATORS OF CEDAW, SDG 5 & SDG 16

All countries that ratified and acceded to CEDAW are obligated to submit periodic reports on 16 main focus areas to eliminate all forms of discrimination of women. Figure 1 depicts the 16 articles of CEDAW.



Figure 1 The 16 Articles of CEDAW . Source: United Nations Treaty Collections – CEDAW (2023)⁵

The articles of CEDAW comprise of 30 articles that outline the rights of women and the obligations of state parties to eliminate gender discrimination. The first 16 key articles of CEDAW address specific measures and areas related to discrimination of women. The first article defines discrimination against women and calls for its elimination. The next article emphasises the need for legislation, institutions, and measures to ensure gender equality in all spheres. Special measures to accelerate gender equality are encouraged.

⁵ United Nations Treaty Collection, *Chapter IV: Human Rights - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, 2023. https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=_en

Cultural norms perpetuating discrimination should be addressed. Trafficking and exploitation of women are condemned. Women's participation in political and public life is promoted. Women's rights to nationality, education, work, health, and economic empowerment are recognised. Rural women's rights, protection in marriage and family life, and equality within marriage are addressed. These articles collectively establish a framework to eliminate discrimination and promote gender equality, with state parties obligated to implement them and report on their progress.

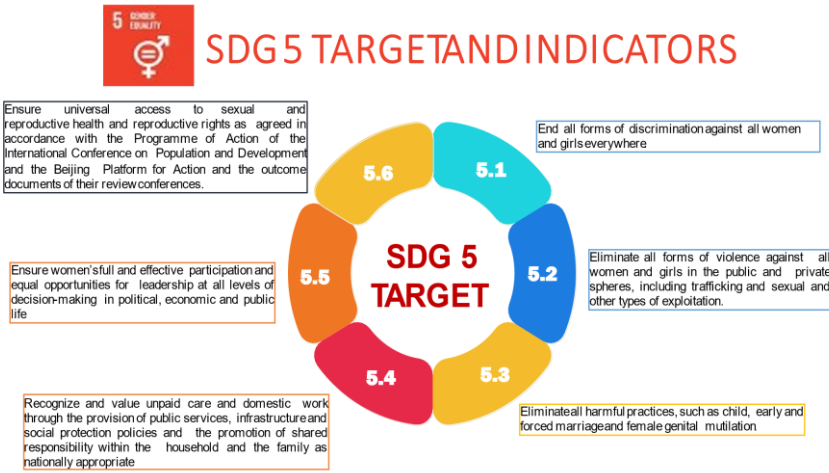


Figure 2 Target and Indicators of SDG 5

SDG 5 (Sustainable Development Goal 5) aims to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.⁶ To measure progress towards this goal, several indicators have been identified. Six (6) main targets and 14 indicators adopted in SDG5 to achieve gender equality globally. This target tracks the proportion of women and girls who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence by an intimate partner or non-partner. It highlights the prevalence of

⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 5 Gender Equality*. 2023, <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/gender-equality>

gender-based violence and the need to address it. It also measures the proportion of women's reproductive age (aged 15-49) rights to modern contraceptive methods. It reflects access to reproductive health services and the ability to make informed choices about family planning.

SDG 5 also focuses on the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. It highlights women's political participation and representation at decision-making levels. It also monitors the proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use, and reproductive health care. It reflects women's autonomy and agency in matters related to their bodies and reproductive choices. It measures the proportion of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence and sheds light on the prevalence of sexual violence and the need for prevention and response measures.

This goal also assesses the existence and enforcement of laws and regulations and how it reflects the legal framework in place to protect women's rights and ensure gender equality. It tracks public allocations for gender equality and assesses the transparency and accountability of financial resources on women empowerment agenda. Gender gaps in access to technology and digital inclusion are also one of SDG 5's indicators. Monitoring of these indicators provides valuable insights into the progress made by states and helps identify gaps, inform policies, and drive actions to create a more equitable and inclusive society.


 SDG 16 TARGET AND INDICATORS	
16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
16.4	By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime
16.5	Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
16.6	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
16.8	Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance
16.9	By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration
16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

Figure 3 Target and Indicators of SDG16

SDG 16 (Sustainable Development Goal 16) focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, and accountable.⁷ It encompasses indicators that measure progress in areas related to peace, justice, and strong institutions. SDG 16 has ten (10) targets and 24 indicators to strengthen the promotion of peace and inclusive societies at the local levels. It measures the number of homicides per 100,000 people, providing an assessment of the overall level of violence within a society. It helps track progress in reducing violence and promoting peaceful societies. It also monitors the proportion of the population who have experienced some form of corruption and sheds light on the prevalence of corrupt practices and the need for transparent and accountable institutions.

SDG 16 highlights the importance of measuring the proportion of individuals who have experienced discrimination or harassment based on their age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or other status. It assesses the proportion of the population who perceive their community as safe and secure, providing insights into

⁷ UNDP. *Sustainable Development Goals: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/peace-justice-and-strong-institutions>.

people's perceptions of safety and the effectiveness of measures taken to ensure public security. It does give a special emphasis to the proportion of children aged 1-17 years who have experienced any form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence to measure progress in protecting children from violence and abuse. These indicators play a vital role in monitoring and evaluating progress of policy decisions, public allocation towards building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. By addressing these indicators, countries can work towards creating a more stable, fair, and sustainable future.

FEMINIST GOVERNANCE

Feminist values, mechanisms and networks, which are indicators of feminist governance (see Table 1), illuminate how regional governance and feminism influence the Asia region. Feminist values refer to gender equality, inclusiveness, empowerment, substantive equality, philosophy, and principles. Mechanisms refer to organisational structures, platforms, protocols, and law, while networks refer to the collaborative endeavours and the discursive relationships that exist among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs), state governments, and business organisations to foster feminist values.⁸

This section contextualises the relationship between CEDAW and SDGs framework in comparing the indicators as reported in Malaysia CEDAW Reports and Voluntary National Review Reports. The element of culture also be considered and refers to human and organisational attitudes towards feminist beliefs, rights, justice, and expectations. This approach is also known as the Substance-Structure-Culture approach, which provides a framework to scrutinise existing laws that directly or indirectly discriminate against women and measures needed to reform any oppressive rules and policies as

⁸ Rashila Ramli and Sharifah Syahirah., "Feminist Governance in Asia: areas of contestation and cooperation" in *Handbook of Feminist Governance*, ed. Sawer Marian, Lee Ann Banaszak, Jacqui True and Johanna Kantola. (United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 396-407. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800374812>

presented in the 2014 Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

Table 1 Feminist Governance Elements

No.	Feminist Governance	Description
1.	Values	State obligation, substantive equality, and non-discrimination.
2.	Mechanism	Government and regional IGO policies, laws, administrations.
3.	Network	Local, regional, and global organisations, specific government and IGOs agencies.

Source: Sharifah Syahirah (2015)⁹

Feminist governance values are derived from the principles stipulated in CEDAW and SDGs. These international agreements construct and pressure the Malaysian government to revisit and amend different laws, policies, and practices related to women's rights. It applies feminist principles and values to policy-making, decision-making, and institutional practices. It seeks to challenge and transform patriarchal power structures and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Feminist governance is guided by key values, including state obligation, substantive equality, inclusiveness, intersectionality, and non-discrimination. State obligation refers to the responsibility of governments to uphold and protect women's rights, eliminate discrimination, and create an enabling environment for gender equality. This includes enacting laws, policies, and institutions that promote women's rights and address gender disparities.

⁹ Sharifah Syahirah SS, "Regional-global Governance Network on Women's Rights: CEDAW and its Implementation in ASEAN Countries," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 172 (January 2015):519–524. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.397>

Substantive equality goes beyond formal equality and aims to address the underlying structural factors that perpetuate gender inequality. It seeks to provide equal opportunities and outcomes for women, taking into account the diverse needs and experiences of different groups of women. Inclusiveness emphasises the importance of including marginalised voices and perspectives in decision-making processes, ensuring that all women are heard and represented. Intersectionality recognises that women's experiences of discrimination are shaped by the intersection of multiple identities such as race, class, sexuality, and disability. A feminist governance approach acknowledges and addresses these intersecting forms of discrimination and seeks to create policies and practices that are responsive to the diverse needs of women.

Non-discrimination is a fundamental principle of feminist governance, advocating for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. It challenges gender stereotypes, biases, and harmful norms that perpetuate inequality. In terms of mechanisms, feminist governance involves the development and implementation of policies, laws, and administrative practices at the government and regional intergovernmental organisation (IGO) levels. This includes integrating gender perspectives into policy frameworks, adopting gender-responsive budgeting, and ensuring gender-balanced representation in decision-making bodies.

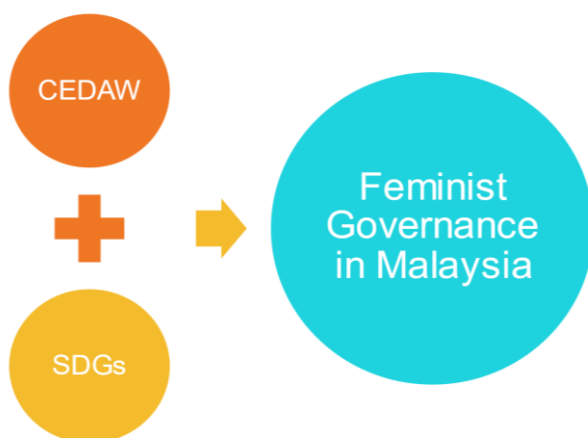


Figure 4. Feminist Governance in Malaysia

Additionally, feminist governance operates through networks that connect local, regional, and global organisations, as well as specific government agencies and IGOs. These networks provide spaces for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and advocacy. They facilitate the exchange of best practices, promote coordination among different actors, and contribute to the development of gender-responsive policies and programs. Feminist governance recognises the importance of collective action and collaboration among diverse actors to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. It seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable governance system that challenges power imbalances and fosters meaningful participation and representation for all women.¹⁰

CEDAW and VNR Reports

The Malaysian government has successfully submitted and presented three periodic CEDAW reports and two VNR reports. The latest CEDAW report was submitted in February 2021 and covered 16 main

¹⁰ Rashila Ramli and Sharifah Syahirah., "Feminist Governance in Asia."

provisions of women’s rights in Malaysia. Meanwhile, the first review of SDG 5 was in VNR 2017 while SDG 16 was reviewed in VNR 2021. Therefore, it is timely to compare the indicators in these two reports to identify the strength of feminist governance that has been constructed.

Table 2 SDG5 in the Malaysian VNR Report (2017)

No.	Indicator	Current Status (%)	Details
1.	Economic participation of women	54% 0.8%	An increase from 46.4% (2019) Poverty rate in female-headed household (2014)
2.	Protection of Women	Acceded & Ratified	CEDAW, BPFA 1995, CRPD, CRC & Vienna Plan of Action on Human Rights the Sexual Offences against Children Act 2017
3.	Education	12.9%	Gender parity has been achieved at all levels of education.

Source: Malaysian VNR Report (2017)

According to Malaysian government VNR Report (2017)¹¹, the economic participation of women in Malaysia has shown a significant increase, rising from 46.4% the to 54.1%. This indicates a positive trend in women's involvement in the workforce and their contribution to the country's economy. Additionally, the low poverty rate of female-headed households, which stands at 0.8% indicates that a relatively small proportion of female-headed households in Malaysia are experiencing poverty. CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) provide a comprehensive framework for the Malaysian government to rectify national administrative structure such as the

¹¹ Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017*. (Putrajaya: Economic Planning Unit, 2017), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf>.

establishment of a ministry in 2001 focusing on women's empowerment and inclusive society.¹²

Meanwhile, the CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) recognises the rights of women with disabilities, while the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) addresses the protection of children, including girls, from sexual offenses. The Vienna Plan of Action on Human Rights emphasizes the importance of protecting women's human rights. The Sexual Offences against Children Act (2017) was introduced in Malaysia to prevent and address sexual offenses against children. Together, these legal instruments and legislation contribute to the protection of women's rights, the prevention of violence and discrimination, and the promotion of gender equality.

Table 2 indicates that gender parity has been achieved at all levels of education in Malaysia. There is equal access and enrolment of both boys and girls in educational institutions, ensuring that they have an equal opportunity to receive an education. Gender parity in education is a significant achievement as it promotes equality, empowers girls, and contributes to the overall development of society. It signifies that gender-based barriers to education have been addressed, allowing both boys and girls to pursue their educational aspirations and unlock their full potential. The achievement of gender parity in Malaysia's education system reflects the commitment towards promoting inclusive and equitable education for all.

¹² Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia, *Women Director's Programme*.
<https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Dokumen/Dasar/Women-Directors-Programme.pdf>.

Table 3 SDG5 in VNR report 2021

No.	Indicators
1.	Non-Muslim women married before 18 years: 2,392 cases.
2.	Women as leaders in politics. Senate 18%, Dewan Rakyat 14.9%, Cabinet Ministers 17.9%, Deputy Ministers 15.4%.
3.	Women in managerial positions: 23.3%
4.	Women used contraceptive: 89.3% (2014), Mobile phone ownership: 95.7%

Source: Malaysian Government VNR Report (2021)¹³

Table 3 indicates that there is a prevalence of non-Muslim women marrying before the age of 18. In terms of political leadership, women hold positions in the Senate at a rate of 18 percent, in the Dewan Rakyat at 14.9 percent, as cabinet ministers at 17.9 percent, and as deputy ministers at 15.4 percent. Additionally, women occupy 23.3 percent of managerial positions. In terms of reproductive health, a significant majority of women, approximately 89.3 percent, use contraceptives. Furthermore, mobile phone ownership among women is high, with approximately 95.7 percent of women owning a mobile phone. These data points shed light on the status of women's rights, representation, and access to technology in Malaysia.

¹³ Economic Planning Unit (EPU). (2021) Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021,

Table 4 SDG 5 Reported in the Malaysian Government Report on CEDAW

Article	Substantive Changes
1: Discrimination against women	Article 8(2) & working on the Anti-Discrimination Against Women Bill.
2: Measures eliminate discrimination	Considering to ratify Optional Protocol. The Parliamentary Select Committee All-Party Parliamentary Groups.
3. The development and advancement of women	Realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Women agenda in 11MP & 12MP (2021-2025) mirrored SDGs. BAR Council Legal Aid Scheme.
4. Equality between men and women	Work-life balance, childcare services and flexible working arrangement. Penjana Kerjaya. Hiring incentives, Career Comeback Programme, quotas on women representation in decision-making.
5. Gender Stereotyping	Act 265 (2021), flexible working hours, number of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Malaysia, JKM in charge on domestic violence, Talian Kasih, SKUAD WAJA, collaboration with JAKIM, 2 mosques as shelters. D11. ISM as a gender-sensitisation training center.
6: Anti-Trafficking and Exploitation of Prostitution	MAPO worked closely with CSOs & IOs National Action Plan on Anti-Trafficking in Persons (2021-2025) Prostitution is prohibited.
7: Participation in political and public life	Low score in Malaysia's Gender Gap Index (MGGI) on women political empowerment: 0.108
8: International Representation and participation	Increase to 49.75%

9: Nationality and citizenship	<p>Issue on citizenship for Malaysian women's children.</p> <p>Not a party to stateless persons convention.</p>
10: Education	High score in MGCI 0.99
11: Employment	<p>Stop gender discrimination in the workplace by making accessible and affordable care services for children & elderly.</p> <p>Unpaid care work and social safety net.</p>
12: Equality in access to health care	<p>Under-five mortality rate decreased to 6.9 per 1000 compared to 7.7</p> <p>Increase hospital services and facilities. Family Planning Program as a key component of maternal services.</p>
13: Social and economic benefit	MEDAC, AIM and SPED initiatives
14: Rural Women	Various courses for rural women digital marketing, basic skills and agriculture.
15: Equality before the law and civil matters	<p>Protection of domestic workers. Refugee, asylum seeking & stateless women</p> <p>LGBTIQA+ women human rights defender and foreign wives.</p>
16: Equality in marriage and family law	<p>Amendment Act 164 ensures the rights of spouses</p> <p>No polygamous marriages are allowed for non-Muslims but are allowed for Muslims.</p> <p>Underage marriage SOP 2020.</p>

Table 4 highlights various substantive changes and initiatives related to women's rights and gender equality in Malaysia. Efforts are being made to address discrimination against women through Article 8(2) and the Anti-Discrimination Against Women Bill. Measures to eliminate discrimination by consideration of ratifying the Optional Protocol and the establishment of Parliamentary Select Committees and All-Party Parliamentary Groups. Alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, integration of women's agenda in national development plans, and initiatives like the BAR Council Legal Aid Scheme.

In terms of effort towards equality between men and women, the Malaysian government focuses on work-life balance, childcare services, flexible working arrangements, hiring incentives, career comeback programs, and quotas for women representation in decision-making roles. To reduce gender stereotyping, the Act 265 (2021) and measures such as flexi working hours, prevention of female genital mutilation, addressing domestic violence, and gender sensitization training have been introduced and implement. Collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) and international organizations (IOs) through the Malaysian Anti-Trafficking in Persons Action Plan (2021-2025) and the prohibition of prostitution are efforts taken in combating anti-trafficking and exploitation.

CEDAW also demands all states to report and improve women participation in political and public life. Malaysia reported a very low score in women's political empowerment, indicating a need for increased participation and representation. Meanwhile, there is increasing women representation at international level by 49.75%. In terms of nationality and citizenship, issues related to citizenship for children of Malaysian women remain unsolved due to non-party status to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

According to CEDAW report (2022) Malaysia has a high score indicating progress in women's education.¹⁴ However, it does not reflect the statistics of women in employment whereby issues related to gender discrimination in the workplace, providing accessible and affordable childcare services, addressing unpaid care work, and strengthening social safety nets remain unsolved. In the aspect of equality in access to healthcare, there are improvements in reduction in under-five mortality rate, improvement in hospital services and facilities, and the Family Planning Program as a key component of maternal services. To enhance social and economic benefits, the Malaysian government introduces various initiatives by the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC), Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM), and the Skills and Professional Enhancement Program (SPED). Special attention is given to rural women in empowerment programmes focusing on digital marketing, basic skills, and agriculture.

Equality before the law and civil matters is one of the most important provisions in CEDAW. It spells out matters related to protection of domestic workers, addressing the rights of refugee, asylum-seeking, and stateless women, and supporting women human rights defenders. Equality in marriage and family law need more attention in the Malaysian context. Currently, there are amendments ensuring the rights of spouses, prohibition of polygamous marriages for non-Muslims, and the introduction of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for underage marriages.

Feminist Values, Mechanism and Network Strengthening SDG16

Feminist values are rooted in the core principles of international frameworks such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the SDGs. These values encompass a range of fundamental principles that guide the pursuit

¹⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), *Sixth periodic report*, 16 May 2022.

of gender equality and women's empowerment. The six (6) key feminist values based on the core values of CEDAW and the SDGs are:



Figure 5 Feminist Mechanism

Figure 5 shows the feminist mechanisms in Malaysia consist of various instruments, policies, and initiatives that promote feminist values. As mentioned earlier, Malaysia accessed the CEDAW treaty in 1995, an international legal framework that obligates the government to take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all spheres of life. The global feminist mechanisms adopted by the Malaysian government are CEDAW (1979) (accessed in 1995), Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA, 1995), and SDGs (2015). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) was introduced in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and one of the main factors that the Malaysian government agreed to CEDAW.

After the government's adoption of these global mechanisms, efforts have been made to amend Malaysia's Federal Constitution to recognize and uphold gender equality. Meanwhile, the National Women's Policy and Action Plan has been introduced since 1989. Followed by two policies on at least 30% women in decision making (corporate and public sectors). The National Women's Policy sets out

strategic objectives and actions to promote gender equality and women's advancement in various sectors, including education, employment, health, and political participation. While, the at least 30% Women Decision Making Policies aim to ensure at least 30% representation of women in decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors. This policy seeks to enhance women's participation and influence in governance and decision-making processes. The Malaysian government also successfully established select committees in Parliament to address specific issues, such as gender equality and women's rights. These committees provide a platform for discussions, research, and policy recommendations related to women's issues.

In 2020, Malaysia introduced the Sexual Harassment Act to address and prevent sexual harassment in various settings, including workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. The act aims to provide legal protection and support to survivors of sexual harassment. Malaysia also currently is working towards gender mainstreaming, which involves integrating gender perspectives and considerations into policies, programs, and activities across all sectors. This approach ensures that the needs and experiences of both women and men are addressed in decision-making processes. These mechanisms collectively aim to advance gender equality, protect women's rights, and promote women's empowerment in Malaysia. However, it's important to note that progress may vary, and ongoing efforts are needed to address existing challenges and fully implement these mechanisms.

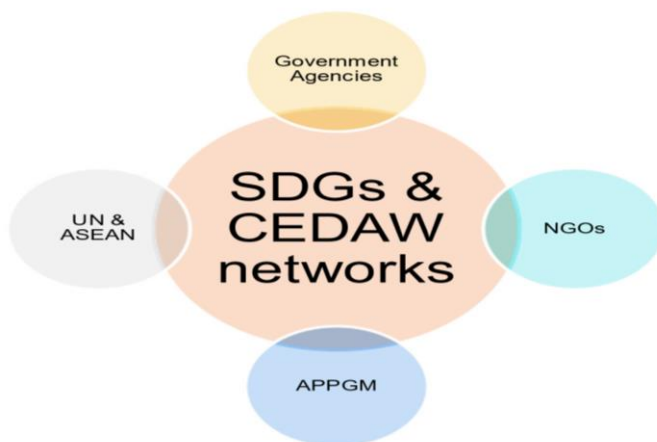


Figure 6 Feminist Network

The feminist governance created by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has played a crucial role in strengthening the feminist networks and empower women NGOs such as the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) and the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), along with government agencies and institutions. The network receives support from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the SDGs (APPGM-SDG) as well. By leveraging the principles and objectives of the SDGs and CEDAW, this network has strengthened the gender equality agenda both at the United Nations and within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The SDGs and CEDAW provide a robust framework and set of principles to guide the network's activities. The SDGs, with Goal 5 specifically focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment, have served as a catalyst for action and collaboration among various stakeholders. CEDAW, as an international legal instrument, has provided the network with a foundation for advocating against discrimination and promoting women's rights in Malaysia. Women NGOs such as NCWO and JAG have been championing women's

causes and driving change. These organizations work tirelessly to raise awareness about gender issues, provide support services, and engage in advocacy and policy dialogue.

The network also involves government agencies and institutions, recognizing the importance of collaboration between civil society and the government in advancing gender equality. Government agencies play a crucial role in implementing policies, programs, and initiatives that promote women's rights and address gender disparities. By working together, the network enhances the impact of these efforts and facilitates the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices. Support from the APPGM-SDG further strengthens the network's activities. This parliamentary group provides a platform for collaborations between policymakers, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. By aligning their efforts with the SDGs, the network gains political support and visibility, which are essential for driving change and influencing policy decisions. The network's engagement with the UN and ASEAN amplifies its impact beyond national borders. By participating in international forums and initiatives, the network can share experiences, learn from global best practices, and contribute to shaping the gender equality agenda at regional and international levels. This engagement helps to build alliances, foster cooperation, and promote mutual learning among countries in the pursuit of gender equality.

The feminist network in Malaysia, driven by the SDGs and CEDAW, brings together women NGOs, government agencies, and institutions to promote gender equality and empower women. This network, supported by the APPGM-SDG, leverages the UN and ASEAN platforms to strengthen its advocacy efforts and create lasting impact. By collaborating and leveraging the principles and objectives of the SDGs and CEDAW, the network works towards a more equitable and inclusive society in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the combination of SDGs targets and Malaysia's accession to CEDAW has significantly strengthened feminist governance in the country. SDGs targets have provided a comprehensive framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, complementing the obligations outlined in CEDAW. This has created a more conducive environment for feminist governance actors to advocate for women's rights and drive initiatives focused on empowerment and inclusiveness. However, to maximise the impact of SDG 5, SDG 16 and CEDAW, it is essential for the Malaysian government to further integrate CEDAW into its reporting on SDG5. This will ensure a more comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing gender disparities and advancing women's rights. By linking these two instruments more closely, the government can demonstrate its commitment to gender equality and hold itself accountable for the progress made.

Feminist governance plays a vital role in ensuring that periodic reporting on gender-related issues is conducted and that sex-disaggregated data is available. These practices contribute to evidence-based policymaking, allowing for targeted interventions and the monitoring of progress towards gender equality goals. While significant strides have been made, there are still areas of concern that require urgent attention. Women's political empowerment, leadership opportunities, domestic violence, rights in marriage, and the burden of unpaid work remain persistent challenges. It is crucial for feminist governance actors to continue advocating for policy reforms, awareness campaigns, and the provision of support services to address these issues effectively.

In conclusion, the combined efforts of SDGs targets and CEDAW have strengthened feminist governance in Malaysia. However, continued commitment from the government, civil society, and stakeholders are necessary to overcome the remaining challenges

and achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. By prioritising the areas of concern and implementing targeted interventions, Malaysia can continue its progress towards a more inclusive and gender-just society.

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P A R T



SDGs and Prosperity

CHAPTER SEVEN

Income Generation Projects: Generating Income for the Marginalised Community

K. Eruthaiaraj and Nur Balqis Osman

INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, APPGM SDG has been undertaking micro-SDG Solution projects at the community level. From 2020 to 2022, we have undertaken 296 community projects with the support of 132 solution providers. These projects can be categorized as grassroots projects impacting economic, social and environmental concerns. A total of 47 income generating projects were carried out from 2020 to 2022. Despite plenty of solutions to overcome those problems, there will always be the factor of the surrounding environment that affects the endeavour.

As inflation struck, marginalized communities were affected as low-income households faced challenges to buy daily necessities, including small traders and people who do business at home or in the small communities such as the Orang Asli and Orang Asal Sabah and Sarawak. There were also other hardships, such as scarce marketable opportunities and the price increases of basic needs. By having income generation projects, these problems can be moderated and help to give opportunities to the marginalized communities to learn new skills to survive, while the solution providers will give hands-on monitoring throughout the projects.

INITIATIVES OF THE APPGM-SDG AND SOLUTION PARTNERS IN OVERCOMING ISSUES

The APPGM-SDG works closely with Solution Providers who coordinate the projects and mobilize grassroot communities to establish various targets to ensure the projects continue without obstructions and subsequently contribute to the prosperity of their

communities and the country. In this income generation project, poverty and lack of resources are basically the main purpose for APPGM-SDG to empower the marginalized communities to build their own initiatives to develop their own income, with a little push from solution providers' by giving hands-on skills to the community. In 2022, the APPGM-SDG managed a total of 25 income generation projects after the Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects were completed in 2020 and 2021. The participants were chosen by solution providers from the identified parliamentary constituencies and the projects are implemented with monitoring after they have acquired skills and business knowledge. Additionally, the participants who are successful in their business are chosen as a local champion of their own respective community in the project. Seed funds are granted to them by the APPGM-SDG as a motivation to do even better in their respective businesses.

THE TYPES OF SOLUTION PROVIDERS

Income generation projects can be implemented in any parliament constituency and the related community can benefit by joining the projects operated by solution providers and the participants who have completed their hands-on skills. Their skills can be refined by teaching the community who are in need by being facilitators at their project centres and selling their products to others. Only in 2022, the income generation projects can be done after going through Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects with the same participants from the first phase of the projects. There are three types of Solution Providers that have joined the APPGM-SDG for assisting the marginalized communities, focusing on economical projects.

There are 47 solution providers that operate their projects nation-wide, assisting the marginalized communities by giving hands-on skills and business knowledge. 22 of them are from the Registry of Societies (ROS). Social Enterprise or *Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia*

(SSM) consist of 21 solution providers and 4 solution providers are of the University category.

Table 1: Type of Solution Providers (as at 10 June 2023)

Solution Providers	Number of solution providers
ROS	22
SSM / Social Enterprise	21
University UNU RCE	4
TOTAL	47

Source: APPGM-SDG 2022

TARGET GROUP OF THE MICRO-SDG PROJECTS FROM 2020 TO 2022

10 categories were detected from 47 income generation projects completed as of 10th June 2023. With a total of 75 target groups, the majority of solution providers identified women as their main target group with 30 (40%). Youth had 21 (28%) target groups, becoming the second highest. Small traders came in third with 9 (12%) target groups. Farmers had 5 target groups (6.67%). People with Disabilities (PWDs) was fifth with 4 groups (5.33%). Next was 2 target groups from Flat Dwellers (PPR) with 2.68%. And the villagers, Orang Asli, ex drug-addict clients and refugees each had 1 target group, making up 1.33% each.

Table 2: Target Group of the Micro-SDG Projects from 2020 until 2022

Target Group Category	Number of Target Group in Each Category
Women	30 (40%)
Youth	21 (28%)
Small Traders	9 (12%)
Farmers	5 (6.67%)
PWDs	4 (5.33%)

PPR / Flat Dwellers	2 (2.68%)
Villagers	1 (1.33%)
Orang Asli	1 (1.33%)
AADK Clients	1 (1.33%)
Refugees	1 (1.33%)
TOTAL	75

Source: APPGM-SDG 2022

PROJECTS CLASSIFICATION FROM 2020 TO 2022

The 11 types of projects from 2020 to 2022 consisted of income generation, skills development, education, fresh water, waste management and health, digitalisation, inter-agency, CLC, heritage, drug prevention, mindfulness and basic infrastructure projects.

There were 144 income generation projects with 15, 48 and 81 projects in 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively, making up 49 percent (49%). Skills development projects totalled 38 projects with 5, 6 and 27 projects from 2020 to 2022 (12.9%). Education projects from 2020 to 2022 were 6, 8 and 14 projects, with a total of 28 projects (9.6%). Fresh water, waste management & health awareness programs constituted a total of 27 (9.2%) projects with 2, 8 and 17 projects from 2020 to 2022. Digitalisation projects from 2020 to 2022 totalled 18 (6.1%) projects with 1, 6 and 11 projects in each respective year. Inter-agency projects made up 11 (3.8%) projects in total, with 3 projects in 2020, 6 in 2021 and 2 in 2022.

Community learning centres numbered at 10 (3.4%) projects in total, where in 2021 there were 2 projects and 8 projects in 2022. Heritage projects made up 7 (2.3%) projects, with 1 project in both 2020 and 2021 and 5 projects in 2022. Drug prevention projects totalled 5 (1.7%) projects, with 1 project in 2021 and 4 projects in 2022. Projects on mental health constituted 3 (1%) projects, with all

being in 2022. Basic infrastructure and amenities projects made up 3 (1%) projects, 1 for each of the years from 2020 to 2022. Overall, there were a total of 294 projects from 2020 to 2022.

Table 3: Project Dynamic Classification from 2020 until 2022

Classification	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL	%
Income Generation	15	48	81	144	49
Skills Development	5	6	27	38	12.9
Education	6	8	14	28	9.6
Fresh water, waste management & health awareness program	2	8	17	27	9.2
Digitalisation	1	6	11	18	6.1
Inter-agency	3	6	2	11	3.8
Community Learning Center	0	2	8	10	3.4
Heritage	1	1	5	7	2.3
Drug Prevention	0	1	4	5	1.7
Mental health	0	0	3	3	1
Basic infrastructure & amenities	1	1	1	3	1
TOTAL	34	87	173	294	100

Source: APPGM-SDG 2022

MOVEMENT OF SOLUTION PROVIDERS FROM 2020 TO 2022

From 2020 to 2022, 132 solution providers collaborated with the APPGM-SDG, to advance the economic and prosperity agenda in the country. Starting with 25 solution providers in 2020, this number increased to 78 solution providers in 2021. In 2022, the solution providers increased to 132 organizations, with 88 of them being new to collaborating with APPGM-SDG, 44 of them continuing from past

years, while another 34 did not pursue further collaborations. Those that finished and did not pursue from 2020 to 2021 consisted of 49 organizations.

Table 4: Solution Providers Movement from 2020 until 2022

Status/ Year	2020	2021		2022		Did Not Continue	
New SP	25	68		88		2020	2021
Continuati on	-	Continue	Did Not Continue	Continue	Did Not Continue	15	34
		10	15	44	34		
Total	25	78		132		49	

Source: APPGM-SDG 2022

IMPACT STORIES FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COMMUNITY

Individuals from different communities around Malaysia have demonstrated that it is possible to have a better and prosperous life by striving for their dreams and upgrading their skills to be better in the community. These people can be a model for their communities, showing that people can be change makers, and serve as assets to the country. Below are six impact stories that illustrate how community well-being and prosperity can be elevated through education and the tutoring of others. These are undertaken under the APPGM-SDG projects. Their efforts contribute to making changes in society and to building inclusive communities.

The ANA CB ENTERPRISE Journey: From Sewing Shop to Community Learning and Care Centre (CLC) in Baling, Kedah

Starting in 2021, with 20 participants in Phase 1, all the participants learned sewing skills and generated income from activities utilising these newly learnt skills. Gradually, they generated income for their

household. In the Phase 2 project, they became junior trainers, providing them a chance to teach others in different programs. With a total funding of RM60,000 for Phase 1 and 2 for two years, they have demonstrated a tremendous increase in social mobility among participants.

In 2022, ANA CB Enterprise received corporate sewing orders, which the participants took part in and gained incomes ranging from RM200 to RM4,000 each. It gave a boost of confidence to the participants since the place became a one stop engagement in learning and income earning centre for the community, as a skills promotion centre and for developing their network. This way, the participants are able to build their income by gaining more through the solution providers network created by APPGM-SDG.

The centre has now become a one stop skills, counselling and empowerment centre for vulnerable women, where participants are able to bring their children while training and working, and participants who lack sewing machines can use the machines provided at the centre without payment. These developments show a promising future for the communities involved.

These changes help the participants gain success in their lives. A few participants are generating income and have managed to purchase their own assets each month, such as Puan Khamisah Mohdeen and Puan Suriati Shaari. Again, Puan Khamisah Mohdeen and her friend Azibah Yusof, have also managed to generate profits of RM12,000 each by sewing Baju Raya in the last Ramadan season from March to April 2023. These impact stories really help in spreading positivity and hope for the community to change for the better. By giving support, mindset change and the will to build inclusive communities can be fostered among the participants, solution providers and the community.

The INSPEK, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) Journey: Oyster Mushroom and Orang Asli Livelihood Development Program in Sungai Rual, Jeli Kelantan

The journey started in 2020, a tough task for Dr Noor Hafizoh from INSPEK, UMK to engage the Sungai Rual Orang Asli Community and introduce the income generation model. After two years, the participants decreased to half for various reasons, but the project persisted with undying efforts from the solution provider. And in 2022, the team, especially the participants, showed positive impacts. The number of participants was five and has now become 20 individuals consisting of women and students who completed their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). The flow shows a steady progress towards a stable production of oyster mushrooms. In three years, the total project cost RM115,000 with the participants all starting from an absence income to making an income by growing oyster mushrooms.

The project continued the following year, and showcased great ways of creating multiple income streams for the participants who sell fresh mushroom pieces, compost fertilizer from the used mushrooms and the production of mushroom patties. The skills and abilities of the participants in improvising the products will lead to the creation of more diverse products that utilize oyster mushrooms as the base. The success of this project was spotted by the Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) and they provided RM10,000 for this project. Another milestone was achieved by INSPEK-UMK where they organised a start-up bootcamp from downstream mushroom products, leading to the attainment of a seed fund of up to USD 250,000 for the participants to expand their businesses. Such an opportunity will inspire entrepreneurs in the mushroom industry to be involved in business as well as changing their lives to achieve a sustainable livelihood. It was not an easy task for INSPEK-UMK. Yet, they managed to change the lives of people who are in need to

improve and prosper, supported by their initiatives in research and guidance.

The Persatuan Wanita Inspirasi Mampan Jerlun Journey: Kiosk Jerlun Ohsem, One Stop Women Entrepreneur Centre, Jerlun Kedah

The one stop product sales centre, developed by Persatuan Wanita Inspirasi Mampan, consists of 30 participants with an interest in making food products. In early 2023, 20 plus womenpreneurs created 34 different types of products and each produces an average earning from RM200 to RM300 per month generated from the products. They also received various orders of hamper and bouquet making as an additional source of income.

The *Kiosk Jerlun Ohsem* achieved another milestone during Ramadan this year when the Lembaga Kemajuan Pertanian Muda (MADA) displayed their products in MADA's kiosk. The opportunity has boosted their confidence and highlights the community with their skills and products, thus expanding their business opportunities. As the kiosk provides key support to the community, the kiosk now also functions as a local development centre that provides psychosocial support for the local community, especially the women.

Puan Dahlia, one of the participants who operates a full-time online business selling *Kuih Simpul* and frozen food, earns around RM100 every week. It is not surprising that her skills and her 20 bottles of *kuih* products have sold out in three days, earning her a profit of RM200. She expressed how the display of her products at MADA's kiosk increased customer confidence to purchase her products.

Puan Nurul, another participant, makes her own products and promotes them in Kiosk Jerlun Ohsem. She has also managed to earn a profit of around RM100 each week. These two womenpreneurs demonstrate how they can make an impact. They contribute to the

creation of a better and prosperous life, and become role models for their community.

The Ibrandium Digital Marketing Services Journey: Microgreen Youth Entrepreneur Program in Petra Jaya, Sarawak

This project is an income generation project for 10 inspiring youth with a fund of RM35,000. The participants and solution provider, Ibrandium Digital Marketing Services decided to utilize coriander as a microgreen project because of the short span of growth and having four times the nutrient content compared to fully grown vegetables. It can also be harvested three to four times per month. For every harvest, they obtain produce of 1.6kg with a price RM5.40 per package. The profits and the short-term harvest make it a successful income generation project.

As this project has targeted the youth from Petra Jaya, Sarawak, Geng Microgreen Sarawak (GMS) has produced a unified harvesting method and system management to ensure a stable supply to the market, with the GMS also as the marketing brand for the project as well. This effort carried out by the participants, the Ibrandium team and the APPGM-SDG has encouraged the youth to be trainers of modern farming in the future.

The Right Track Education Journey: Local Champion of Handphone Repair Project in Tubau, Hulu Rajang Sarawak

Garrison, who is the local leader, highlighted that the first handphone repair program done in the Tubau, Hulu Rejang, Sarawak community has inspired the youth to step out of their comfort zone. From imparting knowledge to the participants to focusing on the local champion, Right Track Education Journey has produced successful participants with handphone repair skills and business literacy as well.

Majorie Anak Megong, with a kindergarten teacher background, became the local champion for this project. Ballrully, the most successful participant earns RM3,000 every month as a steady income just by repairing handphones, making spare part replacements for the handphones and for deep cleaning the devices. From Majorie's success, Right Track Education enrolled her in the i-Tekad micro financing program that offered her interest free financing program to develop her business. It has served as the next milestone in her life and her dreams to open a handphone repair shop in her long house.

Such outcomes have opened the eyes of the local leaders to new technology skills and knowledge that brings more opportunities to the young, especially the youth to be better in life in their efforts to achieve greater advancement and prosperity.

The GoDigital Productions Journey: ZERO TO HERO Digital Entrepreneurship Women Incubation Project

GoDigital Production conducts digital entrepreneurship training for ten women in the form of a small business by working together with APPGM-SDG. Since the participants joined the project, they have grown in confidence. They have now reached 25,000 video views on the TikTok social media platform, solely for their businesses. And thereby able to get customers via online to boost up their small business.

One of the participants, Kuganeshwary, owns a small sweet shop called Golden Star Sweets and Snacks in Rawang. Before she joined the project, she only depended on two restaurants who sold her sweets. She had an unsteady income. Now she earns nearly RM1,500 per month just by selling online after undergoing the new digital entrepreneur training with GoDigital Production. She plans to have helpers and open a sweet shop near her house soon.

Pavanitha, a PWD participant who joined, owns Forever Beauty & Healthy brand. With an unsteady income and model, she hardly survived in the business industry. Since she learned digital ways to promote her business, she has a steady income to support her livelihood and is now collaborating with the Lions Club. Since then, her presence in the online world has increased and helped her to prosper.

Some of the participants were also helped by GoDigital Production to acquire business equipment from the i-Seed Selangor Program. These helped the participants to expand their business and contributed to developing their network. Beginning from nothing, now they can live better. These outcomes give new hope to achieve a better life for themselves and the country. Slowly but surely, this will inspire people to strive more in the future.

CHALLENGES

Throughout the 3 years of APPGM-SDG's monitoring and implementing the projects with solution providers and grassroot communities, there are some challenges that requires more coordination and support from the local communities and different stakeholders at the local level:

1. **Funding:** Most of the projects require detailed budgets for funding. Due to the local community's lack of access to resources, it is difficult to implement projects without the assistance of solution providers and APPGM-SDG.
2. **Lack of expertise:** The skills and knowledge taught by solution partners to the communities are difficult to practice without proper monitoring and guiding. Without assistance from trainers, the communities who join will not be able to learn progressively and will not be able to practice those skills for their income generating cycle.

3. **Social dynamics:** New skills learned and used for the benefit of the communities might be slow to be accepted as they differ from conventional ways previously practiced in their daily routines. These could also require more time and more of their efforts. Differences in opinions or lack of participation will lead to discouragement and withdrawals while the project is ongoing.
4. **Market access:** Due to lack of exposure to potential business targets and circles, the project will not be able to progress due to lack of promotion and less resources for media exposure by using social media platforms.

LESSONS

Some valuable lessons are learned from the projects. Following are the lessons gathered during the project period:

1. **Organising Local Communities to be Local Champions using Bottom-up Approach.** Using a bottom-up approach can help identify the issue with communities meaningfully and will lead to localized solution projects being implemented. The project is solely managed by solution providers with targeted local communities, illustrating the project as a community-driven project.
2. **Capacity Building of Local Champions to Address Local Issues.** With the help of APPGM-SDG funding, projects through Solution Providers will be implemented with the identified local communities that benefit them from the issues obtained and highlighted by APPGM-SDG researches at the grassroots. In building up the skills of the local communities, it is important to monitor the participants and nurture their confidence and skills.
3. **Mobilising Excluded Community for Poverty Alleviation (Live in Dignity & Become Local Champions).** Teaching new skills to the community is not an easy feat. Exposure towards

the skills for income generating projects requires the targeted group to be keen and willing to explore beyond their limits. The approaches applied by solution providers take into account the locals' issues and are at the same time manageable within their resources, while empowering the communities through skills, increasing knowledge with a quality education and building up self-confidence to reach new circles of communities by helping through being a tutor.

4. **Community Solution - Long-Term Relationship & Trust Building Process.** Building trust is an important pillar. As having a strong partnership strengthens the working relationship between APPGM-SDG, solution providers and the communities. The continuous partnership can be achieved by the willingness to respond positively, and being genuine and trustworthy between parties. From 2020 to 2022, there are 132 solution providers and 294 projects have been undertaken throughout the years with 145 projects ongoing actively, with the remaining to be successfully completed by all benefactors of the projects. With these achievements, the trust is built on a foundation and ongoing partnerships will be expanded.
5. **Role of Solution Partners as Catalyst and Enablers of Localising Sustainable Development.** Solution partners are our changemakers for bringing positive changes to the lives of marginalized communities. They are our local champions in localizing SDG at the local level, making sure the marginalized communities are accorded the same opportunities as us to live in Malaysia. Our solution providers serve as a movement of community mobilizers that will channel the agenda's ideals to ensure nobody is left behind by using all SDG goals to build better communities for the future of the community and country.

CONCLUSION

Shaped by global and local economic currents, Malaysians have been grappling with the increasing rate of basic needs prices even with the new minimum wage limit of RM1,500. A study previously carried out by Bank Negara provided that the living wage for an adult based in Kuala Lumpur was RM2,700 in 2018. Today, the level of living wage might vary, depending on the different states, household size and many other factors. Such issues and many others have emphasised the need to improve access and opportunities for various communities to be involved in the upskilling and reskilling process, whether formally or informally. This allows workers and communities the possibility of earning better incomes and living wages.

Malaysians need better income creation opportunities and development that uplifts living stands and conditions throughout Malaysia. By expanding opportunities for decent income generation, and ensuring equitable access to wealth for all communities, Malaysia can be a better and more prosperous nation. Individuals and communities when given the right support, resources and ecosystem can and have showcased their potential and achievements in undertaking social and economic projects. The projects implemented and supported by the APPGM-SDG have affirmed this belief, and guided by the principles of partnership and leaving no one behind, the APPGM-SDG and its partners will continue to empower local communities to prosper.

P A R T



SDGs and Planet

CHAPTER EIGHT

Our Planet in Crisis: How is Malaysia doing in this “P” of the SDGs?

Lavanya Rama Iyer

INTRODUCTION

Snapshot Of Our Performance on Our Planet-Related Goals

2015 was a pivotal year. The SDGs were agreed to by the global community, with the refreshing refrain of “leaving no one behind” by building upon 5 pillars that connoted development: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. The Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was also passed, introducing a mechanism that was to deliver on the needed collective global action to address climate change equitably and in adherence to the dictates of science.

Malaysia embraced both these global agendas. At the same time, we were finalising our planning to implement the Aichi Targets under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the framework that the global community devised to arrest the alarming rate of loss of the diversity of life, biodiversity, and nature, of our common home, Mother Earth. The National Policy on Biological Diversity 2016-2025 was launched in early 2016 to guide Malaysia’s delivery on the Targets set at global level.¹ At national planning level, Malaysia’s 11th Malaysia Plan became the guidance document on the first of three phases of SDG implementation.² For climate, the Plan adopted the target that was voluntarily announced earlier in COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009 of reducing emissions intensity of GDP by up

¹ Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, *National Policy on Biological Diversity 2016 - 2025* (Putrajaya: 2016), <https://www.nrecc.gov.my/ms-my/pustakamedia/Penerbitan/National%20Policy%20on%20Biological%20Diversity%202016-2025.pdf>.

² Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Eleventh Malaysia Plan (11 MP) 2016-2020: Anchoring Growth on People* (Putrajaya: 2015), <https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-05/RMKe-11%20Book.pdf>

to 40% by 2020 compared to 2005, and for biodiversity, the global target set under the Aichi Targets of conserving 17% of terrestrial and inland water, and 10% of coastal and marine waters as protected areas by 2020.

An overview of how we have performed on these targets that we set ourselves portrays that we still have much to do and unfortunately, less and less time left to do it. The soon-to-be published data on our emissions performance shows that we had arguably met this voluntary target of up to a 40% emissions intensity of GDP reduction, by achieving about a 35% reduction in 2019. However, as that is a rather vague target in its formulation, any reduction could arguably be seen to meet the target.

In terms of biodiversity targets, while we still maintain forest cover of at least 50% of total land area, it has been reported in the 12th Malaysia Plan that both the terrestrial and marine protected areas targets were not met, with the achievement being 10% for terrestrial (2018) and 5.3% for marine (2020) respectively.³ There were other targets regarding disaster management, waste management, green procurement, renewable energy and energy efficiency which have been achieved to varying degrees. The official figures for all of these are publicly available in the 12th Malaysia Plan and also in the reports that the Department of Statistics Malaysia produces annually on Environmental Performance and SDG Performance.

³Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12 MP) 2021-2025: A Prosperous, Inclusive, Sustainable Malaysia* (Putrajaya: 2021), https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/flipping_book/TwelfthPlan/mobile/index.html.

What Are the Implications of These Numbers?

From the climate perspective, we are seeing greater occurrences of extreme weather patterns, causing both floods and droughts at different times, ultimately affecting people, our livelihoods and our well-being. Landslides, floods, water shortages, crop failure are becoming more rampant affecting fundamentals like food and water security. We are also witnessing new phenomena such as land spouts or mini tornadoes on land, which were only an occurrence in the sea in the past. River surges have also become more frequent.

In terms of biodiversity, we tragically lost our last rhino in the wild, while the census undertaken of our tiger population showed that the numbers were extremely critical, at less than 150 in the wild. As for our seas, the Department of Fisheries Malaysia revealed in 2019 that Malaysia has lost more than 96% of our demersal fish stock (fish that live and feed off the bottom of the ocean) in 60 years.⁴ These losses have huge implications for the stability of the ecosystem services we rely on, including the resources we extract from nature like fish for our food needs. Economically, the unprecedented floods of last year alone resulted in a loss of about RM6 billion whilst the Department of Fisheries also reported that illegal fishing results in an annual loss to the tune of RM4.25 billion!⁵ We are now in the second phase of the SDG roll out in the country with the 12th Malaysia Plan. Similar targets have been set based on our international commitments.

⁴ Malaysia Now, "There aren't plenty fish in the sea anymore, Malaysians warned," January 11, 2021, <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2021/01/11/there-arent-plenty-fish-in-the-sea-anymore-malaysians-warned>.

⁵ Sinar Daily, "Malaysia losses whopping RM4.25 billion yearly from illegal fishing," August 6, 2022, <https://www.sinardaily.my/article/177808/malaysia/national/malaysia-losses-whopping-rm425-billion-yearly-from-illegal-fishing>

Table 1 Malaysia's Progress in Climate and Biodiversity Targets according to the 11th and 12th MP

Targets	11th MP	12th MP
Climate Target (SDG 13)	Up to 40% reduction of emissions intensity of GDP by 2020 compared to 2005	Up to 45% reduction of emissions intensity of GDP by 2030 compared to 2005
Biodiversity Targets (SDG 14 and 15)	17% terrestrial protected areas by 2020 10% marine protected areas by 2020	20% terrestrial protected areas by 2025 10% marine protected areas by 2025 Stabilisation of the Tiger population

There are other important targets too and the 9th Prime Minister also announced in tabling the 12th Malaysia Plan in 2021 that Malaysia will aim for a net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) economy as early as 2050 and that Malaysia will phase out coal in our energy mix with no new coal plants to be introduced.

What Are the Key Takeaways from This?

First, we are seeing that the framing of SDGs which is built on the 5 pillars of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership and comprises 17 distinct yet inter-related Goals has provided an important framework in national planning. There have also been progressive moves towards the breaking down of silos in the roll out of the plans, from Phase 1 under the 11th Plan to Phase 2 under the 12th Plan, with better integration of the first three pillars to achieve the 4th P (Peace), through the formation of effective partnerships (pillar 5).

Second, it is important to note the growing recognition and trust between different segments of society be they Government, Civil Society/NGOs, Academicians or the Private Sector in contributing collectively towards achieving this common agenda.

Civil Society inputs have been solicited and reflected in not only the Malaysia Plans and their mid-term reviews, but also in the SDG Roadmaps and Voluntary National Reviews. A corollary development with the growing importance of ESG for businesses has seen greater genuine interactions amongst corporate traditional “rivals” and also with civil society, particularly to tackle issues posed by climate change.

In the former, civil society has been recognised as the Third Sector in embracing the whole-of-society approach, and encouraging developments have been witnessed in operationalising this through budget allocations in national budgets directly to CSOs including for environmental purposes. The formation of the APPGM-SDG was also instrumental in opening up space for policy dialogue between CSOs and Parliamentarians whilst enabling SDG implementation at local level. Just prior to GE 15, a landmark summit on Climate Change was hosted by the then Opposition in Parliament and attended by the newly appointed 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia along with the then Minister of Environment and Water (KASA) in charge of climate change and its Secretary General.

With the private sector, partnerships have been formed to help navigate through the increasing risks that climate change poses to business be it reputational or physical, in terms of assets at risk of climate impact. Private sector also agitated strongly for the setting of a net zero goal for the country. The financial sector, in particular, is taking these matters seriously. Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) and the Securities Commission have established a Joint Committee on Climate Change (JC3). BNM with the World Bank also recently undertook an exploratory study to assess the exposure to nature related risks⁶, gaining the distinction of being amongst the first four

⁶ World Bank Group and Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), *An Exploration of Nature-Related Financial Risks in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: World Bank, 2022), <https://www.bnm.gov.my/documents/20124/3770663/wb-bnm-2022-report.pdf>.

Central Banks in the world to do so.

Thirdly, there have also been several policy developments, from including reference to the 50% forest cover pledge into the National Forestry Policy for the first time since the pledge was first made at the Rio Summit in 1992, to mandating certification of all palm oil with the Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil standards and capping the area that can be used for oil palm cultivation to 6.5 million hectares (20% of landmass). Improved renewable energy and recycling targets have also been introduced, along with a Roadmap to Phase Out Single Use Plastics by 2030 and encouraging action in cities and urban landscapes, amongst other initiatives. A fiscal measure to promote the protection of marine and terrestrial areas has also been introduced and being institutionalised by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and KeTSA in the form of the annual allocation to State Governments through the Ecological Fiscal Transfer (EFT).

Fourthly, on a regional scale, all three regions in Malaysia have announced various measures. In Sabah, 30% of land area is to be gazetted as totally protected forest by 2025, and more focus has been drawn to the eco-tourism potential in the State. Sarawak has shifted to valuing standing forests in its newly amended Forestry Enactment 2022 and will be protecting 1 million hectares as totally protected forests. Both regions have also contributed to increasing marine protected areas coverage with the gazettment of Tun Mustapha Park in Sabah (2016) and the Luconia Shoals in Sarawak (2018), the two largest marine parks in Malaysia. In the Peninsula, it has been announced that the forest cover will be increased to 50%

by 2040⁷ from the present 43%.^{8, 9}

Fifthly, at the international level, Malaysia supported the definition that was passed at the UN Environment Assembly on Nature based Solutions (NbS), supporting the call for the development of a new international treaty on plastics, and also endorsed the declaration by the UN General Assembly that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right. Presently, it is hoped that being one of the 12 mega diverse countries of the world, Malaysia will play an active role in shaping a strong outcome for the forthcoming Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to secure a nature positive world by protecting 30 percent of land and sea area globally by 2030. Protecting nature underpins our ability to stabilise future climate whilst providing the best assurance in building multi-faceted resilience to the impacts of climate change that we are already facing. Incidentally, in terms of the latter, Penang is the first state that is undertaking Urban NbS for climate adaptation, harnessing the important nature element in efforts to adapt to climate change.

⁷ Perancangan Melangkaui Kelaziman (PLAN Malaysia), *Ringkasan Eksekutif, Rancangan Fizikal Negara Keempat*, (Putrajaya: Bahagian Rancangan Fizikal Negara, 2021),

https://www.kpkt.gov.my/kpkt/resources/user_1/MENGENAI%20KPKT/DASAR/RINGKASAN_EKSEKUTIF_RFN4_18112021.pdf.

⁸ New Straits Times, "State governments urged to increase forested areas," March 26, 2022, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/03/783432/state-governments-urged-increase-forested-areas>.

⁹ There appears to be a difference in the current forest figures between those stated in the documents referenced in footnotes 7 and 8 with the figure of 43% cited in the latter being the more accurate.

Challenges

Whilst the targets that we have set ourselves as a means to measure our achievement of these different SDGs are important by providing needed impetus for action, it is equally important to assess whether these targets are also advancing positive impacts for all the overarching 5 Ps. Only then, can the outcome be said to meaningfully contribute towards the ultimate objective of the SDGs of “Leaving No One Behind”.

For instance, meeting our climate target would need a significant shift in our energy mix from fossil fuel sources to renewable energy sources. Large scale solar farms are seen as one of the solutions in this context. Increased mining activities may also be necessary to produce items like solar panels and batteries to support this transition. However, if the area chosen for the large-scale solar farms or mining activities is not properly done, existing forest areas may end up being cleared. Unfortunately, this kind of outcome is already occurring where some parties see this as an opportunity to gain higher income by converting the forest into solar farms or extracting mineral deposits. This not only reduces forest cover, it also negatively impacts the species that live here as it reduces their habitat, and communities who rely on forest produce and services.

Furthermore, a narrow view of these targets to only meet related SDGs would continue to perpetuate a silo mentality. The achievement of these targets would be seen to be the sole responsibility of related Ministries, rather than a collective responsibility of all to advance the 5 Ps. If, however assessment of the performance included contributions or impacts towards all the 5 Ps, this would motivate more cohesive planning from the outset to ensure a target outcome that also supports the achievement of other SDGs. In this way, collaborative action between various Ministries or Agencies can be designed to efficiently and effectively meet multiple objectives.

Another challenge is the commodification of nature as a means to protect it. Careful planning of projects can meet environmental and social goals whilst also being economically viable. However, here again we have already encountered instances of exploitation with some projects not adhering to environmental or social standards and instead being a tool for greenwashing. This has led to the suspicion and rejection of the concept of Nature based Solutions, as it is associated with climate mitigation through forest carbon trading and offsets only in order to make money rather than address the climate crisis. However, NbS encompasses a far wider scope to address multiple societal challenges including food, water, health issues and disaster risk reduction.

A fourth challenge is policy coherence. In the 12th Malaysia Plan, the green growth chapter includes a section on sustainable mining. In actuality, all mining activities are destructive and hence at best, they can be undertaken in a responsible manner, avoiding environmentally sensitive and/or community areas. There is however no prohibition of mining in forest reserves or other environmentally sensitive areas. In essence, much of the challenges we face are driven by prescribing to the idea of GDP growth as a measure of progress. Quality of growth, operating within nature's carrying capacity and distributive justice are not considered in the pursuit of economic growth measured by GDP.

MOVING FORWARD

We need to set a target for progress that takes account of how we are operating within planetary boundaries whilst also equitably distributing the benefits we gain from the activities we take to society. This needs a paradigm shift to an impact economy rather than a profit driven one pursuing relentless material growth. Measuring this is something we should channel efforts towards and some of the work undertaken by the Department of Statistics Malaysia in developing accounting methods to incorporate

environmental services in national accounts should be further pursued. A collective effort to define a measure of progress Beyond GDP is needed to drive integrated solutions and build a just and equitable society that sustainably uses natural resources within nature's regenerative capacity.

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CHAPTER NINE

Coral Reefs: The Embodiment of the 5Ps of the SDGs: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships (SDG 14)

Julian Hyde

INTRODUCTION

What are Marine Ecosystems?

The Ecological and Economic Value of Marine Ecosystems

Coral reefs are sometimes described as “the rainforests of the sea”, a phrase used to capture the vast biodiversity that they harbour. Together with coastal mangroves and seagrass beds, to which they are closely associated biologically, these marine ecosystems provide a number of important ecosystem services – nature’s bounty that people benefit from. Protection against storms, habitat for juvenile marine species, jobs in tourism – not to mention as a source of food, these marine ecosystems are an intrinsic part of the lives of many people.

There are approximately 800 species of corals and it is estimated that 25 percent of all marine species are found in coral reefs – which cover just 1 percent of the ocean floor (UNEP.org). Coral reefs in Malaysia cover around 4,000 km² and have over 550 species of corals.¹ Marine biological diversity in the South China Sea is immensely rich, with at least 3,365 species of marine fishes, more than one-third of these are coral reef fish.²

¹ Praveena, S.M., Siraj, S.S. & Aris, A.Z., Coral Reefs Studies and Threats in Malaysia: A Mini Review. *Rev Environ Sci Biotechnol* 11, 27–39, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11157-011-9261-8>

² Arai, T., Diversity and Conservation of Coral Reef Fishes in the Malaysian South China Sea. *Rev Fish Biol Fisheries* 25, 85–101, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11160-014-9371-9>

Mangrove forests in Malaysia cover an area of 577,950 ha and there are 70 species of mangroves.³ Mangroves offer a broad array of goods and services to the local community. Among the important roles played are on- and offshore fishery, nursery habitats and shelter for juvenile fish, habitats and food resources for a host of fauna, nutrient influx, and a source of timber and fuel wood for some people. Besides that, mangrove forests have the capability to sequester a significant amount of carbon, and most importantly, protect the shoreline from soil erosion due to strong waves and currents, as well as tsunamis.⁴

With 16 species, seagrass meadows in Malaysia play an important role in supporting coastal marine communities and in maintaining diverse flora and fauna. They are an important component of coastal fisheries productivity and they play an important role in maintaining coastal water quality and clarity.⁵ Despite their ecological and economic value, marine ecosystems are often treated as “the invisible ecosystem” because, unlike actual rainforests, they are to all intents and purposes hidden. Few Malaysians visit marine ecosystems and few understand the benefits they provide to society.

³ Kasturi Devi Kanniah et al. Satellite Images for Monitoring Mangrove Cover Changes in a Fast Growing Economic Region in Southern Peninsular Malaysia, 2018, Remote Sensing. 2015, 7, 14360-14385; doi:10.3390/rs71114360

⁴ Wan Juliana, W.A, Norhayati, A. & Abdul Latiff, M., 2018, Mangrove Flora of Malaysia: Malaysia Biodiversity Information System (MyBIS). Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. pp. 100.

⁵ Please see: Seagrass-Watch in Malaysia, <https://www.seagrasswatch.org/malaysia/>

Why are They Important?

Ecosystem Services

People rely on these marine ecosystems for food and jobs. The planet relies on these ecosystems because they filter water and keep it clean, they protect coastlines from storms and erosion and they absorb a large proportion of annual global CO₂ emissions. Businesses need these ecosystems for the seafood they produce and the jobs that they create. Peaceful, inclusive societies value them for their cultural importance.

Coastal waters account for just 7 percent of the total area of the ocean. However, the productivity of ecosystems such as coral reefs, and these blue carbon sinks mean that this small area forms the basis of the world's primary fishing grounds, supplying an estimated 50 percent of the world's fisheries. They provide vital nutrition for close to 3 billion people, as well as 50 percent of animal protein and minerals to 400 million people of the least developed countries in the world. The coastal zones, of which these blue carbon sinks are central for productivity, deliver a wide range of benefits to human society: filtering water, reducing effects of coastal pollution, nutrient loading, sedimentation, protecting the coast from erosion and buffering the effects of extreme weather events. Coastal ecosystem services have been estimated to be worth over US\$25,000 billion annually, ranking among the most economically valuable of all ecosystems.

Globally, 90 percent of the world's fishers are employed in small-scale fisheries.⁶ In 2015, the fisheries sector in Malaysia provided employment for 175,980 people and its contribution to national GDP was at 1.1 percent. Food fish production is approximately 2.0 million MT/year valued at US\$3.3 billion. Fish trade is valued at US\$ 1.7 billion, and the estimated average consumption

⁶ Please see: The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022: [NSTATS.UN.ORG/SDGS/REPORT/2022/](https://nstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/)

of fish is 56.8 kg/person/year. Marine capture fisheries were the main contributor to fish production and economy of Malaysia in 2016 at 1,574,447 MT valued at US\$2.5 million and providing work to 132,305 people. Aquaculture followed at 407,387.31 MT valued at US\$ 0.68 million providing livelihood to 21,790 people and inland capture fisheries at 5,847.97 MT valued at US\$0.02 million.⁷

In Peninsular Malaysia, the 42 marine parks are managed by the Marine Park Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. These are mostly islands declared as marine parks and comprise both terrestrial and marine components. In Sabah, six Marine Parks are managed by Sabah Parks and in Sarawak, three marine parks are gazetted.⁸ The Marine Parks of Peninsular Malaysia attract over 600,000 visitors per year (Department of Marine Parks Malaysia) and marine tourism contributed 26 percent to GDP in 2019.⁹ The Total Economic Value of Marine Parks in Peninsular Malaysia for the period 2011-2015 was estimated at RM8.7 billion.¹⁰

Out of all the biological carbon (or green carbon) captured in the world, over half (55 percent) is captured by marine living organisms – not on land – hence it is called blue carbon. The Oceans play a significant role in the global carbon cycle. Not only do they represent the largest long-term sink for carbon but they also store and redistribute CO₂. Some 93 percent of the earth's CO₂ (40 Tt) is stored and cycled through the oceans. The ocean's vegetated habitats, in particular mangroves, salt marshes and seagrasses, cover less than 0.5 percent of the seabed. These form earth's blue carbon

⁷ See also: Ahmad Faizal Mohamed Omar, Fisheries Country Profile: Malaysia, 11 June 2018, <http://www.seafdec.org/fisheries-country-profile-malaysia/>

⁸ Please see: Coral Triangle Atlas: Malaysia, <http://ctatlas.coraltriangleinitiative.org/Country/Index/MYS>

⁹ See also: Pemsea National State of Oceans and Coasts report for Malaysia

¹⁰ Please see: Total Economic Value of Marine Biodiversity – Malaysian Marine Parks; Jabatan Taman Laut Malaysia, https://wdpa.s3.amazonaws.com/Country_informations/MYS/TOTAL%20ECONOMIC%20VALUE%20OF%20MARINE%20BIODIVERSITY.pdf

sinks and account for more than 50 percent, perhaps as much as 71 percent, of all carbon storage in ocean sediments. They comprise only 0.05 percent of the plant biomass on land, but store a comparable amount of carbon per year, and thus rank among the most intense carbon sinks on the planet. Blue carbon sinks and estuaries capture and store between 235–450 Tg C every year.¹¹

What's Happening

Marine Ecosystem Management

Worldwide, coastal ecosystems are being lost due to coastal development, climate change and pollution, among other impacts. It is estimated that 40 percent of coastal mangroves have been lost since the 1940s, with a loss rate of approximately 3 percent per year in recent years (11). Land clearing in coastal areas for both construction and aquaculture accounts for most of these losses.

The picture with seagrass habitats is similar. The same research estimates that some 35 percent of seagrass habitats have been lost since the 1940s, with a higher loss rate of 7 percent in recent years, suggesting that seagrass habitats are under more pressure than mangroves. And it is even worse for coral reefs, with some research suggesting that coral reef cover globally has declined by 50 percent during the period 1957-2007.¹² At the same time, catch of coral reef associated fish per unit effort has decreased by 60 percent since 1950. The paper suggests that coral reef's capacity to provide ecosystem services has declined by half since the 1950s – while the global population has grown by more than three times.

¹¹ Nellemann, C., Corcoran, E., Duarte, C.M., Valdes, L., De Young, C., Fonseca, L., Grimsditch, G. (Eds), 2009, Blue Carbon: A Rapid Response Assessment, United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal, www.grida.no

¹² See: Tyler D. Eddy et al. Global Decline in Capacity of Coral Reefs to Provide Ecosystem Services, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2021.08.016>

Data from *Reef Check Malaysia's* annual coral reef survey programme show that “live coral cover”, a key reef health indicator, declined by 10 percent from 2014 to 2020 (though there has been something of a recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic). A 2020 report from FRIM estimates that the total area of mangrove forest in Malaysia fell from approximately 650,000 Ha in the 1990's to 580,000 Ha in the last decade, a reduction of 70,000 Ha, or 11 percent of the original area.¹³ Rates of loss of coral reefs and seagrass meadows are unknown but likely to be similar, particularly seagrass meadows which suffer greater damage from coastal development.

What the SDGs Say

SDG 14 calls on nations to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, sea and marine resources for sustainable development. Progress over the past 7 years (2015-2022) and the current situation – with the goals for which information is available – is assessed briefly below, from a Malaysian perspective.

Target 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

In September of 2015, the Urban Well-being, Housing and Local Government Ministry started enforcing Act 672 of the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act 2007.¹⁴ The Act makes it compulsory for residents to separate their solid wastes according to categories of paper, plastics and others or face fines between RM50 and RM500. The programme covers Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur,

¹³ Please see: Hamdan Omar and Muhammad Afizzul Misman, “Extents and Distribution of Mangroves in Malaysia”, in Hamdan Omar, Tariq Mubarak Husin, Ismail Parlan (eds.), *Status of Mangroves in Malaysia, 2020*, Forest Research Institute Malaysia

¹⁴ Water Segregation Enforcement Starts Today, 1 June 2016, *The Malay Mail*, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2016/06/01/waste-segregation-enforcement-starts-today/1131527>

Johor, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Kedah, Perlis and Pahang. In 2018, RCM conducted a review of progress, including a trial in a housing area in KL and interviews with waste management contractors. The recycling rate remained low. Visual observations of waterways around Kuala Lumpur and Selangor reveal large amounts of trash polluting waterways – which eventually end up in the sea. Observations in coastal areas reveal similar problems. However, there is a lack of readily available data on waste management effectiveness in Malaysia.

Reef Check Malaysia is the Malaysia coordinator for the annual International Coastal Clean-up Day.¹⁵ Data is collected from beach clean-ups around Malaysia. In 2022, the top 3 items found on beaches around Malaysia were cigarette filters, plastic bottles and small pieces of plastic. The data show no reduction in the amount of trash collected from Malaysia's beaches since RCM started conducting annual clean-ups in 2017.

RCM runs the waste management system on Mantanani Island, Sabah. Local villagers are paid to collect waste from households on a daily basis. Trash is separated from recyclables and food waste is composted in situ. Trash and recyclables are sent to the mainland once a month for disposal. In 2021, a total of 66 tonnes of waste was collected and sent for disposal. Had the system not been in place, the majority of it would have been thrown in the ocean – the only realistic disposal the islanders have. RCM is working with partners on Perhentian Island, Redang Island and Larapan Island in Sabah to implement similar systems.

A review of solid waste management and sewage treatment on small inhabited islands of Malaysia conducted by RCM shows that

¹⁵ Please see: Malaysians Picked Up 24,301kg of Trash from Our Beaches, *Reef Check Malaysia*, 4 October 2022, <https://www.reefcheck.org.my/press/malaysians-picked-up-24301kg-of-trash-from-our-beaches>, and <http://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/international-coastal-cleanup/>

most small islands struggle with either solid waste management or sewage treatment – or both.¹⁶

In 2009, RCM conducted a review of sewage treatment systems operated by resorts on Perhentian island. Most were found to be non-compliant with current regulations. Since that time, little has changed. Other islands face similar problems, for example Mantanani island has no integrated sewage treatment infrastructure, with households using either septic tanks or soak away pits, which leach pollutants into the sea nearby. Water quality data show that coastal waters around islands contain bacteria indicating sewage pollution. *Reef Check* surveys show the presence of algae on coral reefs – often a sign of pollution. A recent incident on Perhentian saw 40 tourists fall ill after swimming around the island and staff working in the diving industry regularly report ear infections; sewage pollution is a likely cause in both cases.

Target 14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

During the 1990's, 42 islands around peninsular Malaysia were gazetted as Marine Parks (Establishment of Marine Parks Malaysia Order 1994). Until 2022, no additional marine protected areas have been established and the percentage of waters in managed areas remains at around 5 percent, well below the national target and the CBD Aichi Target of 10 percent.¹⁷ Furthermore, management plans for

¹⁶ Please see: Solid Waste and Sewage Management on Small Inhabited Islands of Malaysia (2021), *Reef Check Malaysia*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9c815e348cd94acf3b352e/t/62788f2c8424d06154fb3ef5/1652068214940/Summary+-+Solid+Waste+and+Sewage+Management+on+Small+Inhabited+Islands+of+Malaysia.a.pdf>

¹⁷ See for instance: Malaysia, Marine Protection Atlas, Marine Conservation Institute, <https://mpatlas.org/countries/MYS>

some islands are out of date and some aspects of management have not kept pace with changes in best practices in marine management (e.g., no mechanisms for participation by IPLCs). Sabah and Sarawak have both established greater areas of marine protection and are closer to having 10 percent of state waters protected.

In 2016, RCM worked with the Department of Marine Parks Malaysia (DMPM) to identify local impacts to coral reefs, in order to develop strategies to address them, in accordance with Aichi Target 10. In most Marine Parks, little action has been taken to address local impacts. Earlier, in 2013 RCM completed a project for DMPM to conduct resilience surveys at three island marine parks to identify resilient sites that might be the focus for strengthened protection. However, resilience principles are still not part of marine park management. Mangrove conservation is the responsibility of state governments. Coastal development, aquaculture and forest clearing are still degrading mangrove areas.

Seagrass meadows in Malaysia have no specific protection unless they are inside Marine Parks in which case, they have some protection against over-harvesting and physical destruction. However, most seagrass meadows fall outside Marine Parks and are highly vulnerable to damage by trawling, coastal development, sand mining and pollution.

Target 14.4. By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

Management of fisheries in Malaysia is the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries Malaysia. The Department prepares plans for

managing fisheries. The A number of policies and plans relate to the fishing industry in Malaysia. These include the National Agro-Food Policy. The policy outlines five policy thrusts and highlights four key sub-industries, one of which is the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The policy has the following objectives for fish stock management, by 2030:

- Protect a total of 10.00 percent of local maritime areas
- Set up Zone B towards trawl free zone
- Ratio of captured fisheries landing to aquaculture landing to achieve 60:40

The policy identifies several key issues including the depletion and increasing pressure on coastal resources, increasing production cost for marine and aquaculture fisheries, biosecurity and compliance issues relating to aquaculture farms, and the relatively low-income level of fishermen. The fisheries and aquaculture strategies look into maintaining self-sufficiency levels, balancing fish landing ratios, enhancing monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) efforts surrounding the marine areas, encouraging use of safe and sustainable fish sources along the value chain, and improving the livelihood and income levels of the fishing communities for the next 10 years.

The following subsector strategies are specified:

- Ensure sufficient, affordable and safe fisheries produce by balancing fish sources in the market, with the aim to shift the fish consumption pattern from a majority of marine fisheries to a more balanced proportion of marine fisheries, inland fisheries and aquaculture
- Enhance fisheries resource sustainability in order to maintain and increase existing fish stock, and promote consumption of fish products that are safe and sustainable

- Increase national economic contribution of fisheries sector to improve the income of the food producer and overall economic contribution of the fisheries and aquaculture subsector by assisting the food producers in diversifying income sources and increasing the market accessibility of Malaysian fishery produce to the global market
- Prioritise good governance across the fisheries and aquaculture subsector to improve cooperation and communication with stakeholders such as state governments, enforcement agencies, fishermen and fish farmer communities and civil societies for positive outcomes

A recent situational analysis of fisheries in Malaysia, conducted by the APPGM (pers. con.), revealed that fishing communities around Malaysia have numerous complaints about how fisheries are managed, particularly surrounding licensing and enforcement activities, which need to be addressed by DoF. Plans to address IUU fishing have been developed, but according to a recent article, although the existing framework is considered comprehensive, further stringent and fair law enforcement to combat IUU fishing in Malaysia's waters is required.¹⁸

Fish bombing, though illegal, remains a problem in many parts of Sabah. Attempts to reduce fish bombing through installing fish bomb detectors and conducting community awareness programmes are on-going in several areas. RCM installed detectors in Mantanani Island and, following campaigns and an increased police presence on the island, the number of blasts declined by 99 percent.

Target 14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information.

¹⁸ Faradilah Ghazali et al., Malaysian Efforts in Combating IUU Fishing: A Legal and Policy Review, *Journal of East Asia and International Law*, 12(2): 387-400

As noted above, Marine Parks were gazetted in Peninsular Malaysia in the 1990's but no further parks have been gazetted until 2022. Currently some 5 percent of marine areas are protected. This is short of the 10 percent target set in the National Policy on Biological Diversity (NPBD), as well as Aichi Target 11. It is also well below the 30 percent target currently being negotiated by the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is calling for 30 percent of marine areas to be protected by 2030. Malaysia has not joined either of the two multinational coalitions that are supporting this target (High Ambition Coalition; Global Ocean Alliance); regional neighbours including Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand have joined or will soon join.

The on-going review of the NPBD will retain the 10% target for marine protected areas, but may include a provision to increase it to 15 percent by the end of the policy lifetime (2030).

Target 14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation.

According to a review published in 2019, subsidies are a form of support provided to consumers and producers by the government to enhance welfare.¹⁹ Fishers in Malaysia receive various types of subsidies. Fisheries subsidies however are a challenge because it can work against fishers' welfare if the fisheries subsidies lead to over fishing and resource depletion. The paper identifies several subsidies that are classified as "beneficial", "ambiguous" or "harmful".

¹⁹ Please see: Lee Wen Chiat, K. Kuperan Wiswanathan, Subsidies in the Fisheries Sector of Malaysia: Impact on Resource Sustainability, *Review of Politics and Public Policy in Emerging Economies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 2019, pp. 79-85

Beneficial subsidies are subsidies that reduce capacity effort and help the artisanal fishers to increase landings and incomes and minimize by-catch. Examples of government expenditure that can be considered as beneficial subsidies are budgets allocated for research and development and fisheries management. Harmful subsidies are those that result in capacity-enhancement in the fisheries that lead to overfishing. Examples of harmful fisheries subsidies are financial support for boat construction and fleet modernization and fuel support that promotes overfishing. In 2017, subsidies totalled RM 524 million, 67 percent which (fuel and catch incentives) were considered to be harmful and have negative impacts on fisheries.

Plan through to 2030

The following focus areas are recommended:

Target 14.1: By 2025 prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution

- Improve sewage treatment, particularly on islands but also coastal areas. Existing systems are adequate and in compliance with building standards; but maintenance and de-sludging programmes are urgently required to ensure they are operating to specification.
- Enforce guidelines of effluent discharge limits through more enforcement by DoE.
- Implement waste management systems on all small, inhabited islands, along similar lines to what is being done on Mantanani, Tioman, Perhentian and Larapan. Economic losses from lack of waste treatment significantly outweigh the costs of improving waste management.

Target 14.2: By 2020 sustainably manage and protect coastal ecosystems

- Develop and implement new management plans for all Marine Parks.
- Establish participatory management arrangements for Marine Parks management.
- Introduce resilience principles into Marine Parks management.
- Address all local impacts to marine ecosystems (e.g. pollution, land-use change, physical impacts from tourism operations, poaching of reef fishes).

Target 14.4: By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices

- Improve enforcement of fisheries areas.
- Address licensing issues.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns to address destructive fishing.
- Establish alternative livelihood programmes to support fishermen in the transition to new livelihoods.

Target 14.5: By 2020, conserve at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas

- Conduct surveys to map all marine ecosystems.
- Identify important biodiversity areas.
- Establish managed areas to protect 30% of important biodiversity areas.

Target 14.6: By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies.

- Reform subsidies to remove harmful subsidies.
- Establish alternative livelihood programmes to support fishermen in the transition to new livelihoods.
- Implement fisheries management plans to protect fish stocks.

CONCLUSION

Marine ecosystems (coral reefs, seagrass meadows and mangroves) are the embodiment of the 5Ps of the SDGs: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership. For people, they provide food and livelihoods in fisheries; they are also a source of recreation and spiritual connection for tourists and local communities. For prosperity they provide employment in numerous industries including fisheries, tourism and aquaculture. For the planet, marine ecosystems are an important sink for CO₂; they also provide flood defences for coastal communities, reducing inundation during high tides and storms. For peace, they provide a balance between coastal communities and deep-sea trawling; they also provide for sustainable livelihoods for coastal communities. And for partnership they connect communities not only within countries, but between countries.

The Malaysian government is strongly encouraged to take action to address the concerns raised about SDG 14, and to improve protections for these essential coastal ecosystems. Integrating resilience principles into management can help to ensure marine ecosystems are healthy and able to withstand the increasing impacts of climate change. Addressing the three key principles of resilience (water quality, herbivores and physical impacts) will also lead to improved conservation outcomes. Improving sewage treatment would lead to better water quality, allowing marine ecosystems to thrive – and enhance a tourism attraction. It will also reduce public health risk. Protecting important fish populations (particularly herbivores) will help keep reefs free from smothering algae, and

enhance coral recruitment. Finally, reducing physical impacts (from tourism and development) will help to ensure these ecosystems are intact and productive.

The role of indigenous peoples is increasingly recognised as critical in the successful management of protected areas. This will require the establishment of appropriate institutional structures, and capacity building and training for island communities that would in turn empower them to make meaningful contributions to management. Finally, introducing seascape-level management of marine resources would protect the ecological connectivity between different marine ecosystems, improving overall ecosystem health and ensuring a flow of new recruits between different areas.

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PART



SDGs and Peace

CHAPTER TEN

A Reflection on the Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Malaysia: The APPGM-SDG Issue Mapping Methodology

Teo Sue Ann

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Nations set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are action-oriented, easy to communicate, limited in numbers and aspirational. These goals set globally are universally applicable to all countries while considering different national realities, capacities, and levels of development while respecting national powers and priorities. They are designed to push member states to progress at local levels through localised, critical, and nuanced thinking of the social, economic, and environmental realities. The goals urge local multi-stakeholder partnerships to share knowledge, experiences, technology, and financial resources. The 17 SDGs are interrelated and have 169 targets and 231 specific indicators.

The 17 SDGs inspire many countries to work on localisation at the district level of government.¹ The UN defines localising as a process of defining, implementing, and monitoring strategies at the local level for achievable global, national and subnational sustainable goals and targets.² Many scholars discuss what is required and who plays the crucial role in localising the SDGs. For example, in North America, Spiliotopoulou and Roseland identified three main conditions for successful localisation of SDGs: 1. A prior commitment to wellbeing for all, aligned to the priorities of the SDGs while leaving no one behind; 2. Experience in creating measurement mechanisms

¹ Oosterhof, Pytrik Dieuwke. "Localising the SDGs to Accelerate the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: The Current State of Play of Sustainable Development Goal Localization in Asia and the Pacific" *Asian Development Bank* (2018).

² Oosterhof, "Localising the SDGs," (2018).

to track wellbeing; and 3. Ability to coordinate actions across multi-stakeholders.³

On the other hand, Patole argues the importance of data and data management for effectively localising SDGs.⁴ Similarly, in Malaysia, Khoo argues that data across wide-ranging indicators are important to track the overall progress of sustainable development.⁵ Some scholars also opined that collaborations between policymakers and other local stakeholders, especially local women leaders, are pivotal in successfully localising SDGs at the grassroots level.⁶ Although many scholars have addressed “what the requirements are” and “who the stakeholders for ensuring effective implementation are” of the localisation of the SDGs, however, few have discussed the question of “how”.

In this article, I will fill the knowledge gap of how to localise the SDGs by anchoring on the localisation process by the Malaysian government. I further narrow my focus on the challenges and hindrances of the localising process. Reddy identified some of these challenges, which include the lack of capacity development and institutional building on SDGs at district and local levels of government; the lack of decentralisation and constitutional protection; inadequate funding; weak local government and

³ Spiliotopoulou, Maria, and Mark Roseland. "Making the SDGs Relevant for Cities: Using the Community Capital Tool in British Columbia." In *Promoting the Sustainable Development Goals in North American Cities: Case Studies & Best Practices in the Science of Sustainability Indicators*, ed. David B. Abraham and Seema D. Iyer, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021): 51-66.

⁴ Patole, Manohar. "Localization of SDGs through disaggregation of KPIs." *Economies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 15.

⁵ Khoo, Yin Hooi. "Unlocking the Paradox Between SDG16 and Democratic Governance in Malaysia." In *Making SDGs Matter: Leaving No One Behind*, ed. Alizan Mahadi and Nazran Zhafri, (Kuala Lumpur: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, 2021): 175 -182.

⁶ Shahizan, Shahnaz, Siti Nurani Mohd Noor, and Suzana Ariff Azizan. "Malaysia's Strength in Women Leadership: Success Factor in Localising the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals." *Turkish Journal of Computer Mathematics Education* 12, no. 2 (2021): 604-13.

accountability; high levels of corruption; and limited local data.⁷ Besides these challenges, I further argue that the intricate relationships between the political representatives (MPs and state assemblypersons), local government, local leaders, and grassroots communities can also be hindrances to the localisation process. I highlight the importance of considering the political leanings of the local government, local leaders and grassroots communities, especially in the context of Malaysia, as a determinant for the successful localisation of the SDG. Belda-Miquel and colleagues also argue that the dynamics of power relations between politicians, NGOs and local communities are crucial in discussing the effectiveness of the localisation of SDGs. The dynamism consists of the conflicting interests, priorities and confidence for collaborations among different stakeholders.⁸

In the following sections, I elucidate, as best as possible, how such political leanings and fierce rivalries between political parties at the national level trickled down to local and district level governments and the local leaders. I demonstrate how the tensions that shape and are shaped by the evolving local political and cultural contexts affect the local leaders' decision-making and the livelihood of the grassroots, directly and indirectly, in different localities. Immler and Sakkers are correct in stressing the importance of local context in the localisation process.⁹ More importantly, in this article, I demonstrate that there are no one-size-fits-all approaches to localising SDGs. Each community has different sets of awareness, spaces and aspirations – which give them different meanings to the present and bind them with shared

⁷ Reddy, PS "Localising the sustainable development goals (SDGs): the role of local government in context." *African Journal of Public Affairs* 9, No. 2 (2016), 8.

⁸ Belda-Miquel, Sergio, Alejandra Boni, and Carola Calabuig. "SDG localisation and decentralised development aid: Exploring opposing discourses and practices in Valencia's aid sector." *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 20, no. 4 (2019), 391.

⁹ Immler, Nicole L., and Hans Sakkers. "The UN-Sustainable Development Goals going local: Learning from localising human rights." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 26, no. 2 (2022).

values, norms and beliefs.¹⁰ Therefore, I present how the Malaysian government considers various local contexts, political circumstances and social dynamics of different states, districts, villages, and communities in their effort and commitment to localising SDGs in the country.

THE ISSUE MAPPING PROCESS BY APPGM-SDG

On 25 September 2015, the Malaysian government announced its adoption of the SDGs during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit. In 2019, the Malaysian government adopted the United Kingdom's All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) model to work on the localisation of SDGs. The APPG in the UK is an informal parliamentary body formed by backbenchers' politicians from all parties who share a common interest in a policy field or relations with a given country.¹¹ The Malaysian Parliament formed the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia for the SDGs (APPGM-SDG), a bi-partisan organisation led by the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance, in November 2019. It gives the Alliance the mandate to lead the APPGM-SDG. The primary role of the APPGM-SDG is to localise the SDGs by engaging with multi-stakeholders, including members of Parliament (MPs), NGOs (both local and international), community leaders, associations, and grassroots communities.

APPGM-SDG started work on the localisation of SDGs in 2020. It received its first funding amounting to RM1.6 million from the Malaysian Ministry of Finance in 2020 to work on localising ten parliamentary constituencies. In 2021, APPGM-SDG received another allocation of RM5 million for the localisation in 20 parliamentary constituencies. Subsequently, in 2022, APPGM-SDG was promised RM10 million for the localisation of 27 new parliamentary constituencies. There are altogether 222 parliamentary

¹⁰ Immler, Nicole L., and Hans Sakkers, "Localising Human Rights" (2022), 267.

¹¹ Thomas, P. "Reaching Across the Aisle: Explaining the Rise of All-Party Parliamentary Groups in the United Kingdom." In *UK Political Studies Association 65th Annual Conference, Sheffield* (2015).

constituencies in Malaysia. As of end 2022, APPGM-SDG has reached 57 parliamentary constituencies.

The localisation of SDGs by APPGM-SDG consists of five phases – issue mapping, situational analysis, solution projects formulation and implementation, impact evaluation, and policy advocacy. We use qualitative methods, namely, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and ethnography with different stakeholders, to understand the social, economic and environmental issues at the ground level. Besides understanding the issues, we also explore the existing mechanism, programmes, policies and local developmental plans by the state and district government and local councils are also explored. The stakeholders for the issue mapping process are the MPs, local communities and their leaders, and local and district government agencies. Empirical data from issue mapping will guide and support the work of community-based projects and policy advocacy.

This article illuminates the qualitative mapping of issues by APPGM-SDG as the first phase for localising SDGs. The issue mapping begins with a discussion with the MP to obtain the profile of the constituency. The profiling of the constituency focuses on obtaining socio-demographic information, topography and geographical locations, public facilities, amenities, and the constituency's social, economic, and environmental issues. In upholding the SDG motto of "Leaving No One Behind", the discussion revolves around people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, single parents, people with disabilities, senior citizens from poor households, indigenous people, farmers and fishers, refugees, stateless or internal migrants, and other minority groups.

Then, we conduct three-day fieldwork at the respective constituencies. During the three-day fieldwork, the APPGM-SDG researchers collect empirical data from grassroots communities, local leaders, and government agencies. During the first and second day, we met with various grassroots communities and relied on the local networks of MPs to invite these participants to the discussions. We invited local leaders and community members to participate in our focus group discussion sessions. The discussions focused on pressing issues that are affecting the communities. We also obtained community inputs about their locality's social, economic, and environmental issues. Discussions were often held in community halls, local eateries, or residential areas. Each discussion would take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. We would visit about six groups of communities during the two days.

We invited local and district government agencies on the third day for a discussion. The empirical findings from the two-day fieldwork with various communities would serve as a context for the discussion. We sought opinions from the government agencies on the findings and their input on the parliamentary constituency's social, economic, and environmental issues. After completing the three-day fieldwork, the researchers prepared an issue mapping report comprising empirical findings on the SDGs.

The issue mapping being the first stage of the localisation reveals the challenges and hindrances most vividly. In this article, I present and analyse my experience conducting issue mapping at six parliamentary constituencies in 2021. These constituencies are Kubang Pasu, Sik, Baling, Permatang Pauh, Batu Kawan and Ipoh Barat. I discuss the challenges of the APPGM-SDG issue mapping process and how these challenges unravelled the diverse political and social dynamics at different localities. Furthermore, I also show how the issue mapping process evolved as we responded to the challenges

whilst we continued to work towards resonating the localisation of the SDGs with the local cultural framework.

THE APPGM-SDG ISSUE MAPPING PROCESS AGAINST THE POLITICAL BACKDROP

It is noteworthy that the APPGM-SDG started the localisation of SDGs in 2020 when Malaysian politics underwent turbulence after the general elections in 2018. In 2021, while the COVID-19 pandemic spread like wildfire in Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, the anxiety of political instability remained pertinent during the issue mapping process. In this section, I discuss the inter-related challenges that the APPGM-SDG found during the issue mapping process due to the series of political, economic, social and healthcare challenges in the country.

IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICS AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

During the general election in 2018, the longstanding Barisan Nasional (BN) political coalition finally collapsed after struggling to hold the fort. It lost the ruling power to the opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan (PH). Since then, there have been fierce political struggles. The former Prime Minister, Najib Tun Razak, charged with the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal, further undermined the longstanding political influence of the BN coalition. As the Malaysian government was working towards stabilising the nation after the change of government, COVID-19 spread across the country. The health crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic dampened political tensions briefly as politicians scrambled to contain the spread of the virus.

Nevertheless, in February 2020, Malaysian politics shook the nation again with the newly formed Perikatan Nasional (PN) taking over the Malaysian government as many politicians from the PH announced their defections and decided to "hop" over to the PN political parties (Tayeb, 2021). Mahathir Mohammad resigned from

the position of Prime Minister. Thereafter, the King appointed Muhyiddin Yassin as the new Prime Minister of Malaysia.

During the issue mapping process, we witnessed how the political situation and lockdowns augmented the insurgent sense of betrayal and frustration across different communities. As one of the participants said:

“The problem now is politics. Conversations at the coffee shops often surrounding the issues of “party-hopping”. When voters voted for their representatives during the general elections, the representatives should represent the people. But when they became the member of Parliament of state assemblyperson, they forgot their mandate that we, the people have given them.”¹²

Interestingly, political instability overshadowed the anxiety of the pandemic. The multiple lockdowns in the country paralysed many local and small businesses and caused many to lose their source of income. For us, the APPGM-SDG researchers, the sense of being betrayed and distrusted by the MP and state assemblypersons became a hindrance to investigating the social, economic and environmental issues on the ground. We relied on the Member of Parliament’s networks at the grassroots to reach out to the local leaders and communities. Thus, our invitations through the MP’s office deepened the misunderstanding that the grassroots communities had about the APPGM-SDG. Another participant explained how the misunderstanding would be inevitable through the networks of the MP:

“... the issue of village administration. The MPKK (head of the village) is too political centred. Villagers

¹² Kubang Pasu, Kedah; FGD on 26 March 2021

chose the leader, but the candidates were chosen by political parties. When the MP loss the seat, the MPKK also loss their positions.”¹³

The Majlis Pengurusan Komuniti Kampung (MPKK) (Village Community Management Council) is an institution set up by the Ministry of Rural Development in each village in Malaysia in 2018. It was to replace the Village Development and Security Committee, also known as Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JKKK). Its primary function is to manage and develop their respective villages. It is responsible for mobilising villagers to participate in the programmes organised by various government agencies. The head of the MPKK is assigned with an important role of bridging the gaps between the grassroots and the government agencies by conveying grassroots issues to the respective government agencies for effective and efficient governance at the grassroots levels.

Nonetheless, according to the participant, the political leanings of the MPKK had misdirected its important role as the grassroots representative. Its function as the bridge was broken as the grassroots community’s lost faith in their political representatives. Since our invitations to the grassroots communities came through the MP’s networks, we received lukewarm responses to our invitations during the three-day fieldwork at the parliamentary constituencies. The participant selections were skewed, as most of the participants in the discussion were the MP’s political supporters or those who expected material hand-outs from the MPs. Even though APPGM-SDG depicted the logo of the Malaysian parliament, it was challenging to convince communities of the Group’s bi-partisan stance. Some groups even blatantly rejected the invitation for interviews as they perceived APPGM-SDG as working with the politicians. Our explanation of APPGM-SDG’s bi-partisan stand often failed to convince those who

¹³ Kubang Pasu, Kedah; FGD on 26 March 2021

were adamant not to get involved in any political affairs or with the supporters of rival political parties.

IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICS IN ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH MPS

At the onset, the APPGM-SDG recognised that partnerships with and among multiple stakeholders are crucial for achieving the localisation of SDGs (SDG 17). Nonetheless, the issue mapping experience of the APPGM-SDG demonstrates that it is simplistic to assume that all stakeholders would understand and willingly cooperate to ensure an effective issue mapping process. As the previous section implied, the APPGM-SDG researchers had to confront the intricate local status quo, cultural frameworks and local politics that shape the relationships and networks among grassroots communities, between them and local leaders and authorities. In this section, I turn to the difficulties in obtaining the collaboration and winning the openness of the MPs to share social, economic, and environmental issues. The difficulties suggest their urgency to protect their political reputation, which are essential for their political mileage.

As mentioned, the issue mapping process begins by introducing the APPGM-SDG localisation of SDGs initiatives to the interested members of Parliament. The first step to the issue mapping process is to obtain the parliamentary constituency's profile from the MP's perspective. However, we observed that even after establishing an understanding with the MPs about the SDGs localisation process, some MPs were reserved about explaining the social, economic, and environmental issues in their constituencies. Instead, they highlighted their handouts of goods and food as their efforts to help the poor. They emphasise on their philanthropic acts to communities in need imply their intentions to demonstrate their contributions to their representative parliamentary constituency. This urge to highlight their services and contributions indicates the fierce political rivalry between them and their political opponents. Therefore, they seem to

believe that they could not afford to show any negativity or give out information that may suggest their incompetence to provide social services to their constituents. Some MPs took offence at the question of “Who are often being left behind in the state and local developmental plans?”

The MPs’ tendency to establish, protect and reinforce the public philanthropic reputation continued to hinder the APPGM-SDG issue mapping process during the three-day fieldwork. The objective of the three-day fieldwork was to meet with different local communities, specifically those living in poverty and minority groups. Nevertheless, due to the MP’s attempts to safeguard their political reputation, they would often direct the APPGM-SDG researchers away from groups deemed as “problematic” – those who have not shown support for the MPs or who have even opposed them. Hence, the participants who were invited and willingly attended the discussions often had good relationships with the MPs and were recipients of various benefits. The benefits are wide-ranging, whether in food handouts, financial capital or tools that enable the participants to venture into small businesses. Some of them received financial aid from the MPs or managed to obtain a housing unit from the People Housing Programme through networks.¹⁴ Some even received medical subsidies from the MPs. During the FGD, these participants tend to praise and show allegiance to the MPs and denied any issue that may suggest the incompetence of the MP. Consequently, discussions of any social, economic and environmental issues were masked by ambiguous responses or denied altogether. As a result, the APPGM-SDG researchers could not effectively gauge the local issues from the communities.

¹⁴ People Housing Programme (Program Perumahan Rakyat or PPR) is a Malaysian government’s initiative to provide low-cost housing scheme for households with monthly income less than RM2,500.

Furthermore, the MPs often perceived the three-day APPGM-SDG fieldwork as a rare opportunity to meet directly with the local communities. Hence, many MPs would attend the discussions, and some even wanted to sit in, listen and understand the issues affecting the communities' well-being and livelihoods. Their participation often had paradoxical implications for the APPGM-SDG researchers. On one hand, the presence of the MP could serve as a platform for the communities to voice their concerns and issues affecting their livelihoods, and pitch for a solution to their political representatives. For instance, a group of villagers at the Sik constituency lamented the seriousness of drug addiction among their village's young people. The participants recalled several incidents when outsiders drove into the village and sold drugs to the young people. Even though they had lodged police reports, the police failed to arrest the drug dealers, but many drug addicts were arrested and sent to rehabilitation. The participants suggested that their village required better surveillance and a guard post, which would allow them to have better control of who could enter their village. The MP, who was with the researchers during the discussion, immediately agreed to bear the cost of building two guard posts at the village entrance.

Nonetheless, some communities perceived the MPs as authoritative figures, especially those who have clientelist relationships with the MPs as recipients of some form of assistance. These communities would often appear uncomfortable to speak freely in the MP's presence. Some local leaders even deemed it necessary to have a brief ceremonious procedure of welcoming the MPs to their village or residential areas. We observed, upon the arrival of the MPs for discussion, they were given space and time to deliver speeches as a ceremonious formality and inhibited the expression and voice of the participants. Thus, the findings obtained under such circumstances were limited and may not effectively reveal the realities on the ground.

The paradoxical reactions of the local communities often reflect the significant roles of MPs at the grassroots level. The APPGM-SDG researchers observed how the clientelist relationships between the MP and the grassroots are pivotal in advancing the politicians' careers. More importantly, to achieve the SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, this scenario illuminates the importance of considering the contextual grassroots networks in establishing the partnerships necessary for successfully achieving the localisation of SDGs. In sum, the MPs' roles are crucial in the localisation process as they can be either the catalyst or hindrance to effective localisation of the SDGs.

DIFFICULTIES IN ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Many emphasised that the local government plays a pivotal role in facilitating and mobilising local development stakeholders such as NGOs, private sectors, and grassroots communities for inclusive, sustainable development at the local level.¹⁵ Nevertheless, these scholars have not discussed how the local government is the driver in mobilising local stakeholders towards sustainable development. APPGM-SDG also acknowledges the crucial role of district and local governments at the forefront of working for grassroots communities. As such, our engagement with the local and district government agencies entailed careful strategizing and gauging the sentiments, often political, of the state and district government officers. Therefore, on the third day of the three-day fieldwork, the APPGM-SDG researchers invited district and local government agencies for a discussion to obtain their perspectives and opinions on the social,

¹⁵ Slack, Lucy. "The post-2015 global agenda-a role for local government." *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 15 (2014), Reddy, PS "Localising the sustainable development goals (SDGs): the role of local government in context." *African Journal of Public Affairs* 9, No. 2 (2016), and Annan-Aggrey, Eunice, Elmond Bandauko, and Godwin Arku. "Localising the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa: implementation challenges and opportunities." *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 24 (2021),

economic and environmental issues in their respective parliamentary constituencies. Unfortunately, our attempts were often unsuccessful.

One of the contributing factors was, again, the political upheaval after the change of government from PH to PN. The APPGM-SDG researchers were confronted with the local government's imposition of heavy red tape within the existing bureaucracy, especially when many of the officers were unfamiliar with the APPGM-SDG and its bi-partisan stance. It is noteworthy that the Bahasa translation of "APPGM-SDG" is "Kumpulan Rentas Parti Parlimen Malaysia Untuk Matlamat Pembangunan Lestari". The words, "Rentas Parti" (translated from All-Party) raised the alarm of some officers who misunderstood the terms as its direct translation, which is "crossing from one party to another". During times of political instability due to the infamous "party-hopping" behaviour, these words became highly sensitive. As a result of this confusion around the term "Rentas Parti", many district and local government agencies shied away from invitations for discussion. In one parliamentary constituency, the government officials even pressured APPGM-SDG into abandoning research and localisation of SDGs because "the MP does not represent the Malaysian government of the day", said the officer. In another parliamentary constituency, all the district and local government agencies rejected the invitation for discussion due to a written order from the directors of their respective departments. In other parliamentary constituencies, the poor attendance of the government officers constricted the discussion to gather meaningful inputs from the local government agencies about their SDG initiatives.

Conversely, to encourage more constructive discussions with the few officers who attended the meeting, the APPGM-SDG researchers often had to present the findings more carefully to ensure that the officers would not be offended by the discoveries of issues related to their respective departments. It is noteworthy that, at the local levels, the officers must attend a monthly meeting to discuss the

recent and on-going issues that the local communities have raised and that are related to their respective departments. Hence, most issues that the APPGM-SDG researchers found were not new to the locals, and the issues presented did not surprise district officers and them. However, many would still be offended when we highlighted the familiar issues by presenting the complaints and grievances from the grassroots communities. Instead of constructively discussing the issues, some officers refused to disclose any of the decisions or measures already taken to resolve them because the issues were none of their department's concerns. Even though some officers appeared open to discussions, they claim to have limited power in solving the issues. Therefore, they perceived the meeting with APPGM-SDG as futile and often a waste of time. They even advised that APPGM-SDG focus on the achievements of the local and district officers' efforts and dismiss any allegations and discontentment by the grassroots.

Despite the lukewarm responses, the APPGM-SDG researchers still believe that engagement with the local and district government agencies is essential in the issue mapping process. Notably, out of the 57 parliamentary constituencies that the APPGM-SDG engaged with, there were at least three parliamentary constituencies in which the researchers had received supportive and enthusiastic participation from the district and local government agencies. A possible reason for the enthusiastic participation was the supportive relationships that the government agencies had with the MPs. The district officers even offered to assist in the three-day site visits and participated in community discussions. The researchers also found that the discussion with the communities, with the presence of the local government officers, helps bridge the communication gap between both parties. On one hand, this was an opportunity for the communities to communicate with government agencies directly and obtain explanations for their issues. On the other hand, the local government agencies had the opportunity to explain the challenges in

resolving the longstanding issues to the communities and eliminate any misunderstanding of negligence and ignorance.

Furthermore, when discussions with the local and district government agencies received enthusiastic responses, the APPGM-SDG researchers could obtain further explanations of the existing issues, and current and on-going local plans. We could further explore possibilities to establish synergies between the politicians, grassroots communities, and the local government's plans for sustainable development. An essential outcome of the discussion was to foster a better understanding of the issues and challenges in resolving them. Such understandings could be a catalyst for more effective partnerships in achieving the localisation of the SDGs.

ANALYSING THE CONSTRICTIONS OF CHALLENGES, BIASES, AND LIMITATIONS

Indeed, the empirical experiences and data from the APPGM-SDG issue mapping process cannot be regarded as representative. However, these findings can still be intelligible to the researchers.¹⁶ As the above analysis suggests, the various challenges are also crucial empirical findings for effective strategizing of the localisation of SDGs. In this section, I explore the challenges faced during the issue mapping process in the six parliamentary constituencies (Kubang Pasu, Sik, Baling, Permatang Pauh, Batu Kawan and Ipoh Barat), and how the experience suggests the significance of employing a multi-stakeholder's approach that includes the grassroots communities in the location of the SDG.

CONTRIBUTING EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS TO THE ISSUES

Thus far, most studies about SDGs in Malaysia have been conducted through quantitative surveys. For example, the Department of

¹⁶ MacLure, Maggie. Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology. *International journal of qualitative studies in education* 26, No.6 (2013)

Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) has provided a list of available data that could be useful for assessing sustainable development across countries. For example, Ariffin and Ng (2020) found Malaysian youths in higher education institutions to have a high awareness of SDGs through a survey of 402 respondents.¹⁷ However, the statistical data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia lacks contextual causal factors on incidence of poverty in a given locality. Invisible people such as the stateless, refugees and migrants are often left undocumented in the official data. The APPGM-SDG's qualitative and bottom-up research methods made up for this lack by documenting directly the lived experiences of and issues affecting those who are often left behind in the country's official data and sustainable development.

Furthermore, the empirical data from the APPGM-SDG issue mapping contextualises the issues, and unravelling the nuances of different localities. For instance, drug dealings and addiction have been long standing issues in Malaysia. These issues are especially rampant among the youths living in rural villages and urban poor. A woman participant from a low-cost flat said:

“Put it simply, when come to the issue of drugs, we (the residents) are like balls. I have my own experience. When my younger brother was involved in drug addiction, I went to the police. The policeman said I should go to AADK (the National Anti-Drug Agency). I went to AADK, they told me to go to the police. Didn't I become a ball? Are they expecting to see death before they would take action?”¹⁸

¹⁷ Ariffin, Fatin Nabilla, and Theam Foo Ng. "Understanding and opinion on sustainable development among youths in higher educational institutions in Penang, Malaysia." *Social Indicators Research* 147 (2020).

¹⁸ Ipoh Barat, Perak; FGD on 8 April 2021

The participant's experience reflected the realities of the issue on the ground. Indeed, the particular experience of this participant is not generalizable to other locations. However, it is evidence of weak governance of this long-standing issue, though this illustrates the initiatives of some local people to resolve the issue by seeking help from the authorities. More importantly, as implied by the participant, the lack of governance fostered doubt and distrust in the enforcement.

In a rural village, the villagers alleged that they knew who the drug dealers were and the locations for dealings and exchanges. Some even witnessed strangers entering their village to deal drugs with the young villagers. A participant recalled:

“...At 2 o’clock in the morning, a car came (into the village) carrying drugs... Our children came out (from the rehab) and went back in again after six months... The main cause is their peers... More than ten times they have gone in and out from the rehab... All parents want their children to be good, not involved in drugs addiction.”¹⁹

The recount from this participant demonstrates how they were aware of the drug dealing activities in their village. His response also indicates a sense of helplessness in preventing their children from being involved in drug addiction. It also indicates the prevalence of drug addiction among the youth in a rural village where parents were often busy as estate workers, struggling to make ends meet. Such contextual understanding of the issue of drug addiction allowed the APPGM-SDG researchers to gauge the complexity and hence, the difficulties in overcoming the issues. Nevertheless, it is also worth highlighting from the participant’s remark that there is a similar initiative from the local people in attempting to resolve the issue

¹⁹ Sik, Kedah; FGD on 28 February 2021

plaguing the youths living among them. Their initiative suggests a potential partnership that can be established between the local authorities and the grassroots communities to curb the issue more effectively.

The empirical data from the APPGM-SDG issue mapping has also uncovered the geographical factors that affect the general social and economic issues within certain localities. Vaziri, Acheampong, Downs, and Rafee Majid (2019) have used hotspot analysis and geographically weighted regression to explain the spatial analysis, mapping and visualisation of poverty in Malaysia.²⁰ The APPGM-SDG employs the traditional qualitative approach of visiting remote villages and documenting the villagers' narratives directly. Given the specificity of our issue mapping approach, the empirical insights obtained from the local communities also provide vivid accounts of their poverty conditions. For instance, the APPGM-SDG researchers visited a small remote village situated at the Thailand-Malaysia border. The issues mapped indicated how the location of the village was a causal factor for the rampant issues of smuggling of drugs, cigarettes, alcohol and other goods, and illegal trespassing involving the communities. Besides, we also found a significant issue of unregistered cross-border marriage, resulting in many "stateless" children. A participant explained:

"When living closer to the borders, many villagers would get married over there (Thailand). In Kampung Padang Satu, there are 16 families who got married over there. They have not registered their marriage here. When they conceived children, how can they get the birth certificates and identification cards for their children? Most of them

²⁰ Vaziri, Mehrdad, Michael Acheampong, Joni Downs, and Mohammad Rafee Majid. "Poverty as a function of space: Understanding the spatial configuration of poverty in Malaysia for Sustainable Development Goal number one." *GeoJournal* 84, no. 5 (2019).

don't have. Sometimes, in the primary schools, the teachers would allow (the children to attend the school), until Standard Six. The children could read and write. But when they reach the level of secondary school, the teachers can't help them anymore. The children need identification card. Sometimes, the principal of the secondary school would help."²¹

The situation explained by the participant revealed the implication of mandatory marriage registration on offsprings in Malaysia. According to the Law Reform Act (Marriage and Divorce) 1976 (Act 164), a couple's marriage which is not registered with the National Registration Department (Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara, or JPN) is not considered legitimate. Even though their children are born in Malaysia, they would not be considered Malaysian citizens automatically because the couple are required to show a legal and valid marriage certificate when applying for the birth certificate. If a married couple has not registered their marriage in Malaysia, their offspring born in Malaysia would not have a valid birth certificate and hence, be considered "stateless". That said, the married couple could still register their marriage with the JPN at any time. However, a late penalty of MYR100 will be imposed on the couple after six months and an additional MYR50 for the subsequent six months. For villagers living in poverty, as indicated by the participant above, the inability to pay the fine would hinder them from registering their marriage. As a result, their children remain stateless.

A stateless child without formal citizenship documentation is not eligible for education and healthcare subsidised by the Malaysian government. Without citizenship documentation, they cannot obtain a passport, bank account and any type of licenses. Although the local school principals and teachers might sometimes allow the children to

²¹ Kubang Pasu, Kedah; FGD on 28 February 2021

attend primary and secondary school for basic education, they would not be able to advance further in their studies. Indeed, the issue of “statelessness” in Malaysia has garnered much scholarly and political interest. The findings from the APPGM-SDG issue mapping further contextualised the issue based on the geographical factor. Such lived realities of the communities living by the country’s border remain understudied.

Furthermore, the APPGM-SDG issue mapping also documented that the sense of being marginalised and discriminated against by the Malaysian government was echoed across different Malay groups. Existing literature on the multi-racial and multi-cultural society in Malaysian politics often revolves around narratives of discrimination and marginalisation of minorities in a Malay Muslim country. For decades, Malay Muslims have been perceived to have the unique privilege of “sons of the soil” (bumiputra). The privilege grants them entitlement to more business opportunities, land ownership, high quotas to enter national universities and employment in the public sector.²² Shamsul argues that such “ethnicised” arguments are “academic dishonesties”.²³ They signify an unfortunate situation that many Malaysian social scientists do not dare to admit.

The APPGM-SDG issue mapping results further show how the ethnicised arguments have driven the oversight of many issues the Malay grassroots communities faced. For instance, Malay Muslims farmers, fishers, single mothers, and youth are often over-represented in the APPGM-SDG issue mapping findings across the 57

²² Balasubramaniam, Vejai. "A divided nation: Malay political dominance, Bumiputera material advancement and national identity in Malaysia." *National Identities* 9, no. 1 (2007), Joseph, Cynthia. "Ethnicities and education in Malaysia: Difference, inclusions and exclusions." In *The education of diverse student populations* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), and Floyd, Calvin W. "Sons of The Soil: The Past, Present, and Future of Malaysia's Bumiputera." *Perspectives on Business and Economics* 37 (2019).

²³ Shamsul, A. B. "Nations-of-Intent in Malaysia." In *Asian Forms of the Nation* (London: Routledge, 2013), 344.

constituencies. The participants often did not shy away from sharing their experiences of being discriminated against. As an example, a Malay farmer lamented:

“The chillies that we, Malay, planted are all graded E. No matter how good the chillies are, they are graded E. But others’ chillies are graded A. When we sell the chillies, our profits can’t make up for the debts that we have pay... Another example, cucumber. Other people could sell their cucumber for RM2, we could only sell it for 20 – 30 cents. We are not lazy, we work, and work hard. But no matter how hard we work, what we get is more debts.”²⁴

The participant is a member of the Lembaga Pertubuhan Peladang (LPP) (Farmers Organisation). LPP was established under the 1973 (Act 109) Farmers Organisation Act. It is supposed to be owned by farmers but supervised by the National Farmers Organisation (NAFAS), state and district farmer's organisations. As members of the LPP, the farmers are entitled to subsidies and assistance in planting and marketing their crops. Nonetheless, during the discussion, many farmers agreed with the remark made by the participant above.

Besides, the APPGM-SDG researchers also recorded that Malay fishers, and their Chinese and Indian peers talked about poor enforcement by authorities to control the trespassing of other fishers into designated zones, the destruction of the seabed and depletion of fish, causing them loss to their income. Single mothers and senior citizens of different ethnic groups echoed the same issues of the lack of government support and social protection. Residents of different ethnic villages living on privately- owned lands recounted how they were asked to leave with minimum compensation. The accounts of these various ethnic groups implied experiences of being marginalised

²⁴ Baling, Kedah; FGD on 24 April 2021

and discriminated against. More importantly, the lived experiences and realities of Malay communities have debunked the mainstream notion that they are all part of the privileged majority in a Malay Muslim-led country.

INTERPRETING HINDRANCES RELATED TO POLITICAL TENSIONS AT THE LOCAL AND DISTRICT LEVELS

Many studies have been done about the political patronage between politicians and communities during general elections and through more entrenched government-linked agencies, corporate and policies.²⁵ These existing studies are essential in shedding light on how politicians establish and maintain their political support with their electorates. Weiss (2017) argues that it is important to understand the “personal touch” by politicians with the grassroots in analysing politicians’ strategies to hold onto their office.²⁶ Malaysian politicians invest their time and money to establish a “personal touch” with their electorates as part of their duties. One of the laments among policymakers in Malaysia is that, though they much prefer to concentrate on policy making, their constituents want to see their faces on the ground.²⁷ Few scholars, however, have addressed the linkages between the daily dynamics of grassroots political situations before and after the general elections campaign.

The APPGM-SDG researchers discovered that community members overly praised their local political representatives for their support because they (the political representatives) attended

²⁵ Pepinsky, Thomas "Autocracy, Elections, and Fiscal Policy: Evidence from Malaysia." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 42, no. 1-2 (2007), Gomez, Edmund Terence, and K. S. Jomo. *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*. 2nd ed. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Gomez, E. Terence. "Malaysia's political economy: Ownership and control of the corporate sector." *Misplaced democracy: Malaysian politics and people* (2014)

²⁶ Weiss, Meredith L. "Going to the Ground (or Astroturf): A Grassroots View of Regime Resilience." *Democratization* 24, no. 2 (2017)

²⁷ Weiss, Meredith L. "A Grassroots View of Regime Resilience." *Democratization* (2017).

weddings, funerals, disasters, festivals, and celebrations organised by the communities. Some MPs even made sure they visited those who had fallen ill or were involved in accidents. Besides the MPs, some assemblypersons too are often compelled to respond to individual requests, such as settling accumulated outstanding utilities, rent, or medical bills. Some members of the communities receive weekly, fortnightly, or even monthly food supplies from the MPs or state assemblyperson's offices in their area. These political representatives called their offices "service centres", where the communities could make requests for their services.

The three-day fieldwork with the selected communities together with the MPs has allowed APPGM-SDG researchers to encounter first-hand such intricate, dynamic political clientelism and patronage. Indeed, not all MPs have extensive local patronage with grassroots communities. Hence, the APPGM-SDG issue mapping has created opportunities for the MPs to establish and reinforce clientelist relationships with the grassroots communities. During the discussion, some of these MPs took the opportunity to give handouts to participants who attended the discussions. Some participants came with expectations of receiving handouts, especially in areas where the communities have been receiving handouts from various politicians over the years.

The APPGM-SDG researchers observed how handing out food, materials, and money is a common practice for politicians from the mainstream and opposition to garner and retain electoral support from the grassroots. Regardless of the political motives, the poor communities clearly benefited from the material and monetary aid.²⁸ Therefore, many participants were willing to take time off their daily routine and work to participate in the discussions even when we held

²⁸ Further reading of how the poor communities are benefiting from the hand-outs from politicians, please refer to "Capital structure and political patronage: The case of Malaysia." *Journal of Banking & Finance* 30, no. 4: 1291-1308.

the discussions on weekdays. During the fieldwork, some communities even openly asked the MPs to pay for their children's school fees, transportation, uniforms, and construction fees to fix rooftops.

However, such political clientelist relations between the grassroots and their political representatives adversely affect Malaysia's sustainable development.²⁹ The continuous handouts have cultivated a sense of dependency among the communities on free food and materials. Some community leaders even opined that the relentless handouts of food by politicians, NGOs, and charitable organisations have stunted the poor communities' motivation for self-reliant livelihood. The communities do not see the urgency for work to secure a stable income because they could still have free food on the table despite not having to work. As a result, government initiatives to support the communities in generating incomes for themselves, such as providing skills training, entrepreneurial knowledge and models, have often received lukewarm responses from the communities.

Notwithstanding, the effectiveness of the handout practice also demonstrates that the MPs can be the catalysts for initiatives to alleviating poverty in needy communities sustainably, if they choose to do so. After all, the seemingly hegemonic relationships based on particularistic benefits are fleeting by nature. When politicians cannot keep up with maintaining the "personal touch" with communities, they may risk losing support to preserve their political careers. Hence, the material handouts are not sustainable, even for their political careers in the long term. Instead, the MPs' resources spent on handouts could be used to assist the poor communities with other sustainable means. For instance, the resources could provide skills training, education and self-help workshops for the communities. The

²⁹ Dettman, Sebastian, and Meredith L. Weiss. "Has patronage lost its punch in Malaysia?" *The Round Table* 107, no. 6 (2018).

skills could empower the communities in generating income to improve their livelihoods.

Furthermore, the social, economic and environmental issues on the ground are intimately related. For instance, long-standing issues of drugs are not only a social issue but also an economic one, especially for those who rely on drug dealerships as a source of income for livelihood. Hence, it can also be an over spilling implication of a lack of employment opportunities and increased living expenses.

Indeed, an integrative form of governance is paramount for resolving these interrelated issues. Nevertheless, stakeholders' partnerships are equally crucial for formulating and executing effective and efficient solutions. As the APPGM-SDG issue mapping findings show, the stakeholders should encompass not only the Members of Parliament and the Malaysian government but also the local government, NGOs and, most importantly, members of the grassroots communities. The lived realities of the communities can contribute different dimensions and nuances in formulating pragmatic policies and strategies.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I discuss the qualitative and bottom-up issue mapping approach by the APPGM-SDG as the first step toward the localisation of the SDGs. The empirical knowledge and data analysis have revealed how entrenched the complex social and political realities are on the grounds. For APPGM-SDG researchers to effectively map grassroots issues, we must find ways to navigate the intricate political dynamics even at local levels to uncover social, economic, and environmental issues.

It is precisely these complex and diverse realities that complicate the APPGM-SDG issue mapping process. To conclude, two fundamental enablers for the successful localisation of the SDGs are

worth highlighting. Firstly, establishing polycentric strategies for localising SDGs are crucial to address the different aspirations of the national government with the local and district governments. The APPGM-SDG issue mapping experiences present the awareness and appreciation of SDGs at the local and district level of government that have been overshadowed by the prevailing political tensions and instability. The different aspirations between the national and local levels created policy decoupling rather than polycentric efforts in localising the SDGs.

Nonetheless, methodological reflection on the mapping of issues indicates that political maturity is the second fundamental enabler for achieving the localisation of SDGs on the ground. It is worth emphasising here that the limitations as discussed in this article, also unravels the crucial roles and responsibilities of politicians and local and district governments in facilitating and mobilising the localisation efforts. The issue mapping experiences demonstrated the importance of concerted efforts between the local and district governments, MPs and civil society, local leaders and grassroots communities. The posited view is that hindrances due to political tensions can be overcome by the persistent engagement of multiple stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable development for Malaysian society that surpasses any political gain.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Addressing SDG Implementation Challenges: Exploring the Role of the National SDG Centre and Capacity Building

Zainal Abidin and Nur Syahirah Khanum

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presents 17 goals for United Nations' signatories as a global universal framework to balance social, economic, and environmental development. Our Common Future report states, "Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life"¹ (Brundtland Commission, 1987). Additionally, the Brundtland Commission defined a crucial emphasis of sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Thus, it shifts the focus on sustainability towards the assessments of needs so that the necessary actions can be prioritised in pursuing development, even beyond 2030.

The best way of identifying these needs is through deep engagement with various stakeholders who are either the implementers or the beneficiaries of the development plan. Agenda 2030 is the first global development plan that represents a complex, holistic challenge of interlinkages and interconnectedness. Understanding the scope of interlinkages among SDGs is key to unlocking their full potential and ensuring that progress in one area is not made at the expense of another. For example, social and economic development can positively impact the environment

¹ United Nations, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (New York: United Nations, 1987), 16, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.

instead of harming the environment. Here, capacity building programmes have gained importance in achieving development needs. According to Bizikova and colleagues (2014), synthesising the contextual needs of a particular capacity building programme across regions requires effective multi-stakeholder engagements to ensure their interests and concerns are well considered in the training process, especially to understand and implement effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms². This shows that the capacity building mission reinforces each interconnected element of the SDGs. Thus, capacity building serves as an opportune platform to understand the trade-offs and synergies emerging from relationships between the goals and is crucial for achieving long-lasting sustainable development outcomes.

This paper argues that the implementation of SDGs is centred on localising and contextualising the Agenda to on the ground implementation. Since it is a national commitment that requires a seamless cascading process from top to bottom, it needs a centralised supporting mechanism as a coordination platform that catalyses myriads of localised action, and further discusses the possible model for SDGs implementation at the local level through an invigorated function of an SDG Centre. The centre is envisaged as a focal point to plan, monitor, and evaluate the various programmes, including capacity building and building effective engagements and meaningful partnerships throughout Malaysia. Thus, strengthening the whole-of-government (WoG) and whole-of-society (WoS) approach for the implementation of SDGs in Malaysia.

As the establishment of the centre is in its nascent stages, it is essential to analyse the existing governance structure and initiatives of the on-going localising agenda and identify key lessons

² Livia Bizikova et al., *Summary of Capacity-building Needs to Advance Sustainable Development Planning and Implementation* (Canada: SDplanNet, 2014), https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/sdplannet_summary.pdf.

for the optimal contribution of the National SDG Centre. In the following sections, this paper identifies the approaches, gaps, and challenges of current localising SDGs approaches, highlighting the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on the Sustainable Development Goals or APPGM-SDG's activities and their contributions. The last section will further argue that one of the most important strategies for localising SDGs is the capacity-building programme while presenting the need for a coordinated platform to further the agenda of localising SDGs.

Institutional Mechanisms for Localising SDGs

Localising the SDGs has been a call to action since 2019 when the UN Secretary-General called for the participation of all sectors of society in pursuing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was a crucial encouragement to move towards a Decade of Action to fully operationalise the goals, targets, and indicators by all the UN signatories. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), "localising is to consider subnational contexts from setting goals and targets, defining implementation strategies and measurement indicators while monitoring and evaluating progress at the local or subnational level".³ Furthermore, in the localisation of the SDGs, bottom-up perspectives and action is emphasised alongside the function of the SDGs as a framework for national and local development policy. SDGs are a means and a desirable end to meet the development needs for this decade.

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), *Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews: Reviewing local progress to accelerate action for the Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations, 2020), https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Asia-Pacific%20Regional%20Guidelines%20on%20VLRs_0.pdf.

While the call for the Decade of Action is targeted toward governments, the actual implementation of the SDGs and the benefits of the achievements involve all agents of society. Localising SDGs then becomes a significant action in recognising the role of other agents and allowing them to participate in the implementation and achieving the Agenda 2030. One of the fundamental guiding principles to implement the SDGs is to “leave no one behind”. United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] (2018) defines those left behind as the people who “lack the choices and capabilities that enable others to participate in or benefit from human development”.⁴ This goes hand in hand with the concept of sustainable development introduced by the Brundtland Commission (1987), where the basic needs of all are met while further positive life aspirations can be satisfied. Both concepts and principles put people and their aspirations at the centre of development, and this should be visible in localising the SDGs.

The localisation of SDGs suggests crucial approaches in governance: the whole-of-government (WoG) and the whole-of-society (WoS) approaches. Biggeri (2021) further asserts that achieving the transformational 2030 agenda requires a participatory, whole-of-government approach, “which is in line with the Sustainable Human Development paradigm and its pillars of equity, sustainability, productivity, and participation”.⁵ According to Cázarez-Grageda (2019), the WoG approach indicates that various parts of government cooperatively facilitate synergies, manage trade-offs and avoid or minimise negative impacts on economic, social, and

⁴ Sarah Renner et al., *What Does it Mean to Leave No One Behind? A UNDP Discussion Paper and Framework for Implementation*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2018), 7, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion_Paper_LNOB_EN_lres.pdf.

⁵ Mario Biggeri, “Editorial: A “Decade for Action” on SDG Localisation,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 22, 4 (12 October 2021):706-712, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1986809>.

environmental aspects of development.⁶ Governments are also required to engage with various stakeholders under the WoS approach to implement the Agenda 2030. This meaningful participation “requires an enabling environment that promotes partnership and contributions by a wide range of stakeholders to collective impact.”⁷

This brings forth a renewed mandate for the government, which is to provide service to its people, and engage and consult the people for their developmental needs. Smoke and Nixon, 2016 argued that an innovative multilevel governance approach driving policy coherence towards a shared vision is required. It was further asserted that the multilevel governance approach needs “a vertical alignment between the various levels of governance (i.e., international, national, regional and local) and horizontal engagement between public, private and social actors”.⁸ The focus on localising SDGs has resulted in various initiatives and discussions with regard to multilevel governance and accelerating local actions for SDGs implementation.⁹ Within the SDGs themselves, there are two

⁶ Karina Cázarez-Grageda, *The Whole of Society Approach: Levels of engagement and meaningful participation of different stakeholders in the review process of the 2030 Agenda*, (Bonn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2018), <https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/Whole-of-Society-P4R-Discussion-Paper-Oct.-2018-1.pdf>.

⁷ Shannon Kindornay and Zeki Kocaata, *A whole-of-society approach: Partnerships to realize the 2030 Agenda*, (Vancouver: British Columbia Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC) & Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), 2019), 2, <https://www.bccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Canada-Partnership.pdf>.

⁸ Paul Smoke and Hamish Nixon, *Sharing Responsibilities and Resources among Levels of Governments*. (New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016), <https://www.local2030.org/library/353/Sharing-responsibilities-and-resources-among-levels-of-governments-Localizing-the-SDGs.pdf>.

⁹ Pytrik Dieuwke Oosterhof, *Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals to Accelerate Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (Asian Development Bank, 2018),

different goals supporting localisation: SDG 11 and SDG 16, respectively, with suggested targets related to governance and local implementation towards the achievement of the SDGs.

A Brief Review of Current SDG Localisation Initiatives

The current initiatives and discussions concerning the localisation of SDGs have illustrated good examples as well as challenges. Under the banner of APPGM-SDG, there were at least 30 capacity building programmes conducted throughout different districts in Malaysia such as Jeli, Pendang, Sik representing urban, semi-urban and rural areas. The participants who were officers of the District Offices, community members and non-governmental organisations of the respective districts received the program very well. It has increased the level of awareness on SDG and also has served as a significant platform for the participants to network with each other outside their regular meeting platforms.

However, at the same time, the capacity building program also revealed several challenges faced at the ground level in the implementation process of SDGs. Among the most common challenges for SDGs implementation is the need to coordinate vertical alignment and horizontal stakeholders' engagement, as well as the lack of capacity of local stakeholders. While the SDGs are universal and applicable widely throughout its signatories, these challenges too, are universal. Local stakeholders' lack of capacity has long been identified in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which also included a localisation component.¹⁰ In Malaysia specifically, local governments are often operating under capacity and under-resourced that they can only take mitigation

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/472021/governance-brief-033-sdgs-implementation-2030-agenda.pdf>.

¹⁰ Oosterhof, *Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals*.

measures for short-term issues rather than dealing with long-term developmental challenges.¹¹

The need for effective multi-level coordination in the localisation of SDGs was presented in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). While the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance, as a civil society organisation, has been in engagement with the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), the engagement with civil societies for the VNR was done on an ad-hoc basis, gathering inputs regarding SDG achievements from the perspectives of civil societies. For a more meaningful engagement and participation of the multi-stakeholders in the consultation process and subsequent establishment of partnerships at the national and sub-national levels, the role of coordination is very important to ensure optimal outcomes.¹²

The identified challenges must be addressed to operationalise the SDGs at all local levels involving local and regional governments or local authorities. Localisation of SDGs, thus, requires the focus on improving multi-stakeholder and multilevel governance coordination while increasing the capacities of local governments and other stakeholders. This is imperative for a more sustained development that benefits the people and planet while contributing to economic growth. Biggeri in 2021 asserted the importance of governance mechanisms at the local level taking into consideration the interactions among authorities, institutions, and society as a whole, and the prevalence of forms of exclusions, inequalities, power imbalance, and vulnerabilities that are immediately experienced by the people. In localising SDGs, putting the peoples' vulnerabilities and lived experiences at the centre of its coordinating mechanism is vital

¹¹ Alizan Mahadi, "Localising SDGs: Observations from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on SDGs," in *Making SDGs Matter: Leaving No One Behind*, ed. Alizan Mahadi and Nazran Zhafri (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia), (2021), 140-149. <https://www.isis.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SDG-Book.pdf>.

¹² Cázares-Grageda, *The Whole of Society Approach*.

to ensure the implementation of SDGs. This cannot happen through the top-down approaches at the local level, instead it needs to be balanced with a robust bottom-up mechanism supporting meaningful partnerships among governments, corporations, academia, and civil society organisations.

Malaysia's Approaches for Localising SDGs: Lessons and Opportunities from APPGM-SDG and VNRs

The identified challenges for localisation of SDGs serve as crucial areas for developing strategies for implementing and achieving the SDGs. While the lack of capacity in local governance and the lack of effective governance mechanisms can be seen as separate issues, they are intertwined in pursuing the SDGs at the local level. For instance, while SDGs 11.3 and 16.7 call for an enhanced capacity for participatory decision-making, SDG 11 specifically targets human settlement planning and management. In contrast, SDG 16 broadly focuses on governance at all levels. Furthermore, critical messages consulted by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UN-Habitat and UNDP strongly suggest that effective local governance ensures the inclusion of stakeholders. Localisation of SDGs requires an integrated multilevel governance and multi-stakeholder approach with a strong national commitment of providing adequate legal frameworks, institutional and financial capacity. Effective multi-stakeholder and multilevel governance is crucial so that the capacity of local government is increased.

The government of Malaysia has agreed to establish the National SDG Centre "aimed at empowering and accelerating programmes for a better and sustainable future for the nation" while encouraging the development of Voluntary Local Review (VLR) reports.¹³ Similar to the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process, it

¹³ New Straits Times, "Govt to establish National SDG centre," September 6, 2022, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/government-public-policy/2022/09/828867/govt-establish-national-sdg-centre>.

assesses the achievements of the SDGs at the local level, emphasising the local contexts instead of the national contexts. Currently, the EPU is the primary coordinator for mainstreaming SDGs at the national level and utilising the SDGs for national planning. However, the SDGs are yet to be fully translated and operationalized at the local level to further pursue sustainable development from a localised perspective.

In Malaysia, Mahadi expands that the localisation of SDGs faces the following issues: 1) fundamental structural challenges where the local authority lacks mandate and institutional support, 2) lack of funding and resources at the local government level, 3) lack of awareness of the SDGs at the state and local government level, and lastly, 4) the overall national political landscape exacerbating silos due to the opposing political configuration between the state and federal government, and or the Parliamentarians and state government. While these challenges are acknowledged, there are key lessons from the work of APPGM-SDG.¹⁴

The APPGM-SDG has garnered the participation of Parliamentarians as local champions with the convening power to gather multi-stakeholders, including civil society representatives and local businesses, in utilising the SDGs. The activities of APPGM-SDG in its pilot phase (2020) are issue mapping, capacity building, and implementing small-scale solution projects addressing the identified issues. In 2021, it further expanded from 10 parliamentary constituencies to 20 constituencies with a strengthened capacity for policy advocacy. The utilisation of SDGs through its activities shows the possibilities for SDGs as an effective tool for integrated policy making throughout the whole policy cycle considering its interlinked targets and indicators.¹⁵ Furthermore, in exploring the possible mechanism for the localisation of SDGs, all its activities actively engage with governments, academia and think tanks, businesses, and

¹⁴ Mahadi, "Localising SDGs."

¹⁵ Mahadi, "Localising SDGs."

civil society organisations. In particular, the implementation of the capacity-building programme significantly requires a whole-of-government and multilevel approach with state government, local district offices, and local councils.

The implementation of the capacity building programme further highlights the challenges, especially concerning the present silos within the governance and the lack of awareness and communication regarding the SDGs at the district level. The present silos within the multilevel governance are seen as the lack of integration of SDGs from the national level planning towards the state level, cascading to the district level. In order to implement the capacity building programme at the district level, the main stakeholder identified is the district office to become a collaborating partner. The silos are evident when some of the district offices were not able to collaboratively execute this project because matters concerning the SDGs are beyond their mandate, and perceived as the responsibility of the local authority or the local council.

This illustrates that the buy-in and support from local councils and district offices are crucial and required to execute the program successfully. Only on a few occasions is the approval for collaboration directly granted by the District Officers, but the endorsement from the State Secretary or the Chief Minister is required at most of the time in certain states. Therefore, in getting the approval to conduct the program in the respective states, the organiser had to play a more active role in advocating for the SDGs and communicating to all state-level stakeholders for their buy-ins and, ultimately, their support in executing the programs.

In organising the capacity-building programmes, it is evident that there are varied attitudes and awareness concerning the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. Biggeri stated that taking the "whole-of-government" approach, which "integrates and

aligns across sectors, departments and administrative organisations to design and implement integrated, balanced and mutually reinforcing policy packages” is urgent in this Decade of Action, to implement SDGs strategies more coherently.¹⁶ However, considering the low level of awareness of SDGs at the local level, the effort to integrate and align the SDGs could be futile. Indicators and targets may not be adequately developed according to the local context, which further undermines the effort to monitor and evaluate the progress of SDGs. At this point, nationally, governments are putting considerable efforts into aligning existing laws, policies, and programmes. At the same time " they have been less adept at developing new integrated strategies for achieving the SDGs and in devising evaluation strategies."¹⁷

Participation and engagement with local governments in the preparation for the 2021 VNRs has not been significant. In the preparation for the next VNR for Malaysia, engagements with civil society organisations and Parliamentarians were more obvious than the participation of local governments. While the government of Malaysia has encouraged the preparation of Voluntary Local Review by the local government, this is not an alternative to an integrated policy planning process; rather, it is an opportunity for vertical alignment and complementary roles of multilevel governance. Biggeri asserts that complementary actions are imperative as "territorial development processes depend on policies, norms, and coordination rules at both national and international levels."¹⁸ This is an opportunity to utilise the SDGs as a capacity-building tool not only at the local level but throughout all the levels in a meaningful way and provides recognisable action items fitting to the local contexts.

¹⁶ Biggeri, “A “Decade for Action” on SDG Localisation.”

¹⁷ Christopher Ansell, Eva Sørensen, and Jacob Torfing, *Co-Creation for Sustainability* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022), 43, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/9781800437982>.

¹⁸ Biggeri, “A “Decade for Action” on SDG Localisation.”

APPGM-SDG Capacity Building Programme as A Key Agenda for SDG Localisation

“Capacity building has long been recognised as one of the means of implementation for the achievement of sustainable development” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)).¹⁹ Between the national and sub-national development plans and their delivery at the local level, implementation challenges persist, particularly regarding the misalignment of sustainable development expectations due to the low level of awareness. The SDGs, with the 17 goals encompasses the critical aspects of the development needs of people, prosperity and planet. These serve as a strategic foundation for pursuing a balanced development for Malaysia. The identified challenges discussed in the previous section suggest that capacity building is a valuable initiative for localising the SDGs. Capacity building on SDGs is a foundation that shall bring together all stakeholders, especially within the multi-levels of government with other sectors, to not only set a development agenda but also to raise awareness while inculcating the necessary understanding of sustainable development and the skills required to carry out the development plans.

The capacity-building initiative led by APPGM-SDG and the Sejahtera Centre, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), exhibits the essence of the localisation of SDGs. Increasing awareness, knowledge, and skills regarding the interlinked nature of SDGs and their implementation by translating the SDGs based on the contexts of the local development agenda and fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships to overcome silos does this. Having implemented the programme in 13 districts, capacity building has proven to be a powerful platform for creating awareness of the goals' interlinkages and interconnectedness and how it relates to the agencies' mandate and functions for service delivery on the ground. As such, the capacity

¹⁹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), *Capacity Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/capacity-development>.

building programme facilitates the translation of the SDGs at the local level, considering its local context, and subsequently, contributes to the implementation of service delivery with an awareness of the SDGs. At best, if done systematically, this will also support the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism for SDG achievements in Malaysia. This is paramount to the overall role of the National SDG Centre as a focal point to coordinate and implement the SDGs through various programmes as well as monitor and evaluate the overall achievement of SDGs through the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach for Malaysia.

The objectives and the modules of the capacity building programme were developed in consultation with the members of the Secretariat as well as other resource persons that have contributed to APPGM-SDG since its inception in 2019. This deliberate consultative process was also based on key experiences gathered in the implementation of the capacity building programme during the pilot phase of APPGM-SDG in 2020, where APPGM-SDG conducted 34 programmes in collaboration with the Sejahtera Centre, IIUM as well as Malaysian Social Science Association (PSSM). This capacity-building programme is mainly targeted at officers at the local government agencies, district offices, state government, as well as representatives from local communities and civil society organisations. The key objectives of the capacity-building programme are:

1. To enhance the understanding of government officers and community representatives at the district level on the SDGs and the National Development Plans
2. To identify the role and functions of stakeholders from the perspectives of SDGs that are integrated and comprehensive to overcome silos of federal, state, district, and government agencies

- To foster cooperation and collaboration among the targeted stakeholders (government officers, MPs, and community representatives)
- To increase the level of involvement of communities in the planning and monitoring of local developmental projects

3. To operationalize SDG 17

Briefly, the modules designed for this programme covers the following four components:

- Introduction to the SDGs
- National Development Plan and SDGs Governance in Malaysia
- Community Engagement Towards Achieving the SDGs, and
- SDGs Issue Mapping and Case Studies of Solution Projects

In the first component, *Introduction to the SDGs*, representatives from the local authority or PLAN Malaysia responsible for the town planning would present the relevant strategic or action plan for the respective districts. In certain locations, it was observed that the SDGs were considered and tagged to the initiatives and action plans proposed in the plans. It was discovered that each district has its separate development agenda to pursue social, economic, and environmental development. This is imperative to create awareness of the local development agenda, which would provide a contextualised perspective as a basis for sustainable development in each district. In the second component, the governance structure in Malaysia from federal, state to local authority is briefly discussed, so participants are aware of the mandates and responsibilities of governance functions. In the third component on community engagement, participants are informed on

the importance of stakeholder engagement and the effective models that can be used to engage with local communities. In the last component, the respective APPGM-SDG researchers would present their issue mapping findings and case studies of the small-scale solution projects that have taken place in all the Parliamentary constituencies. During this session, participants are given guiding questions and are instructed to map the projects' relevance to the SDGs and the respective local plans.

Capacity building as a programme promotes understanding the SDGs' interlinkages and interconnectedness. Due to the interlinked and integrated nature of the SDGs, the achievement of SDGs relies on fostering the mind-set of an integrated policy design at the national level, which trickles down to the implementation of action at the local level. Ansell and others argued that SDGs require "highly distributed collaboration – one that cascades downwards from the global to the national level than from the national to the local level" (pg. 42).²⁰ At the global level, capacity building for the SDGs is led by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) under the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). This division supports the Member States to prepare the VNRs and "building capacity for integrated planning and policy design, linking to the national planning process key sectorial areas such as transport, agriculture, energy, water and sanitation, sustainable cities, waste management, and disaster reduction, as appropriate".²¹ In Malaysia, these sectorial areas are not only the responsibility of the federal government but also the responsibility of the state government and local agencies and authorities. Therefore, the capacity-building mechanism must cascade and be implemented locally.

²⁰ Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing, *Co-Creation for Sustainability*.

²¹ UNDESA, *Capacity Development*.

During the capacity building programme, discussions are focused on the reality on the ground rather than the general and overarching policy agenda at the national level. This is essential considering that the current approach to identifying synergistic opportunities and the interactions between the SDGs is technocratic and relies on modelling exercises, which often take place in highly developed institutions and communities.²² Considering the limitations of local government and local authorities in Malaysia, capacity building serves as a more accessible platform for SDGs integration at the local level as an avenue to exchange ideas and information about local sustainable development. Further asserted by Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing, “the work of integration must proceed through interaction, negotiation, and exchange of ideas between existing institutions and groups.”²³ It was observed that participants of the capacity building programme were able to discern local development priorities with the provided local datasets and necessary information, and were instructed to make connections to the SDGs and its targets. The goals and targets are discussed more specifically during the discussion of local solutions projects that were provided as case studies on SDGs-related programmes. The solution projects executed in each Parliamentary constituency were crafted by the local CSOs informed by the situational analysis and issue mapping exercises conducted during the first phase of activities by APPGM-SDG. Thus, the capacity building programme involving the state government, local agencies, and authorities serves as a platform to further mainstream and realign governance for SDGs localisation.

Due to the interlinked and integrated nature of the SDGs, achieving SDGs relies on engagement between various stakeholders, ultimately leading to partnerships and breaking the silos in implementing the development agenda. In this sense, robust multilevel governance with the capacity to meaningfully engage with

²² Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing, *Co-Creation for Sustainability*.

²³ Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing, *Co-Creation for Sustainability*.

stakeholders is required. Cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development have been in the discourse since the adoption of Agenda 21.^{24,25,26} For the localisation of SDGs, the APPGM-SDG has leveraged state actors, including Parliamentarians and non-state actors such as academia, civil society organisations and social entrepreneurs, to implement local actions. Besides focusing on enabling local stakeholders, cross-sector partnerships are also vital. This can be deepened through capacity-building programmes where the roles and responsibilities are discerned further, not with antagonism but with a collective mission to align interests and actions for delivery service. In addition, a framework for facilitated dialogue and negotiation would be valuable as "misunderstandings and misalignments remain common" between governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private sectors.²⁷

While the capacity building programme provided an interactive space to co-create and increase comprehension of the SDGs, there remains a lacuna for an institutional and structural mechanism to advance partnerships and implement the SDGs. With the federal government's encouragement for VLRs, meaningful and consultative measures are required to be done in a participatory, inclusive, and transparent manner. As such, the VLRs and SDGs localisation "represent an innovation by and for cities to advance local priorities" by contributing to the integration and alignment between national and local development strategies (pg. 710).²⁸ Beyond the VLRs, considering the geographical diversity of Malaysia, local actors must be enabled according to their contexts. This is also an opportunity for local leaders and, potentially, the private sector and

²⁴ Ansell, Sørensen, and Torfing, *Co-Creation for Sustainability*.

²⁵ Ann Florini and Markus Pauli, "Collaborative Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 5, 3 (16 July 2018): 583–98. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.252>.

²⁶ Oosterhof, *Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals*.

²⁷ Florini and Pauli, "Collaborative Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals."

²⁸ Biggeri, "A "Decade for Action" on SDG Localisation."

small-scale social enterprises to influence the policy agenda and its implementation. Thus, a centralised, coordinated approach for SDGs localisation is essential, even more so as the localising SDGs movement is shown to reshape the national SDG processes.

CONCLUSION

Localising SDGs is an essential process to pursue sustainable development in a diverse local context where geographical and cultural contexts coalesce. Capacity building programmes that centre around providing local contexts to the SDGs as a means and an end to be achieved is a critical platform to provide an understanding of the interlinkages and interconnectedness of SDGs. Through the capacity-building programme, multi-stakeholder partnerships and multilevel governance can be fostered toward a more coordinated action.

In essence, developing a specialised platform for a coordinated SDGs implementation relies on overcoming silos and forming partnerships and the space to develop understanding and alignment of interests of various stakeholders. Through a highly contextualised capacity-building programme, the input can be reported to the national coordinating body of the SDGs. Through an established reporting mechanism, an agency like the National SDG Centre will have a better and deeper understanding of SDGs among different states and districts in Malaysia.

Hence, setting up a National SDG Centre as a coordinating body to provide an institutional framework, facilitate funding and resource mobilisation, and closely monitor the mechanism for SDGs localisation and its implementation strategies is very timely and vital. To differentiate itself from other centres of national locus standing, the National SDG Centre must champion the Malaysian process of achieving SDGs through capacity-building programmes as a space for meaningful interactions and developing understanding of the highly interlinked and interconnected nature of SDGs.

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PART



SDGs and Partnerships

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Journey in SDGs from Advocacy to Action: Past & Present (Between 2011 - 2022) and Future (2023 - 2030)

Denison Jayasooria

INTRODUCTION

We have come a long way in our work in SDGs as CSOs-NGOs in Malaysia. All this took time and we can review it as a journey with many people taking an active role consistently over time. Documenting this is also important as time passes and many forget the events, the personalities and the developments. This reflection of the journey is entitled from advocacy to action in localising SDGs. It is a story of a fellowship of people with an idea but possessing no staff, office, and funding or legal institution yet still managed to achieve so much within a short duration. Over time, they have managed to organise themselves and consolidate the work to become the leading voice and movement for SDGs in Malaysia.

The journey of the CSOs through the *Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance* can be divided into three phases between 2011 and 2022 pertaining to the past and present: 1) *Phase One - From MDGs through RIO+20 (2011-2014)*; 2) *Phase Two - SDGs & Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance (2015-2019)*; and 3) *Phase Three - APPGM-SDG & Localising SDGs (2020-2022)*.

The review does look at the chronology of events as well the key developments globally, nationally, and locally. Appendix 1 that is attached at the end of this paper, which is about 10 pages, provides basic details of the three phases, including the events, dates, organisers, documentation and lessons learnt. In each phase, there are various developments pertaining to advocacy and local action in relation to SDGs. Seven key themes guide our reflections.

There is an opportunity at the end of the review of the three phases, to draw pointers on the opportunities, challenges and achievements. In addition, there is the next Phase (2023-2030) that is an agenda for the future over the next eight years.

PHASE 1: FROM MDGs THROUGH RIO+20 (2011-2014)

These years were the formative period for ideas on the nature of development and while the discussions are at the global level, it has much relevance to the national and local levels.

Global Events & Relevance. The starting point for the SDGs is the Millennium Development Goals (MDG),²⁹ which is a set of eight development goals formulated by the United Nations between 2000 and 2015. Malaysia was an active contributor to this process and undertook the delivery well.³⁰ In this post-MDG period, the UN hosted a global discussion on the global development agenda at Rio, Brazil in June 2012.³¹

National Events & Relevance. Malaysians especially the CSOs were monitoring these global events and hosted events in Malaysia. PROHAM, a human rights organisation hosted a RTD on July 18, 2011 on this theme that laid the foundations for future discussions on SDGs. PROHAM reviewed the MDGs from a human rights perspective. The event took place at the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia's (SUHAKAM) office.

²⁹ <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

³⁰ <https://www.undp.org/malaysia/publications/malaysia-millennium-development-goals-2015-report>

³¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20>

In the context of RIO+20, two Malaysian discussions were hosted before the global event in June, and another after, which is significant as concerns on poverty and human rights are now linked to environment and sustainability concerns. ASLI's Centre for Public Policy Studies then headed by Tan Sri Michael Yeoh hosted them.

Local Events & Relevance. An issue that had a key interest among many was Tasik Chini and the campaign was led by Transparency International (TI). While there was a very strong emphasis on the environment, the discussion also focused on the rights of the Orang Asli community with a strong human rights focus.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships. We were in the formative stages of the work and therefore much of the discussion was among academics and activists.

Institutional developments. In this formative period, two organizations played an active role namely PROHAM and ASLI's Centre for Public Policy Studies in creating the spaces for conversations.

Challenges Faced. We were at the formative stage and therefore not many challenges. There were also not yet any major interactions with government agencies.

Lessons Learned. It is important to note that even at this early stage of the SDGs development process, we were able to link the global to national and local concerns. The foundational work was undertaken by CSOs and think tanks that had a strong commitment to human rights and development for all.

PHASE 2: SDGs & THE MALAYSIAN CSO-SDG ALLIANCE (2015-2019)

During this phase, the 2030 Agenda is foundational for our advocacy and action with the launch at the UN, the adoption of SDGs by the Malaysian government and its incorporation into the national development plans. The vehicle created by Parliament and the role of parliamentarians is key for the localisation of SDGs. The *All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals* (APPGM-SDG) is promising to be a major example nationally and globally in making a difference to the everyday life of grassroots communities.

Global Events & Relevance. The September 25, 2015 launch³² of the SDGs - 17 goals at the UN provided the momentum to organise ourselves for a collective discussion. The then Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib Tun Razak, spoke on behalf of Malaysia in accepting the agenda 2030 framework.³³ Participation at the *High-Level Political Forum* (HLPF) event in July 2017 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York is also significant, including the hosting of a side event in New York.

National Events & Relevance. The global launch facilitated a national level discussion on the SDGs by civil society organisations (CSOs). This was held on October 27, 2015 in Kuala Lumpur. The event drew many groups to discuss the implications of global SDGs as the framework for Malaysia's national development agenda.

The Malaysian government agency for SDGs, the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Department, together with the United Nations in Malaysia hosted two national-level events, a symposium in early 2016 and a conference in late 2016. Both of these events provided opportunities for CSOs to engage with

³² Please see: <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/un-summit-for-adoption-of-post-2015-development-agenda/>

³³ Please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0-R>

government agencies on SDGs concerns, especially the cross-cutting nature of SDGs. CSOs hosted three RTDs before July 2017 with ASLI-CPPS, and another as a post-HLPF event in Malaysia to review the *2017 Malaysian Voluntary National Review (VNR)* report. Post-GE14 reform discussions provided an opportunity for CSOs to present SDGs as a reform agenda on May 28, 2018.

The major breakthrough for the Alliance were the series of discussions (between December 2018 and July 2019) with the Speaker of Parliament on the establishment of a special panel or committee on SDGs that eventually led to the formation of the *APPGM-SDG*. The *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) government hosted in November 2019, the National SDG Summit and the Alliance organised the CSO forum and submitted the CSO feedback on SDGs.

Local Events & Relevance. In early 2019, CSOs made field visits to flats in Desa Mentari, Petaling Jaya and also Selayang to explore local concerns for SDGs mapping. We organised these with the MPs from the two areas. We also explored the methodology for mapping local needs and issues.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships. CSOs established good links with the EPU to form the main grouping of CSO-NGOs in dialogue and conversation with the government on SDGs. Representatives from the EPU also participated in Alliance events. We secured a good relationship with the UN both at the national and international level. On October 24, 2017 the UN formally recognised the work in promoting SDGs by conferring the UN Day award to the Malaysia CSO-SDG Alliance.

Finding a receptive Speaker of Parliament for greater engagement of CSOs and parliamentarians can be seen as a major achievement. The approval by Parliament was given on October 17, 2019. The year 2019 was a major breakthrough that created a new structure for engagement between parliamentarians and CSOs. Likewise securing the support of seven members of the lower house and one from the Senate with YB Maria Chin Abdullah agreeing to be the Chair and YB Dato' Sri Nancy Shukri as the Deputy Chair. The approval letter from Parliament was received on Oct 23, 2019.

Institutional Developments. During this period several organisations such as ASLI-CPPS and later KSI headed by Tan Sri Michael Yeoh assisted the Alliance with many different discussions. Likewise, many planning meetings took place at ISIS Malaysia.

Challenges Faced. The expanded work required staff, office and funds. However, such resources were difficult to secure.

Lessons Learned. The SDGs provided an excellent opportunity to integrate economic, social, and environmental concerns together with human rights and governance dimensions. While there were many networks and coalitions however, they were more focused on single-campaign issues. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were cross-cutting in nature. The Alliance provided the platform for CSOs to express their interest in SDG matters.

The government too was looking for partners and as we had the cross-section of NGOs and academics, it was possible for the government to establish and formalise links with us. And although the Alliance did not have the funds, it however, had the ideas and a very strong network of committed people. It was therefore able to, with an entrepreneurial spirit, seize the opportunities that were made possible.

PHASE 3: APPGM-SDG & LOCALISING SDGs (2020-2022)

This phase focused on work consolidation. From ideas and thoughts on SDGs, to delivery and action in the localising of SDG plans at the parliamentary constituency level.

Global Events & Relevance. Malaysia, in July 2021 presented its second *Voluntary National Review* (VNR) report at the *HLPF* in New York. Due to Covid, the event was held online and we had many opportunities to participate in side events. Malaysia's report was presented by the Minister of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) on July 16, 2021.

National Events & Relevance. Malaysia hosted a series of meetings for the preparation of the 2021 VNR, and the Alliance and the APPGM-SDG Secretariat participated in these meetings. The CSOs organised a series of working groups that drafted papers as input to the preparation process. The 2019 SDG summit is significant, as well as the July 2021 Malaysia's report produced from the VNR preparations. There was a change in the EPU approach between 2017 and 2021 as CSOs were part of the drafting committee and CSO input was included in the VNR report. We also read the final report before print. The localising SDG agenda of both the *Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance* and the *APPGM-SDG* was featured in the VNR report as box stories.

Local Events & Relevance. The localising SDG agenda by the APPGM-SDG committee of Members of Parliament and the Secretariat has reached 57 parliamentary constituencies. Covering these constituencies is the most impressive aspect of our work, primarily the grounded research methodology, field visits, micro-SDG solution projects as well as the mapping reports, situational analyses and the policy implications that we have derived from them. Also significant are the solution providers. There are now 78 micro solution providers. When we started, our NGO base was only in the Klang

Valley. It has now expanded to over 57 parliamentary constituencies with new partners from including rural locations particularly in Sarawak. Among the providers are the university community and scholars, CSO-NGO leaders as well as community-based organisations, and social enterprises.

The diversity of communities we have identified at the grassroots level is also significant as we interact with the different ethnic, religious, and class groups, citizenship status (stateless) and social including gender concerns in Malaysian society. We have identified and are working in 73 local neighbourhoods around Malaysia. We seek to build a stronger grassroots movement of local people for SDGs. Our outreach to young people and our capacity building programs at the ground level is making an impact but these need to be consolidated in the coming years. Currently, we have identified 39 youth-based organisations committed to SDGs. We took an innovative approach to appoint SDG youth agents at the parliamentary constituency level.

In this period, we managed to strengthen our partnership with the Parliament, EPU and Ministry of Finance (MoF). We also developed our contact base among government officials from the district and local government offices during our field visits and focus group discussions at the parliamentary constituency level.

Institutional developments. During this period, we received strong support from the EPU, MoF and Parliament for the localisation of SDGs. Several State governments expressed interest in our work and accommodated our outreach such as the Economic Planning Unit of Sarawak as well as some thoroughly supportive district officers at the field administrative level such as in the Jeli and Bera parliamentary constituencies. Over the next few years, we need to strengthen these relations.

Likewise, we received strong support from the Malaysian Social Science Association (PSSM), the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia (ISIS Malaysia), KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific (KSI), Junior Chamber International Malaysia (JCI Malaysia) and International Youth Centre (IYC), and local universities such as the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) in hosting and organising programs. Many of the Alliance members are also partners in various capacities as resource persons and solution providers.

Challenges Faced. While we are able to identify the local needs, concerns and issues we face many hurdles in seeking to solve them. One major hurdle is Federal-State government roles and the lack of agency cooperation in solving social problems. The ambiguity is due to the silo nature of government agencies in operating their mandates. SDGs involve cross-cutting concerns and faced with these issues, the institutional mechanisms are lacking at the grassroots level because of the way the district offices and local authorities operate.

Lessons Learned. This phase covered the development of the parliamentary involvement and network in SDGs especially in the localisation of SDGs. The breakthrough was the linking between the grounded approach of identifying local needs with macro-policy concerns that can be discussed at the parliamentary and national level.

REVIEW OF THE THREE PHASES

We have reviewed the three phases and we can recognise the opportunities, challenges, and achievements in the earlier years. We have been able to take up the opportunities, face the challenges and over the past years achieved much. These are precious lessons for us.

Opportunities

This analysis recognises four key opportunities. The first is that SDGs provided the platform to bring CSOs together – economic, social & environmental organisations. CSOs organised themselves, and took this opportunity to collectively transform these gains into ground action.

Second, parliament provided us with a new institutional mechanism for engagement between elected officials of parliament with other stakeholders such as civil society leaders, academicians and grassroots community leaders on SDG related matters.

Third, grassroots communities became active in the localising of SDGs. These are neighbourhoods in rural or urban locations. They were part of the local mapping exercise on local needs as well as in undertaking social projects. There is much diversity among these local communities as they could represent an ethnic or religious or even a refugee community. There is openness in them seeking to find cross cutting solutions to everyday concerns on the ground.

Challenges

There are four key challenges. The first is the challenge of working with government agencies at the district and local levels. These agencies operate within their mandates to address local issues but face difficulties due to the crosscutting nature of the SDGs. Many of them work in silos and therefore, there is a need to clear the formalities on how to work with agencies at the district and local authority levels.

The second challenge is the many unresolved local issues in each parliamentary constituency. Based on our field visits and report on the mapping of needs, we have identified local issues with the inter-agency cooperation of both Federal and State governments. However, we are struggling to find the solutions. There could also be

political dynamics especially if the MP is from a party that is different from the ruling party. There might be an uphill battle to resolve them.

The third challenge is funding. We have received funds from the Ministry of Finance over the past three years. However, as these are annual grants, we are therefore operating following a moving 12 months-calendar basis. The staff are all on a one-year contract, which gives rise to long term issues on retaining good staff. Furthermore, we need to operate on a one-year calendar cycle.

The fourth challenge is while we do well on economic, social and environmental concerns, there seems to be a lack of emphasis in SDG 16 pertaining to governance and human rights concerns.

Achievements

Seven achievements can be noted. The first, is the establishment of the APPGM-SDG that can be seen as a major breakthrough as this is the first time the Malaysian Parliament has established a new vehicle. This parliamentary group is dedicated to SDGs.

Second, we succeeded in securing the support of 57 MPs from 2020 to 2022, and they have become SDG champions at the parliamentary constituency level. In this context we also managed to undertake the mapping of local needs in the 57 locations. Third, we managed to undertake 236 micro solution projects that have made an impact on the ground.

Fourth, we have identified and are working with 78 solution providers who are active at the grassroots level. They are the key SDG change makers. We have also undertaken capacity building programs. Fifth, we have identified the need to work with young people and therefore we hosted SDG youth summits and developed partnership with 39 youth organisations. Sixth, our major achievement was to secure a yearly grant from the Ministry of

Finance as well as develop a robust partnership with the Economic Planning Unit (EPU).

Seventh, we have developed dynamic effective partnerships with regional and global NGOs especially in the context of the *High-Level Political Forum* (HLPF). We have also been active in regional and international SDGs gatherings.

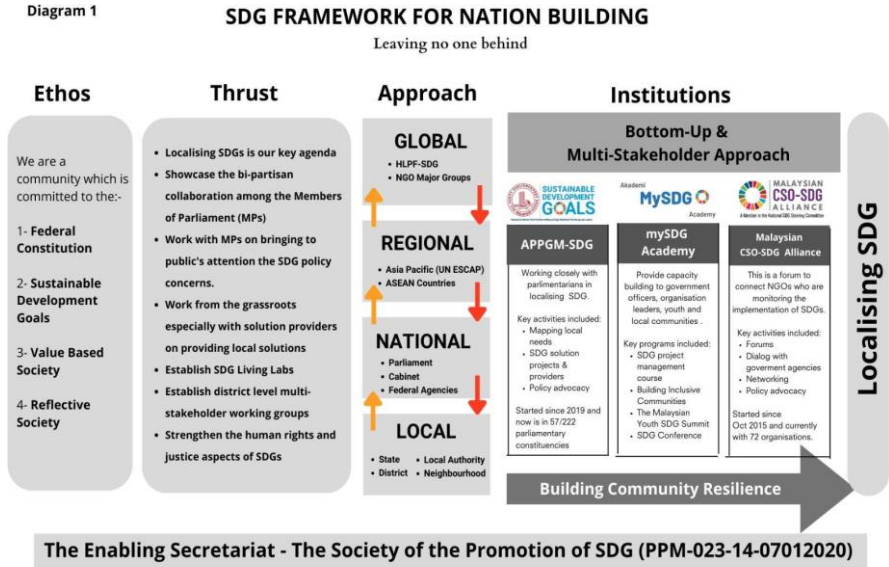
THE NEXT PHASE: SDGS & BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE (2023-2030)

The next phase can be considered as the period of expansion of the localising agenda over the next seven years (2023-2030). It is the period to build community resilience. The Secretariat team has developed a perceptive framework, which we have identified as the *SDG Framework for nation building* that kindles the light to the future journey. It is also displayed in Diagram 1 below.

Framework for the Future

Diagram 1 illustrates the framework for nation building based on common ethos and thrust. Our approach is key as well as the institutional structures and mechanisms that we will use to attain the goal of *leaving no one behind*. After three years (2020-2022) of localising SDGs via the APPGM-SDG, we recognise that we must strengthen and adopt a compelling values-based approach that can serve as our ethos and foundational values that represents our standing.

Diagram 1



(SDG Society, Nov 2022)

Figure 1. SDG Framework for Nation Building

We are a community committed to creating a value-based ideological society. One can recognise eight key values that serve as the foundation of all our work in building a better and sustainable Malaysia. *Table 1* below illustrates these values. They are built on the foundations of the Federal Constitution, and the 2030 Agenda and commitments.

Table 1. Value-based Approach

NO	VALUES	MEANING
1.	Appreciates diversity	Diversity recognises different ethnic, cultural, linguistic groups in the community. Each is important and we must appreciate them like our own. In our daily dealings, we can have an appreciation of them. We must not look down on others.
2.	Ensures sustainability	<p>Sustainability is a lifestyle theme that we need to understand and apply. Applied to personal life, organisational culture as well as in the management of natural resources.</p> <p>Some examples are related to how we undertake recycling (paper) or conserve energy (electricity & water) in the office and house.</p>
3.	Respects women	Elevating the position of women and adopting an empowerment strategy including providing equal opportunities and ensuring equality of outcomes.
4.	Inclusive development	<p>Inclusion of assistance and support for all is key. Here “all” means irrespective of ethnicity, gender, age, location, disability.</p> <p>It is about “leaving no one behind” and can be applied to family or community.</p>
5.	Ensures non-discrimination	We must not discriminate against any one or have views that look down on others as inferior. We are all equal as human beings.

6.	Justice based	We recognise “needs-based approach” but there must be “rights-based approach”. Our actions must be based on the principle of justice and fairness to all.
7.	Good governance	Integrity, honesty, and accountability is key. This must be the principle that governs personal conduct and must be a cornerstone of our organisation.
8.	Teamwork and partnerships	Working as a team is key. We need to support each other and ensure an effective team.

Future Targets

The next eight years are before us as we race towards 2030. We have the SDG Summit in September 2023 that is a Mid-Term Review of the SDGs as well as Malaysia presenting the VNR report for the third time in July 2024.

Over the next eight years we can set some specific targets for expansion especially in reaching the target of all the 222 parliamentary constituencies. With these targets, as illustrated in *Table 2*, we are also focusing on developing and expanding our solution projects, solution providers and resource persons.

A key focus is in reaching grassroots communities with the SDGs sustainability message through an empowerment strategy. We are currently undertaking micro-projects in at least 73 local neighbourhoods in the past three years and we project to reach another 240 neighbourhoods. In the next phase, we aim to undertake community profiling and work with the local leadership and empower them to adopt an SDGs framework for their grassroots.

Table 2. Expanding our Outreach in Localising SDGs

	2020-2022	2023- 2030 (8 years)	Total
Reaching Parliamentary Constituencies	57	165 @24 per year	222
Micro SDG Solution Projects	236	1,600 @200 per year	1,836
Solution Providers (CSO, NGOs, SE, Universities)	111	495	606
Resource Persons (CSO, NGOs, SE, Universities)	28	80 @10 per year	108
Local Communities at the grassroots (Leaving no one behind)	73	240 @30 a year	313
Impact on individuals at the grassroots (Leaving no one behind)	9,800	40,000 25 persons x 1,600	49,800
District level SDG Multi stakeholder groups	2	40 @ 5 per year	42
Capacity Building workshops & target numbers	29	200	229
Reaching youth organisations and numbers	39	280	319
Full time staff at the secretariat	15	30	45
Funding needed (RM)	17 million	110 million	127 million

Policy Coherence and Advocacy

Over the past three years, we have undertaken the mapping of local needs in 57 parliamentary constituencies using a ground research methodology. This entailed going to the field and interacting with the local communities. Through focus group discussions, we gathered the views of the grassroots.

We recognise that there are many unresolved local concerns. These have been well documented in the mapping of needs reports and situational analysis. A formal publication of the researchers' work on the 2020 materials has been released. The policy round-table discussions hosted with ISIS Malaysia held in early November 2022 also highlighted the potential of multi-stakeholder dialogues.

The grounded research findings from the 2021 and 2022 issues mapping reports will be released in 2023 that will be a compelling story of unresolved concerns at the grassroots. We recognised that in each parliamentary constituency, there are about 10 to 15 unresolved concerns. This requires inter-agency cooperation and in a majority of the cases, an inter-government cooperation especially between Federal and State governments.

We face an uphill task in securing the partnership and support of all parties in finding lasting solutions. There will be a need for a dedicated team to take up the gaps and unresolved issues to affect long-term remedies. One consideration is the setting up of a *Centre for Social Inclusion*. It will be a small team with a focus on making follow-ups to all the unresolved issues identified at the grassroots level. This could be similar to the mySDG Academy, which is the training arm of our SDG Society.

CONCLUSION

We can recognise that the APPGM-SDG experience of multi-stakeholder partnerships with parliamentarians, CSOs, academics and grassroots organisations is a major development in Malaysian society. We believe that over the next eight years we will see the expansion of this vision and the impact of the work in localising SDGs. We have a major task. And we seek the support and cooperation of all to ensure *no one is left behind* in Malaysia.

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APPENDIX 1

A Journey in SDGs From Advocacy to Action Phase 1: From MDGs Through RIO+20 (2011-2014)

EVENT	DATES/PLACE	ORGANISER/ RESOURCE PERSONS	DOCUMENTATIO N
MDG from a human Rights Perspective	July 18, 2011 @ SUHAKAM KL	PROHAM & SUHAKAM Dr Lin & EPU Rep Mr Mohd Idris	Chapter 4 in PROHAM & Human Rights Concerns in Malaysia (2013) - pages 110-138. PROHAM initiated the review of MDGs that paved the stage for new discussions on SDGs.
RIO+20 Agenda & implication for Malaysia	June 4, 2012 @ MIM	ASLI Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS). Datuk Yusof Kassim, Dr Hezri (ISIS Malaysia), EPU Rep	This is one of the first discussions on the post MDGs development agenda
Rio+20: The Future We Want: United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development). The outcome of the Conference	20-22 June 2012 @Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	United Nations	The future we want (June 2012). Link: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html
The Future we want: A post RIO+20	July 9, 2012 @ Sunway University	ASLI Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS).	Chapter 2 in Malaysian Issues & Concerns. Some

Discussion, Lessons learnt & implications for Malaysia		Tan Sri Navaratnam, Dr Hezri (ISIS Malaysia), Mr Gurmit Singh (CETDEM)	policy responses (2013), CPPS pages 25-40
A National Campaign to save Tasik Chini, Pahang	August 5, 2012 Field visit to Tasik Chini, Pahang	Transparency International (TI) Ms Josie M. Fernandez (TI) & Dr Hezri (ISIS Malaysia)	Link: http://www.transparency.org.my/events/selamatkan-tasik-chini-warisan-negara-rizab-biosfera-unesco-national-campaign Help save the “dragon” of Tasik Chini IN UKM Ethnic Studies Paper series No 23 Dec 2012

Phase 2: SDGs & the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance (2015-2019)

EVENT	DATES/PLACE	ORGANISER/ RESOURCE PERSONS	DOCUMENTATION
SDG Gap analysis consultancy and report	September 12, 2015	Commissioned by EPU & UNDP Dr Hezri & Alizan Mahadi (ISIS Malaysia)	Gap analysis for the implementation framework – post 2015 development agenda. Unpublished report, A foundational paper for the Malaysian government
Summit for the adoption of the SDGs	September 25, 2015 United Nations, New York	United Nations	Link: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/summit
SDG & Human Rights, A framework for conflict resolution & mediation: Implications for Malaysia & ASEAN	October 27, 2015 @ KL Convention Centre, KL	PROHAM, GMM & KITA-UKM EPU Rep Datuk Yoges, Mr Alizan Mahadi (ISIS Malaysia),	Sustainable Development Goals & Malaysian society: Civil society perspectives. UKM Ethnic Studies Paper series No 45, Feb 2016 Link: https://base.socioeco.org/docs/kita-book-45-text-sdg.pdf

SDG Symposium	February 23, 2016	EPU and UN Team in Malaysia	The first major national discussion and the Alliance was represented (Ref on page 11) Link: https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-05/SDG_Roadmap_Phase I 2016-2020.pdf
SDG Multi-stakeholder partnership Conference	November 15-16, 2016	EPU and UN Team in Malaysia	The second major which discussed the SDG Roadmap and preparation for the 2017 VNR (Ref on page11.) Link: https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-05/SDG_Roadmap_Phase I 2016-2020.pdf
National SDG Steering Committee	December 2016	DG of EPU Chair Alliance rep – Denison & Dr Lin	Alliance was invited along with a number of CSOs including COMANGO & MENGGO
Series of 4 SDG RTD'S in2017	March 14; May 22; July 3 & September 28, 2017	ASLI-CPPS & Alliance	Publication Launched on May 28, 2018– SDG: Policy Coherence & Malaysian Society.

National SDG Roadmap from CSO Reflections, -Development policies (Vision 2020, SDG 2030 & Transformation 2050) -Sustainability Agenda -Science & technology		Panel speakers	A major policy discussion exercise hosted by Tan Sri Michael Yeoh while he was with ASLI-CPS Link: https://base.socioeco.org/docs/sustainabledevelopment_goals.pdf
Malaysia VNR Report presentation at HLPF	July 17, 2017 at UN HQ New York	UN- HLPF EPU Minister	Malaysian VNR Report (2017) Link: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf CSOs posed key questions during the session and later had lunch with the EPU Minister in New York
CSO Discussion on the Malaysian VNR Report	July 18, 2017 at the UN Plaza, New York	Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance, Mr Alizan, Ms Lavanya, Ms Loke Lin (Third World Network), Mr Rizal (Empower), EPU Rep Datuk Yoges & Denison	SDG Implementation in Malaysia: CSO Reflections on the VNR (2017). Unpublished report (Aug 4, 2017) Alliance hosted the first global discussion in New

			York and UN ESCAP & UNDP from the Bangkok office participated
Post VNR dialogue among CSOs	August 4, 2017 at the Wisma UN KL	Alliance Denison & UN Resident Coordinator, Mr Stefan	SDG Implementation in Malaysia: CSO Reflections on the VNR (2017). Unpublished report (Aug 4, 2017)
UN Award for SDG Work	October 24, 2017	Alliance & Denison for the promotion of SDGs First major recognition	Link: https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/10/24/three-receive-un-sustainable-development-awards/ https://www.unhcr.org/en-my/news/latest/2017/10/59eeeadc4/un-calls-on-malaysia-to-champion-sustainable-development-goals.html
Alliance dialogue with EPU on feedback to the SDG Roadmap	February 21, 2018	Denison & 20 other CSO leaders including Dr Lin, Prof Rashila, Omna, Bathma, Shanti, Andrew Khoo, Zara & Jeffery Phang	Major meeting with EPU hosted by the Alliance as input to the SDG Roadmap

RTD on Review of UPR from SDG Perspectives	February 28, 2018	ASLI- CPPS & Alliance	
Alliance together with other CSOs presenting recommendations to Institutional Reform Committee	May 28, 2018	Alliance & CSOs	<p>SDGs as the foundation for reforms. Link: https://www.malay.siakini.com/letters/427553 12 major recommendations (78-page document)</p> <p>A key meeting post-GE14 and the PH government hosted a committee to review reforms. We proposed that these reforms be based on the SDGs.</p>
RTD on Institutional Reform & SDGs	June 5, 2018	<p>ASLI-CPPS & Alliance</p> <p>Panel include speakers from G25, SUHAKAM & Ms Lavanya of WWF</p>	A discussion on this reform theme from SDG perspective

National SDG Summit	November 6 & 7, 2019	EPU and UN Team in Malaysia. PM & EPU Minister	Link: https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia-SDG-Summit-Report-2019.pdf
National SDG Summit Whole of Nation approach	Plenary 3	Denison speaker in panel	Link: https://www.epu.gov.my/ms/malaysia-sdg-summit-2019
National SDG Summit: Civil Society Forum	Parallel Session 3- November 7, 2019 11am to 1pm	Denison and Alliance panel of 16 presenters	Document: Accelerating SDGs in policy & services at the local levels: Civil society perspectives Link: https://www.epu.gov.my/ms/malaysia-sdg-summit-2019
Three dialogue sessions with the Speaker of Parliament – Tan Sri Dato' Mohd Ariff on setting up a Parliamentary group on SDGs	December 19, 2018, January 30, 2019 & May 16, 2019	Speaker, Denison & key leaders of the Alliance	A major breakthrough for CSOs to form a parliamentary level committee. Speaker was open and parliament was undergoing greater people participation

Workshop on the UK system of the APPG	March 22, 2019	Ms Zoe Watts of Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)	A good introduction to the UK system of bi partisan politics
A dinner hosted by Speaker of Dewan Rakyat	Monday July 1, 2019 Parliament House, KL	Parliament speaker, potential MPs, academics and CSO leaders	Links: https://www.ukm.my/kita/news/secretariat-of-the-all-party-parliamentary-group-appg-on-sdgs-1-july-2019/
National Forum on SDGs	July 19, 2019 Parliament House, KL	KSI & Alliance Tan Sri Michael Yeoh hosted this event with the Speaker to create awareness	https://kasi.asia/events/national-forum-on-sustainability-csr-sdg-2019/ https://www.qigroup.com/news/qi-group-at-the-national-forum-on-sustainability-corporate-social-responsibility-sustainable-development-goals-2019/
Budget 2020	October 11, 2019	Finance Minister	Allocation of RM2 million a major breakthrough (Page 73) Link: https://www.bnm.gov.my/documents/20124/761679/bs2020.pdf

Establishment of the APPGM & the APPGM SDG	October 17, 2019 Parliament House, KL	YB Datuk Liew Vui Keong, Minister in PM Department reads a resolution	Mohamad Ariff Md Yusof, et al., Law, Principles and Practice in the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) of Malaysia (Malaysia: Sweet & Maxwell, 2020), 477
1st meeting of the APPGM SDG committee & election	October 22, 2019	YB Maria Chin elected as Chair and YB Dato Sri Hajah Nancy Shukri as Deputy Chair	Minutes documents the decisions
Establishment of the Secretariat and the framework of the localising SDGs	November-December 2019	Core Alliance members as Lead coordinators for 10 selected parliamentary constituencies	The approaches are documented in different handbooks pertaining to mapping exercise & situational analysis and also the procedures on solution projects

Phase 3: APPGM-SDG & Localising SDGs (2020-2022)

EVENT	DATES/ PLACE	ORGANISER/ RESOURCE PERSONS	DOCUMENTATIO N
ROS Society registered	January 7, 2020	Pro-term Committee members	Registration of Society for the promotion of SDG under ROS as the legal entity to manage the MOF funds and employ the staff.
APPGM SDG 2020 field visits and solution projects	Between January and August 2020	All the field visits & mapping exercise	Alliance members were the anchor of the secretariat during the formative period. Only one full-time staff (Rahmah) with another part-time (Anthony) 2020 Annual report documents all the plans & activities carried out in 2020 Link: https://www.parli men.gov.my/images/webuser/jkuasa/LAPORAN%20KRPPM/APPGM-SDG%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%202020.pdf
1st AGM Meeting of the SDG Society	July 9, 2020	Election of 8 SDG Society officials	The legal entity
APPGM SDG change of leadership	August 17, 2020	YB Dato' Sri Hajah Rohani Abdul Karim as	A change due to the rule that the Chair must be

(chair & deputy) with the change of the Federal government		Chair & YB Maria Chin as Deputy Chair	from the Government party without Cabinet post Change of speaker of parliament. Also supportive of APGM multi- stakeholder engagement process
Budget 2021	November 6, 2020	Finance Minister	2nd allocation for the APPGM SDG localising SDG work (Page 54) Link: https://belanjawan2021.treasury.gov.my/pdf/speech/2021/bs21.pdf
2021 Localising SDG agenda New staff recruitment & 2021 plans	January to December 2021		2021 Annual Report – all details of plans and activities carried out in 2021 Link: https://www.parliament.gov.my/images/webuser/jkuasa/LAPORAN%20KRPPM/APPGM-SDG%202021%20Annual%20Report%20.pdf
SDG 16 Monitoring & review	October 2020 to January 2021	Asian Development Alliance (ADA)	Monitoring and Review of SDG 16 plus in Malaysia (2015 – 2020) Link: https://ada2030.org/adda-admin/images/Ma

			Malaysia-SDG-16-Plus-National-Case-Study.pdf
VNR 2021 Preparatory meetings	Six different meetings- February 2, 5 & 8; May 3, 7 & 20, 2021	EPU hosted the meetings Alliance represented by Denison, Dr Lin, Lavanya & Prof Rashila	2nd round of VNR preparation Good CSO representation
CSO Five Thematic working groups as input to the VNR process	February 8, 2021	Alliance & CSOs	CSO Report (May 2021) Link: https://kasi.asia/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/APPGM-SDG-CSO-SDG-Alliance-Submission-To-Malaysias-2nd-VNR-Online-SDG-2021.pdf
The Malaysia Sustainability Leadership Summit 2021 (MSLS)	March 9, 2021 Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur	KSI, Alliance The Speaker, Tan Sri Michael Yeoh	A major conference hosted by Tan Sri Michael Yeoh & KSI team Launch of the APGM SDG Annual report (2020) with the Speaker of Parliament Link: https://kasi.asia/events/the-malaysia-sustainability-leadership-summit-2021/ https://www.parliament.gov.my/images/webuser/bkk/

			<u>APPG-SDG%20MSLS%20speech%20-%209%20March.pdf</u>
Poverty Circle	July 1, 2021	EPU Chaired by EPU Minister	Monthly meeting with all the relevant agencies APPGM-SDG Representatives: Datuk Denison / Dr. Lin Mui Kiang / Nur Rahmah Othman
HLPF & VNR Malaysia	July 16, 2021	EPU Minister & online presentation	Link: <u>https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia Voluntary National Review %28VNR%29_2021.pdf</u>
HLPF and side events	July 2021	Side events	Participation in 4 different side events. Details in 2021 Annual report pages 48-49
Global CSO SDG Scorecard Report	July 8, 2021	Side event Alliance	Link: <u>https://kasi.asia/publications/malaysia-cso-sdg-alliances-submission-to-peoples-scorecard-process-assessing-national-delivery-of-the-2030-agenda/</u>

Impact Evaluation	23 - 24 October 2021	PSSM/ IKMAS-UKM	Prof Rashila Ramli and Impact Evaluation Team of university people. Hybrid meeting with about 25 persons
First Briefing Session on SDG Policy Issues with parliamentarians	28 October 2021 & 22 November 2021	APPGM-SDG Alizan & Zainal briefed the MPs on the 2020 research findings	
Budget 202	October 29, 2021	Finance Minister	3rd Allocation (RM3 million) but raised to RM10 million by Finance Minister (Page 49) Link: https://budget.mof.gov.my/pdf/2022/ucapan/bs22.pdf
Youth SDG Summit	November 6, 2021	Online event Ms Zoel Ng & youth team	Link: https://sharing4good.org/article/malaysia-youth-sdg-summit-2021-6th-nov-2021-10am-1pm-kl-time
SDG Steering Committee	November 16, 2021	EPU Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria & Rahmah attended	
Building Inclusive Communities	December 1 & 2, 6 & 7 and 13 & 14, 2021	One day – PJ, Selayang & Kuala Selangor	On day workshop in three locations & training module development Link: https://www.face

			book.com/APPGM/SDGMY/posts/building-inclusive-community-bic-training-funded-by-undp-kuala-selangor-day-1/449917460034722/
Rental of new office at Avenue	January 2022 onwards	Avenue 8, 2022	Secured an office space for the first time as the APPGM SDG secretariat
2022 Annual planning & staff recruitment	February 4-6, 2022	Hotel in Selayang	Setting up a new team for the 2022 task & orientation
2022 plans and activities	January to December 2022		Parliamentary constituencies have expanded to 57. Details in the 2022 Annual Report (To be published in early 2023)
SDG Technical Committee	March 30, 2022	EPU Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria & Rahmah participated	
Malaysian Youth SDG Summit 2022	June 11, 2022 International Youth Centre (IYC) Physical & online	In partnership with the International Youth Centre in Cheras & Youth and Sports Ministry (KBS). Ms Zoel Ng & youth team	Link: https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/06/804036/sdg-summit-empower-and-inspire-youths

Solution Providers Retreat	June 17-19, 2022	Armada Hotel, PJ	Capacity Building workshop for solution providers. Recognizing the potential of 78 solution providers as ground agents for SDGs
Alliance Co Chair Elections	June 29, 2022	CSO-SDG Alliance	Election of co-chairs and handling over leadership from Denison to Lavanya and Jai Yaw
Pre HLPF event	June 30, 2022	APPGM-SDG, Alliance & Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Link: https://www.kiu-co.com/copy-of-news/hybrid-pre-hlpf-event%3A-global-sharing-of-best-practices
HLPF	July 2022 Side events	YB Rohani, Denison, Rahmah & Zoel in New York at UN HQ	Printed report (26 pages) – HLPF Report (July 5-18, 2022) a good documentation
2023 Budget Consultation	August 15, 2022 August 23, 2022	Ministry of Finance	Input to pre-budget discussion and consultation. A presentation of APPGM SDG localising agenda and a request of funding for 2023 Links: https://z-upload.facebook.com/APPGMSDGM/posts/609992437360556

			https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/08/23/pm-budget-2023-prepared-with-peoples-wellbeing-at-its-core/24298
National SDG Council	September 5, 2022	EPU PM Office, Putrajaya	Presented the findings on APPGM SDG field study and feedback from CSO Committee on SDG matters
Budget 2023	October 7, 2022	Finance Minister	4th Allocation from MoF APPGM SDG & localising SDGs well recognised by Federal Government (Page 70) Link: https://budget.mof.gov.my/pdf/2023/ucapan/buku-budget-speech-2023.pdf
Parliament dissolved	October 10, 2022		APPGM SDG dissolved and the Secretariat will cease using the APPGM SDG logo. Visibility during this period for the secretariat to use the logo and name of the Society for the Promotion of SDGs

Staff orientation after the recruitment for 2023	November 1, 2022	Avenue 8, PJ	New document: SDG Values, framework & priorities for 2023 delivery
Expansion of the office	November-December 2022	Avenue 8, PJ	Rental & renovation of the next block as more space needed for staff and meeting. Expansion & consolidation of the full time
SDG Policy Forum	November 2-4, 2022	ISIS Malaysia	The first major policy conversation. Good participation although no MPs participated. 5 SDG Policy RTD based on the research undertaken in 2020 & 2021
SDG Roadmap 2 Meeting	November 15, 2022	EPU Putrajaya	Alliance invited to attend the technical working committee in which Kiu Jai Yaw & Zoel Ng represented the Alliance EPU continues to recognise the Alliance

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Government and CSO Collaboration in SDG Implementation

Lin Mui Kiang

BACKGROUND

On 25 September 2015, Malaysia together with other 192 world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. This is a global commitment towards a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive development, with 17 SDGs and 169 targets. The SDGs is a new, universal set of goals, targets, and indicators that UN Member States will be expected to use to frame their agenda and political policies over 15 years (2016 – 2030). With its 17 Goals, 169 Targets and more than 200 Indicators that cover 5 dimensions namely People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, the SDGs will stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet.

The 2030 Agenda has been shaped by relevant United Nations (UN) agreements and Conventions as well as the experiences and achievements gained through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the global development agenda spanning the period 2000–2015. The 2030 Agenda was the result of two years of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world. It transcends the MDGs to include wider economic, social and environmental objectives, and with a greater focus on peace, participation, and inclusiveness.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as our collective blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries (poor, rich and middle-income countries) to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. SDGs recognise that ending

poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. It challenges us to get serious about delivering an integrated and balanced social, economic and environmental agenda. While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals. Countries have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the Goals, which will require quality, accessible and timely data collection. Regional follow-up and review will be based on national-level analyses and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level.

Formation of the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance

Following the launch of the SDGs by the United Nations in September 2015, a small group of CSO leaders met in October 2015 to discuss the role that CSOs can play in the implementation of the SDGs in Malaysia. They then invited all related CSOs to give their opinion and discuss the areas where they can contribute. This resulted in the formation of the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance with 50 members in 2015 to harness their collective strengths, expertise and experience of the CSO groups in the country. As the founding members met and further discussed the contributions that can be made by the diverse nature and attributes of the many organisations, many more have opted to join the CSO-SDG Alliance with membership reaching 70 organisations in 2022, several of which are umbrella bodies with nationwide branches. The Alliance started work with no office, no funds and no staff, often meeting in *mamak* restaurants and tea stalls. Still, their enthusiasm and commitment overcame the lack of resources.

From the beginning, the Alliance has engaged with the EPU, which is the focal point for the SDGs. The Alliance was invited to be a member of the National SDG Steering Committee established by EPU in 2016. The Alliance has actively participated at all national SDG summits and seminars in 2016 and 2019, and have provided input to the National SDG Roadmap, Malaysian Voluntary Reports for 2017 and for 2021, as well as provided input into the 11th Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review and the 12th Malaysia Plan.

Institutional Mechanisms for SDG Implementation

The Economic Planning Unit (EPU) in the Prime Minister's Department is the focal point for Sustainable Development and acts as a coordinating agency on the initiatives related to SD including the Sustainable Development Goals. In the process to embrace and implement the 17 SDGs in a systematic and measurable manner, Malaysia has put in place an institutional setup and an enabling environment.

EPU established a multi-stakeholder, participatory governance structure helmed by the National SDG Council chaired by the Prime Minister. It held its first meeting on 6 September 2022 where the Prime Minister reiterated Malaysia's strong commitment to achieve the SDGs and announced the setting up of the National SDG Centre in EPU, and the requirement for states and local authorities to prepare and submit voluntary local reports on the progress made in their localities. The APPGM-SDG was represented by its Chairperson Hon. Dato' Sri Rohani Abdul Karim who, supported by its Secretariat which is the CSO-SDG Alliance, made a progress report to the Council, after which the Prime Minister requested that his constituency Bera be covered under its program as well.

The Council is supported by a National SDG Steering Committee (NSC), chaired by the Minister of Economic Affairs, and a National SDG Technical Committee (NTC) chaired by the Director General of the EPU. The National SDG Council reports to the UN via the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). The NTC consists of five SDG Cluster Working Committees (CWCs), under which are Task Forces for each set of Goals. The five CWCs are responsible for Inclusivity, Well-Being, Human Capital, Environment and Natural Resources, and Economic Growth which are related to their respective SDGs. The CWCs are tasked with identifying indicators for each SDG, as well as with developing and implementing programmes and reporting progress to the NSC. Each CWC is led by a Section Head in EPU and includes representatives of Government Ministries/agencies, civil society, the private sector, academics, UN agencies and youth representatives. The inclusive and participatory approach used in this governance structure is in line with the 11th Malaysia Plan, which focuses on a paradigm shift towards more participatory government by citizens, including NGOs/CSOs, as partners in service design and delivery.¹ The CSO-SDG Alliance is well represented as members of the NSC, and also was invited to assign members to the 5 CWCs to formulate a National SDG Roadmap to guide implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Alignment of the SDGs with the Five-Year Development Plans

The Government recognises that a comprehensive implementation of SDGs will require the mobilisation of resources, including manpower, capacity building, and physical spaces as well as funding. Since Malaysia's national development plan has always been geared towards economic, social and environmental agenda, the implementation of SDGs in Malaysia is aligned with the five-year national development plan, which utilises the government

¹ Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Eleventh Malaysia Plan (11 MP) 2016-2020: Anchoring Growth on People* (Putrajaya: 2015), <https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-05/RMKe-11%20Book.pdf>.

development budget starting from the 11th Malaysia Plan. The alignment of SDGs and national development is realised through a mapping exercise which involves the integration of the national development plan's action plans, initiatives and outcomes to the SDGs' goals, targets and indicators. The Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV) 2030 was announced in 2019 with the underlying principle of achieving economic growth through "equitability of outcome". The 12th Malaysia Plan, covering three development dimensions – economic empowerment, environmental sustainability and social re-engineering will further crystallise the implementation of the SPV 2030.² The CSO-SDG Alliance was invited to review drafts of the 12th Malaysia Plan and was able to provide comments and feedback to many of the chapters.

It is important for the federal government to mobilise and engage state and local institutions and stakeholders on the priorities that should be addressed by the SDGs. Multi-level governance platforms should incorporate state, local and district governments by setting up SDG Committees and other mechanisms to jointly assess their needs, define their SDG priorities and develop programmes and plans at territorial level. They can work together to ensure a more integrated and efficient approach to local development through cooperation in service delivery, infrastructures and, where possible, through the pooling of resources and capacities. Peer learning and teamwork can be an effective way to improve service delivery, change working methodologies and promote problem-based learning, and improve their political and technical decision making and performance. Localization of the SDGs can therefore provide a framework for local development and to how constituencies can support the achievement of the SDGs through action from a bottom-

²Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12 MP) 2021-2025: A Prosperous, Inclusive, Sustainable Malaysia* (Putrajaya: 2021), https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/flipping_book/TwelfthPlan/mobile/index.html.

up approach and to how the SDGs can provide a framework for local development policy.

Capacity building is crucial for the transformation of human resources and institutional capabilities. The achievement of the SDGs requires the empowerment of individuals, leaders, organizations and societies. Building endogenous capacities is necessary for institution-building, policy analysis and development management, including the assessment of alternative options. In order to achieve this, specific knowledge and skills must be developed to perform tasks more efficiently and mindsets and attitudes must be changed.

There is a need to address poor service delivery. It is to be noted that many of the projects cover grounds that are under the purview and responsibility of government agencies but they do not seem to have been effectively addressed and met the needs of the local communities. As such it is important to review public development policies and service delivery modes, as well as the performance of front-line agencies and to find ways for their improvement.

Malaysia SDG Summit 2019

In September 2019, Malaysia hosted the Malaysia SDG Summit 2019 themed, “The Whole of Nation Approach: Accelerating Progress on the SDGs” to create public awareness and understanding on SDGs as well as creating a platform to discuss the progress, opportunities, challenges and solutions with various stakeholders i.e., public and private sectors, academia and, non-government organisations. The event was co-organised by the Government of Malaysia and UN Malaysia and demonstrated Malaysia’s commitment, to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to take stock of the SDGs progress, gaps and explore ideas and solutions to bridge these gaps.

With over 2,600 registered attendees over the two-day Summit, numerous critical themes were discussed, from ideating strategies to leave no one behind; ensuring that environmental sustainability is placed central in Malaysia's development paradigm; highlighting the challenges and opportunities in unlocking the potential of women in Malaysia; to emphasising the role of institutional reform and ensuring a whole-of-nation approach in order to accelerate her progress on SDGs achievement. This platform is important in bridging the gaps and the summit acted as a catalyst for future dialogues and collaborations across sectors, to ensure that the nation achieves the 2030 Agenda together. The CSO-SDG Alliance played an active and important part in these sessions with papers delivered by its prominent members and resource persons, answering questions and following up with participants and the public. These high-profile public appearances helped to establish realisation of the strength and the diverse expertise of the CSO-SDG Alliance and led to it being sought as a resource organisation in SDG policy planning, capacity building and implementation.³

Malaysia's Voluntary National Reviews 2017 and 2021

In support of the global monitoring and reporting of the 2030 Agenda, Malaysia is committed to undertaking broader country reporting every four years. The government has presented two Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) at the 2017 and 2021 global High-level Political Forums (HLPF). The first VNR in 2017 at the HLPF themed "Eradicating poverty and promoting Malaysia's prosperity in a changing world," reported on the achievements of Malaysia on SDGs.⁴ The theme for the 2021 VNR was "Sustainable and resilient

³ Lin Mui Kiang, "APPGM-SDG Institutional Panel CSO-Academia Partnership in Localising SDGs - Experiential Research on SDGs at the Local Level" (presented at the 12th International Malaysian Studies Conference (MSC12), Zoom, 17-18 August 2021).

⁴ Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017: High-level Political Forum* (Putrajaya: 2017), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf>.

recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the Global Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development.”

The CSO-SDG Alliance played an important role in contributing to contents and review of the drafts. Working groups were formed with CSOs, academic institutions, think tanks and the private sector to discuss the various themes and papers were written and submitted to the EPU Secretariat for inclusion into the report. This was acknowledged by the Minister of Economic Affairs, Dato' Sri Mustapa bin Mohamed who said in the preface of the 2021 VNR, “This report would not have been possible, if it were not for the strong support and encouragement from the Right Honourable Prime Minister and my Cabinet colleagues. Of course, my team at the Economic Planning Unit, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on SDGs, United Nations’ agencies in Malaysia, participating private sector, civil society organisations, academia, and individuals all deserve their due recognition for their contribution to this report.”⁵

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on SDGs for Localising SDGs at the Parliamentary Constituency Level

Although Malaysia has adopted the SDGs in development planning and made specific references to SDGs in the 11th and 12th Malaysia Plan, there are many challenges in the localisation of SDGs at the State and district levels. The interconnected nature of the SDGs requires a crosscutting and multi-dimensional approach in delivery. This is where the CSO-SDG Alliance can play a major role in multi-stakeholder engagement. This is the major partnership thrust of SDG

⁵ Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, *Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021* (Putrajaya: 2021), https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia_Voluntary_National_Review_%28VNR%29_2021.pdf.

17.17, where the call for the promotion of effective public, private and civil society partnerships are made.

The Alliance participated in a series of public engagement events organised by the Parliamentary Speaker that had direct relevance to SDGs, and hosted a series of conversations with the Speaker. On 1 July 2019, a dinner was hosted as an interaction between MPs and CSOs. A National Forum followed this on SDGs held on 19 July 2019 in Parliament hosted by KSI, Parliament and the Alliance. The Alliance called for greater parliamentary involvement at two levels, namely at the policy-making level and monitoring the delivery at the local level. CSOs saw the MPs as enablers for localising the SDGs.

Parliament Malaysia approved the formation of All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Oct 17, 2020 that are bipartisan, multi-stakeholder groups of Members of Parliament (MPs), civil society, academia, public and private sector members. On the same day Parliament approved the establishment of the first APPGM group on Sustainable Development Goals with the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance as the Secretariat. Members of Parliament from both houses established an APPGM-SDG Committee. The first committee from 2020 to 2022 was chaired by YB Dato' Sri Hajah Rohani Abdul Karim and the Deputy was YB Puan Maria Chin Abdullah. The Secretary was YB William Leong Jee Keen and the Treasurer was YB Dr. Kelvin Yii Lee Wuen. The other two members from Dewan Rakyat were YB Tuan Wong Tack, YB Tuan Ahmad Hassan, YB Tuan Ahmad Fadhli Shaari and Dewan Negara members were YB Senator Datuk Paul Igai, and YB Senator Adrian Bannie Lasimbang who subsequently left after completing his Senator term. The Committee agreed to undertake a pilot project in ten parliamentary constituencies in ten states with the theme of localising SDGs at the parliamentary constituency level.

For 2020 and 2021, the Secretariat was made up of senior founding members who served as heads of the respective sections of solutions, research, finance, audit, and other responsibilities. They were from CSOs, academia from public universities and think tank groups who undertook research and policy work as well as CSOs and social enterprises who carried out solution projects at the ground level. This SDGs team is highly motivated and works in close partnership with the office staff of the MPs as well as with all the key district level government staff in localising the SDGs. From 2022, the Secretariat was fully staffed with full time employees funded from the allocations from the Ministry of Finance (MOF), and the core founding members served as resource persons.

The Secretariat made presentations to EPU and MOF with proposals and plans of implementation. A major breakthrough for the APPGM-SDG was the allocation of RM2 million in the 2020 Budget by the MOF for the localising of SDGs, and this was used to implement 34 projects in 10 constituencies. Similarly, the 2021 Budget has allocated RM5 million to increase the outreach to another 20 parliamentary constituencies for which we have managed to implement another 87 projects. Due to the commitment and hard work put in by members of the team, the APPGM-SDG have received strong endorsement from the MPs, EPU as well as the MOF. MOF has doubled its allocation to RM10 million for 2022, which was used to reach another 27 constituencies. In terms of governance, the funds are managed by the Society for the Promotions of SDGs, which is the legal entity for the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance. The Secretariat submits monthly activity and financial reports to Parliament and the MOF.⁶

⁶ Lin Mui Kiang, "APPGM-SDG Institutional Panel CSO-Academia Partnership in Localising SDGs - Experiential Research on SDGs at the Local Level."

There are four phases in this implementation. Phase one is the mapping and awareness. A three-day field study is undertaken in each of the ten constituencies during which time, local issues and needs are identified. There is local prioritisation of the issues. The second phase is designing local solutions to address the concerns. The third phase is the execution of the solution projects by solution partners that could be undertaken by CSOs and social enterprises in partnership with local actors. The final stage is the project review and evaluation.

The key priorities of the APPGM-SDG are to address poverty and inequality in Malaysian society; mainstream gender perspectives in SDG delivery; ensure greater multi-stakeholder partnerships among MPs, government agencies, CSOs, academics, private sector and local communities; strategically ensure that there is an effective cross-cutting of the 17 SDG goals to foster balanced development (economic, social and environmental); and to give greater visibility of SDGs at the local level through the delivery of services as well as at the national level through policy discussions at Parliament and with decision-makers in Putrajaya. They are equally important as the SDG priority is "leaving no one behind", and a balanced approach should be followed. In our APPGM-SDG work, there is a focus on specific target groups such as the rural and urban poor, the B40, women, children, indigenous people, refugees and undocumented, persons with disabilities, the elderly and rural smallholders and the fishing community.

The list is non-exhaustive and their issues are cross-cutting. Based on the identification, mapping and prioritisation of issues based on site visits on the ground by the research team, roundtable sessions are held to propose recommendations to the government on policies and programs that can be adopted to address them. An annual integrated and comparative APPG report that highlights the common issues and challenges across the parliamentary constituency

studies is presented to the Speaker and Secretary of Parliament. The findings could be shared via speakers by APPGM members in parliamentary debates and question time as well as special roundtable discussions that could be hosted to discuss the findings.

The APPGM solution projects are designed to address the issues and challenges identified during the field visits and discussions with the MP's office, government agencies, NGOs, community leaders and the community. Upon prioritisation of the issues to be addressed under the APPGM-SDG programme with its allocation of RM120,000 for each constituency, calls for proposals are made to interested and competent parties to submit their project proposals. They are wide ranging and cover many sectors and SDGs. The APPGM-SDG seeks to maximise the contribution from the expertise, experience, dedication and commitment of related organizations to assist the communities on the ground. They range from CSOs/NGOs, local universities, community associations and even private sector firms. Proposals are then reviewed by the Solutions Committee that emphasises on the criteria of their effectiveness in addressing the issue(s) that they purport to resolve, their sustainability, and replicability or scalability. The suitability and capacity of the project proponents are also assessed. The reviewed projects are then endorsed by the respective MPs before being presented to the APPGM-SDG Executive Committee for final approval.

From 2020 to 2022, about 300 solution projects were approved and implemented in 57 parliamentary constituencies. Feedback has been very positive and many NGOs, local communities and even government agencies have been energised to make improvements to further overcome local issues that are addressed by the solutions projects. Partners include city councils, municipal councils, district councils, universities, think tanks, partners in 57 constituencies, and private firms. Partners with expertise and local knowledge are crucial to achieve objectives of the projects. They

include local universities, specialised CSOs, and local NGOs such as Sabah Women's Action Resource Group (SAWO), Perkhidmatan Sosial Pembangunan Komuniti (PSPK), Sarawak Dayak Iban Association (SADIA), Rise of Social Efforts (ROSE), My Petaling Jaya (MyPJ), Pertubuhan Pembangunan Wanita Tamarai Pulau Pinang (Tamarai) and Youth Clubs in Pensiangan, Sabah. The bottom-up approach is enhanced with the involvement of CSOs and Community-based Organisations (CBOs). Local authorities and community leaders will also be empowered to identify and alleviate pockets of poverty at the community level. Designated government officials at the local level can be assigned to coordinate and implement the grassroots approach to ensure the success of poverty alleviation initiatives.⁷

In preparation for the implementation of the solutions projects, capacity sessions were carried out for government agencies from federal, state and local levels, NGOs, community leaders and communities to raise awareness of the SDG principles and how they are relevant to them in their work and daily lives. They include joint sessions to increase understanding among them and to mainstream the SDGs. There were also sessions to resolve issues on specific subject matters such as health and well-being, women and youth empowerment, needs assessment for community development, problem solving for squatter communities, rights and responsibilities of flat dwellers, community health screening, increasing youth readiness for employment, natural farming principles for sustainability and quality produce, and dialogues with agencies to discuss specific issues. The solutions projects are wide ranging to address the diverse issues that have been prioritised. They cover many sectors including poverty alleviation, health, education, waste management, entrepreneurial development, income-generating projects, skills training and community development.⁸

⁷ All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG), *List of Solution Projects* (Unpublished document, 2020).

⁸ APPGM-SDG, *Issue Mapping Findings* (Unpublished document, 2020).

In addition to solutions projects, the APPGM-SDG members from various civil societies, public universities and think tank groups have been providing policy input to the Economic Planning Unit as input to the Voluntary National Review Report, 2021 Budget, Post-Covid National Economic Recovery Plan, the Twelfth Malaysia Plan and enhancing the multidimensional poverty indicators as well as effective district and local government level delivery of services especially to Bottom 40 (B40) and vulnerable communities.

Overall, it is an amazing journey of the CSO-SDG-Alliance working in close partnership with the Members of Parliament, EPU, community leaders and civil servants at the local level. Its accomplishment and progress so far need to be taken to a higher level especially with the rapid expansion of its responsibilities in more constituencies and also many expectations that have been put on the Alliance. The Alliance hopes to further work together to enhance its effectiveness in the implementation of the SDGs on the ground.⁹

Way Forward for Government-CSO Collaboration

Government-CSO collaboration can be further strengthened. CSOs can support policy making by bringing realities on the ground to the process and act as a source of citizen science data for bottom-up information for targeted sustainable development planning. CSOs should thus be seen as partners to disseminate sustainable development plans to local stakeholders and to implement the 12th Malaysia Plan that seeks to further the implementation of the SDGs. In this sense, CSOs can both offer perspectives on shaping policies as well as be partners to implement strategies and actions. There would be active participation of CSOs in developing development national plans from the onset till implementation.

⁹ Lin Mui Kiang, *APPGM-SDG Annual Report 2020 - Solution Projects*.
<https://www.parlimen.gov.my/images/webuser/jkuasa/LAPORAN%20KRPPM/APPGM-SDG%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%202020.pdf>.

Service delivery can be enhanced and be more impactful if the strengths of CSOs who have wide coverage and trust on the ground are combined with those of Government agencies who have resources and longer-term goals. CSOs can also help define, develop and implement projects that serve multiple purposes in meeting the SDGs in a holistic and integrated manner. CSOs can be appointed and mobilised to carry out many government functions and to carry out service delivery, ranging from social welfare, health, education, environment, and other sectors. CSOs can help bridge Government Agencies with the communities to enhance delivery of public services.

CSOs can also provide an independent and objective assessment of the progress being made in the 12th Malaysia Plan implementation by providing constructive feedback. CSOs can contribute towards developing robust measures to assess and monitor project impacts to track SDG implementation, and identify gaps to ensure the feedback provided is evidence-based. Mid-term review of the 12th Malaysia Plan should include the CSO-SDG Alliance and its partners to get feedback and work towards improving and implementing changes. What is needed is a screening and monitoring group to select responsible and capable CSOs to reach out to left behind groups. Funding could be provided for CSOs to be the independent monitoring body to ensure effective delivery of the plan.

On 14 February 2022, the CSO-SDG Alliance was invited to a conversation with Prof Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Noor Azlan Ghazali, Executive Director of the Economic Action Council (EAC) Secretariat on the new policy document entitled "Resetting Malaysia: Aligning to The New Economic Landscape."¹⁰ The outline highlights eight change agenda and two of the change agendas are:

¹⁰ The Secretariat of Economic Action Council (EAC), *Resetting Malaysia: Aligning to the New Economic Landscape* (Putrajaya: 2021), https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2022-05/Resetting_Malaysia_0.pdf.

Reset 4: Promoting shared responsibility, good governance and sustainability

Reset 7: Attending vulnerable communities, and mainstreaming the Third Sector. In how to take the Third sector forward, the recommendations are to:

- Formalize the role of 3rd sector as partners in development;
- Formulate a national policy for the official recognition of the role of the 3rd sector as partners in development;
- Establish a clear governance (formation, finance, reporting, monitoring, accreditation, etc), scope of involvement, and a 3rd sector national referral centre;
- Formation of a multi-stakeholder partnership coordination taskforce for the 3rd sector at the federal, state and district levels;
- Introduce training and educational programmes to strengthen the 3rd sector's capacity and social work professionalism;
- Develop a standard template for systematic impact assessment and evaluation of community-based transformation projects;
- Develop a dedicated 3rd sector web portal to enhance sharing of best practices and to promote collaborative initiative amongst the 3rd sector organisations; and
- Set up a national grant to support advocacy-based 3rd sector (e.g., SDG, Science & Technology, Democracy, and etc.) through competitive bidding with stringent performance and impact evaluation.

This will open up further the role of CSOs as partners in national development. As the CSO-SDG Alliance has had a head start with more than seven years in policy research, capacity building and localising of the SDGs, it is in a strong position to take up expanded responsibilities and tasks to supplement and complement the government's efforts and look forward to this beneficial collaboration.

CONCLUSION

SDG achievement depends strongly on progress made at the local level. There is now a growing recognition of the need to localise the SDGs as witnessed at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2021, with a number of initiatives and discussions giving attention to the need to accelerate SDG implementation through increased efforts at the local level. Through the lens of policy coherence and a multi-level governance approach, effectively leveraging SDG localisation is critical for achieving sustainable development by 2030. Overall, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a unique opportunity to rethink public management and local development. Without localizing the SDGs, much progress on implementation of the SDGs will be left untapped.

The government, specifically EPU and MOF, has recognised the unique contribution of CSOs and would like to strengthen the role of the third sector as part of the agenda to move towards a whole of nation and whole of society approach. APPGM-SDG has demonstrated how CSOs can complement the role of government in development delivery and at the same time builds capacity at the local level. In localising SDGs, a holistic approach is needed to push for promoting policy coherence, multi-level governance, adopting a public management approach that promotes a whole-of-nation approach can help facilitate SDG localization and mechanisms that support the alignment of national and local sustainable development agendas must be in place. At the national level, this requires

commitment, advocacy, and continuous support for local governance as well as national policy and legal frameworks that integrate local SDG plans. At the local level, effective localisation requires, first and foremost, awareness of the SDGs. Translating the SDGs into local contexts is needed to define how communities can benefit from achieving the SDGs through inter alia issue mapping and conducting needs assessments.

It is important to promote ownership and co-responsibility for the implementation of strategic projects. The implementation of projects needs to include the full involvement and participation of local stakeholders such as NGOs, research organisations, academia, private sector, community-based organizations and community members. This multi-stakeholder approach should create ownership and co-responsibility among all actors and serve to mobilise and reallocate resources effectively. The Members of Parliament play an important role to promote the involvement of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable groups. When citizens are involved in the planning stage of a plan or project, they are usually keener to participate in the implementing and monitoring stages, too.

The APPGM-SDG programme demonstrates the power of the bottom-up approach that is used in the localisation of the SDGs. The process of issue mapping and prioritisation has led to the design of solution projects to address the specific challenges as there are no one-size-fits-all solutions for addressing problems on the ground. It enables the leap-frogging from traditional businesses to high tech e-commerce, provides valuable transformation for local communities to catch up and create a more level playing field. Feedback has been very positive and many NGOs, local communities and even government agencies have been energised to make improvements to further overcome local issues that are addressed by the solutions projects. It is a good approach to empower the local community and to achieve the Agenda 2030 and should be stepped up in order to

leave no one behind (LNOB). The experience gained from 2020 onwards will serve to enhance their implementation and impact.

Much has been achieved during the period 2015-2022. However, much more needs to be done in the remaining eight years in order to build back better, especially when we have been adversely affected by the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from socio-economic undertakings, efforts should also be made towards reforms such as in corruption, judiciary, good governance, transparency, justice, racial discrimination, social protection rights for the refugees, parliamentary reform and more, as stated in SDG16, and putting up the right policies. Moving forward, we must recognise that localising SDGs is a crucial pre-requisite for nationwide SDG adoption. There is a need for a whole-of-nation approach and greater coordination across Government, from the Federal level all the way down to the local level, in order to facilitate SDG adoption. In this regard, the Parliament of Malaysia established the All-Party Parliamentary Group on SDGs to assist the Government in reaching out to the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly those who reside in remote areas. This initiative is part of Malaysia's effort in ensuring that everyone in the country will enjoy the benefits of economic development. This journey of the Government with the CSO pioneers is testament to the multi-stakeholder engagement indicated in SDG 17.17, where a partnership model is advocated. The Malaysian society is illustrative of this principle and while we have achieved much, there are still many challenges ahead in our quest to achieve the SDGs by 2030 in order to leave no one behind.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Data Disaggregation to Increase the Visibility of Indigenous Peoples in Achieving SDGs in Malaysia: A Methodological Note Utilising DOSM Annual Reports of SDG Indicators in 2018-2021

Wong Chin Huat

Introduction

This methodological note argues that for the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) to be not left behind in the attainment of SDGs, Malaysia must move towards data disaggregation to identify them either as individual ethnic groups or as categories to provide better public services and to increase statistical accuracy. It makes the case by firstly analysing the annual data of SDG indicators in Malaysia released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) in its annual reports in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 and secondly identifying 95 SDG indicators that may be data-disaggregated to make IPs invisible, based on “SDGs For Indigenous Peoples”, an exploratory study carried out by Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development (JSC) at Sunway University and commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 2020-2.

This note consists of four parts. Part 1 explains what data disaggregation for IPs means. Part 2 analyses the DOSM data available for two SDG Indicators – 2.3.2 and 4.5.1 – which specifically state the need to disaggregate data for IPs. Part 3 zooms in on two SDG indicators – 3.2.2 and 4.a.1 – using DOSM data to show how data disaggregation for IPs may be done and how this may complement DOSM’s admirable work on localised, district-level SDG data since 2019. Part 4 presents the full list of 95 other SDG existing indicators that may be potentially disaggregated for IPs, drawing from the JSC-WWF study, which the author happened to be the principal investigator. It concludes with a call to the DOSM and other public agencies to consciously disaggregate and make IPs visible in their data.

1. Data Disaggregation

UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals (UN IAEG-SDGs) provides a clear definition:

“Disaggregation is the breakdown of observations within a common branch of a hierarchy to a more detailed level to that at which detailed observations are taken. With standard hierarchical classifications [...] categories can be split (disaggregated) when finer details are required and made possible by the codes given to the primary observations.”¹

Here, “dimensions” refer to the characteristics by which data is to be disaggregated (by sex, age, geographical location, etc.) while “categories” refer to the different characteristics under a certain disaggregation dimension (female/male, etc.).² Hence, the localised SDG indicators and ‘small area statistics’ compiled by DOSM is also data aggregation with ‘geographical location’ as the ‘dimension’ and ‘administrative districts’ as the ‘categories’.

The additional data disaggregation we call for is a new dimension – being ‘indigenous peoples’ which entail both indigeneity and marginalisation. Where possible, the categories should be individual tribes such as “Sungai”, “Penan” and “Senoi”, as per the official ethnic groupings recognised in Sabah, Sarawak and the Malaysian Peninsula. Subject to the nature of data, as in the case of 4.a.1, aggregated categories like “Orang Asal in Sabah and Labuan”, “Orang Asal in Sarawak” or “Peninsular Orang Asli” or just “Orang Asal” may also be accepted. However, a catch-all category like “Bumiputera” or “Pribumi” as understood in the implementation of public policies would defeat the purpose of disaggregation for two reasons: first, such a category is too wide and too large that smaller

¹ Patole, M., “Localization of SDGs Through Disaggregation of KPIs,” *Economies*, 2018, 6(1), pp. 5

² Data Disaggregation and its Key Role in International Development, Toladata, 12 October 2021

groups within it are likely to be invisible; and second, the inclusion of the dominant ethnic majority may conceal the marginalisation of the smaller groups, as economist Muhammed Abdul Khalid argues convincingly in his book “The Colour of Inequality: Ethnicity, Class, Income and Wealth in Malaysia”.³

Data disaggregation has long been advocated by researchers and rights advocates of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, Canada, 2009; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.) While disaggregation on ethnicity is not made an international norm because of cross-national differences in definition, categorisation and emphasis of ethnicity, Malaysia can easily utilise this strength to produce data disaggregation on ethnicity for the IPs to be made visible, given her long history in collecting ethnicity-based data.

2. Unactualised Data Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples in Two SDG Indicators

Out of the 248 indicators, only two specifically mention indigenous peoples, but the DOSM reports does not provide IP-specific data for both. (Table 1)

Indicator 2.3.2, on average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status, is to serve the target 2.3 of doubling by 2030 agricultural productivity and incomes of women and indigenous peoples amongst other small-scale food producers. Both the 2019 and 2020 reports list such data as “partially available, need further development” but no data is provided even in the elaborate 2021 reports.

³ Khalid, M.A., *The Colour of Inequality: Ethnicity, Class, Income and Wealth in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: MPH Publishing, 2014)

Indicator 4.5.1 looks at how equally different groups of population - female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile, persons with disabilities/others, indigenous peoples/non-indigenous peoples, persons affected by conflicts/others – perform on all education indicators. If no one is left behind because of their group membership, then the indicator would be closer to 1. If the indicator is less than one, then the first group in comparison (female, rural, both 20%, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, persons affected by conflicts) is systematically disadvantaged, signalling the need for policy intervention.

Drawing data mainly from the Ministry of Education, the DOSM's 2021 report on 'People' gives us a good glance on gender parity in education as per Indicator 4.5.1. Girls achieved marginally better in reading and mathematics, both at the end of primary education and lower secondary education. For every boy in pre-school, there was 1.03 girl in 2021. Likewise, in the preceding 12 months, for every young/adult male in formal education and training, there was 1.03 young/adult female. Finally, the DOSM's Labour Force Survey suggests there was perfect parity in literacy skill for those aged 15-24 throughout 2019-2021. However, if we include all above 24 years old in the labour force, then female is marginally behind (0.97-0.98 to 1) in literacy skill in 2019-2020, reflecting gender discrimination against women in the earlier generations. (Table 2)

The data for comparison of IPs and persons with disabilities to the rest of the population is not available. If data is available, can we expect the figures to be close to 1 for all the indicators available in Table 2? If parity is not achieved now, can we achieve by 2030 the second half of Target 4.5.1: "By 2030, ... ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations"? As ethnic data is constantly collected in Malaysia, and data on disability can be easily collected if not yet so,

the Ministry of Education and DOSM should furnish full data on Indicator 4.5.1 for year 2022.

Scan QR code to view Table 1: Unactualised Data Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples for Two Existing SDG Indicators



Scan QR code to view Table 2: Gender Parity Index for Education indicators, Malaysia, 2019-2021



3. Exploring Data Disaggregation with Indigenous Peoples for Two Other SDG Indicators

This section makes the case why data disaggregation with IPs is both technically possible, beneficial and desirable, to complement the DOSM’s geographical data disaggregation at the state and administrative district levels. We will use two SDG indicators that does not specify any data disaggregation: ‘Indicator 3.2.2 Neonatal Mortality Rate’ and Indicator 4.a.1 ‘Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service’.

3.1 Indicator 3.2.2 Neonatal Mortality Rate

To illustrate this point, we reproduce the 2021 data for ‘Indicator 3.2.2 Neonatal Mortality Rate’ as Table 3. Neonatal mortality is defined as death between 0-27 calendar days after birth. Target 3.2 is “By 2030, end preventable deaths of new-borns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births.”

*Table 3. Neonatal Mortality Ratio by State, Malaysia, 2019-2021
(Table 3.4, p 72, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators
Malaysia 2021 – Focus Area - People, reproduced)*

State	2019*	2020*	2021
Malaysia	4.1	3.9	4.1
Johor	3.9	4.2	4.4
Kedah	4	3.7	4.4
Kelantan	5	4	5.2
Melaka	4.5	4.8	4.7
Negeri Sembilan	5.2	4.1	4.3
Pahang	4.6	3.5	4.4
Perak	4.5	4.6	4.2
Perlis	4.4	6.6	5.2
Pulau Pinang	4	3.6	3.6
Sabah	4	5.7	5.6
Sarawak	3.2	3.4	3.1
Selangor	3.7	3	2.9
Terengganu	4.8	3.9	4.8
W.P. Kuala Lumpur	3.2	2.5	3.5
W.P. Labuan	4.2	5.3	5.3
W.P. Putrajaya	3.5	4.2	3.8

*Notes: The ratios are per 1,000 live births *revised*

The data shows a slow and fluctuating progress towards the goal, the number of neonatal deaths per every 1,000 live births has dropped from 4.4 (2017), 4.6 (2018), 4.1 (2019), 3.9 (2020) to 4.1 (2021) (DOSM, 2020: 114, Table 3.4; 2022: p72, Table 3.4).

Importantly, there were clear variations across states. For 2021, the rate ranged from 2.9 in Selangor, 3.1 in Sarawak and 3.5 in Kuala Lumpur at the lower end to 5.2 in Kelantan and Perlis, 5.3 in Labuan and 5.6 in Sabah at the higher end. If this leads us to think the neonatal death ratio simply reflects socio-economic development of

the states, then vastly rural Sarawak and urbanised Labuan appear as anomalies.

DOSM's localised data provides us invaluable disaggregated insights based on geographical location (dimension) of administrative districts (category). We produce the data for three states with a substantive or notable size of indigenous population – Sarawak, Sabah and Kelantan - in 2021. (Tables 4-6) At this level of disaggregation, we find some occasional spikes like Sabah's Kalabakan (70.7 in 2021) and Putatan (38.2 in 2020), Sarawak's Song (12.9) and Telang Usan (10), and Kelantan's Jeli (11.2), all in 2021. This may be due to a very small denominator (live births) such that a sudden increase in neonatal death can generate a high ratio, and such outliers may not represent the general condition.⁴ Unfortunately, we do not have the data of live births per district per year to confirm our hypothesis.

However, we also see high neonatal mortality persisting for at least two years in 2020-2021, such as Sabah's Kuala Penyu (16.6, 18.5), Beaufort (9.1, 10.2), Sipitang (11, 8.7), Kota Marudu (13.5, 4.5), Papar (10.7, 6.6), Sarawak's Sebauh (6.5, 8.5) and Kelantan's Kuala Krai (5.8, 6.7) and Pasir Mas (5.4, 5.8) districts. Unfortunately, we do not have the health data at the district level to provide further analysis.

Disaggregation enables targeted attention and intervention. If the excessively high neonatal mortality is generally caused by geographical factors, such as insufficient supply of medical practitioners and transportation access to emergency treatment, then improving on these aspects should be able to reduce neonatal mortality in the next year. However, without disaggregated data, we cannot analyse if the chance of neonatal death is spread evenly across all in the same district, and not disproportionately hitting certain

⁴ For example, if there are only 50 births in an administrative district, and two infants die before the first 28 days, the neonatal mortality rate would be 40/1000.

communities who may be more marginalised than others in household income, malnutrition, water supply and sanitation? We would not know about the latter unless we have disaggregation data based on ethnicity or specific to Indigenous Peoples.

Taking Sabah’s Kuala Penyu district as an example (16.6 and 18.5 neonatal deaths per 1000 live births in 2020 and 2021 respectively), these high numbers may mask large differences between ethnicities and IPs in the same physical district. Without data disaggregation, public health practitioners will not be able to target education, preventive and curative services in local languages and customs, as the Kuala Penyu district is not homogeneous enough to qualify for a one-size-fits-all public health approach.

Data for indicators like 3.2.2 should be disaggregated to the individual ethno-religious group (as category) to identify intersectionality (Centre for Intersectional Justice, n.d) and enable effective intervention. Grouping communities into some composite categories like “Orang Asal” or “Bumiputera” might mask the plight of the most marginalised groups if their numbers are small.

Table 4 Neonatal Mortality Ratio by Administrative District, Sarawak, 2019-2021

District	2019	2020	2021
Sarawak	0.3	3.4	3.1
Kuching	0.3	4	2.1
Bau	0.5	3.5	2.6
Lundu	0.7	5	-
Samarahan	0.2	3.5	2.8
Serian	0.1	1.3	2.3
Simunjan	0.4	1.4	-
Sri Aman	0.6	-	-
Lubok Antu	-	5.9	-
Betong	0.7	4	1.4
Saratok	-	4.3	2.8

Sarikei	0.3	1.2	2.9
Maradong	0.3	-	2.8
Daro	1.1	5.4	-
Julau	-	4	4.1
Sibu	0.4	2.8	2.7
Dalat	-	3	3.2
Mukah	0.3	6.1	1.5
Kanowit	-	4.1	-
Bintulu	0.2	4.6	4.8
Tatau	0.2	2.2	8.9
Kapit	0.6	6.4	2.1
Song	0.4	-	12.9
Belaga	0.3	2.6	-
Miri	0.2	3.3	7.4
Marudi	0.4	4.8	2.6
Limbang	0.9	1.4	1.6
Lawas	0.2	6.3	6.4
Matu	-	-	-
Asajaya	0.5	3.1	3.2
Pakan	0.8	-	4.3
Selangau	-	6.1	4.8
Tebedu	-	3.8	6.2
Pusa	0.8	2.8	2.9
Kabong	0.5	8	5
Tanjung Manis	0.7	8.5	-
Sebauh	0.3	6.5	8.5
Bukit Mabong	-	3.1	6.1
Subis	-	2.7	2.7
Beluru	-	-	-
Telang Usan	1.3	-	10

(Extracted from Table D4, p 172-173, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators Malaysia 2021 – Focus Area - People)

Note: “-“ no cases

Table 5 Neonatal Mortality Ratio by Administrative District, Sabah, 2019-2021

District	2019	2020	2021
SABAH	0.4	5.7	5.6
Tawau	0.4	6.7	6
Lahad Datu	0.2	1.5	5
Semporna	0.3	2.2	1.8
Kinabatangan	0.9	7.2	3.1
Beluran	0.3	8.6	8.8
Kota Kinabalu	0.5	3.7	5.8
Ranau	0.5	4.5	2.1
Kota Belud	0.7	7.7	4.3
Tuaran	0.5	3.7	7.1
Penampang	0.2	4.8	6.6
Papar	0.6	10.7	6.6
Kudat	0.6	7.9	5.6
Kota Marudu	0.4	13.5	4.5
Pitas	0.5	1.1	2.5
Beaufort	0.4	9.1	10.2
Kuala Penyu	0.2	16.6	18.5
Sipitang	0.1	11	8.7
Tenom	0.5	4	6.8
Nabawan	0.1	4.6	4.3
Keningau	0.3	3.9	5.4
Tambunan	0.4	2.7	-
Kunak	0.2	3.1	3.3
Tongod	-	-	-
Putatan	0.8	38.2	7.4
Telupid	-	4.5	6
Kalabakan	0.6	5.2	70.7

(Extracted from Table D4, p 171-172, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators Malaysia 2021 – Focus Area - People)

Note: “-” no cases

Table 6. Neonatal Mortality Ratio by Administrative District, Kelantan, 2019-2021

District	2019	2020	2021
KELANTAN	0.5	4	5.2
Bachok	0.5	2.7	6.4
Kota Bharu	0.5	3.5	4.7
Machang	0.4	4.6	4.6
Pasir Mas	0.3	5.4	5.8
Pasir Puteh	0.6	2.6	5.2
Tanah Merah	0.5	5.7	5.8
Tumpat	0.6	3.4	4.2
Gua Musang	0.5	3.8	2.2
Kuala Krai	0.5	5.8	6.7
Jeli	0.8	2.9	11.2

(Extracted from Table D4, p 169, DOSM, 2022, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators Malaysia 2021 – Focus Area - People)

3.2 Indicator 4.a.1 Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service

Data disaggregation on IPs group membership cannot be directly pursued for some indicators, but we can construct proxy categories for IPs to be visible. Once such indicator is ‘Indicator 4.a.1 Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service’. We reproduce the DOSM data for 2019-2021 as Table 7.

Almost near 100% of the schools in Malaysia across states and federal territories enjoy all facilities listed except for ‘computer’ and ‘adapted infrastructure and materials’ where even the national rates are only 88.8% and 16.9%. Table D9 in the same Report provided the administrative district level data for the same set of measures, similar to what Table D4 provides for Table 3.4.

How do we know if indigenous school children are disproportionately affected by lack of facilities? We cannot disaggregate by indigenous group membership of students. However, we can create proxy categories like the quintiles from “schools with 20% or less Indigenous Students” to “schools with > 80% Indigenous students” to assess disparity in resource allocation.

Scan QR code to view Table 7: Proportion of Schools with Education Facilities by State and Type of Access, Malaysia, 2019-2021 (Table 4.a.1, p 123-124, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators Malaysia 2021 – Focus Area - People, reproduced)



4. Identifying SDG Indicators for Potential Data Disaggregation with Indigenous Peoples

Adapted and Updated from the methodology from the JSC-WWF study, we list down here 97 Indicators corresponding to 64 Targets that may make IPs visible with data disaggregation. (Table 8)

Scan QR code to view Table 8: Ninety-Seven SDG Indicators Where Specifying Data Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples is Possible and Desirable



Other than 2.3.2 and 4.5.1 that have explicit mention of indigenous status, the remaining 95 indicators – only 93 of which are unique, as 1.5.1, 11.5.1 and 13.1.1 are the same – where data aggregation for IPs which may be attempted – sometimes with proxy, as demonstrated in the case of 4.a.1 – are listed below in Table 9, with data availability in the DOSM reports from 2018 to 2021 listed.

Scan QR code to view Table 9: Proposed Data Disaggregation for 95 Existing SDG Indicators



CONCLUSION

This methodological note has made the case for data disaggregation with indigenous group membership as a dimension and individual indigenous groups (unaggregated where possible) as categories to make IPs visible so that they would not be left behind. As ethnic data is regularly collected in Malaysia, DOSM and the Ministry of Education should provide full data including indigenous status for Indicators 2.3.2 and 4.5.1 for the DOSM' SDG Indicators 2022 report.

In line with the values of 'sustainability', 'compassion' and 'innovation' in the Madani Malaysia framework, DOSM and other government agencies should expand their admirable efforts on data disaggregation beyond geographical location – administrative districts – to indigenous status. Malaysia can and should become a leading example in our eagerness to better understand and effectively act on the plights endured by indigenous peoples, in the spirit of 'leaving no one behind'.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Solution Providers as Grassroots Mobilisers in Localising SDGs

K. Eruthaiaraj

INTRODUCTION

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) is a bipartisan initiative, mandated by the Parliament of Malaysia to localise the SDGs nationwide. APPGM-SDG plays a key role to fill the vacuum by engaging people from the grassroots communities through community-led SDG Micro Solution Projects. As grassroots mobilisers, they are the eyes and ears of the marginalised communities that ensure the voices and the aspirations of the local communities are not left unheard. The grassroots mobilisers are the APPGM-SDG solution partners that build strong networks and partnerships with the state and district agencies, local civil society organisations (CSOs), and the local communities to address local issues. They also coordinate short-term projects to gather feedback and lessons for policy advocacy and evidence-based situation analysis.¹

This partnership model aligns with SDG 17.17, which encourages a multi-sectorial partnership that brings together different players and sectors to find a common ground to discuss matters that matters most to the marginalised and neglected groups. The key focus here is to drive policy advocacy that translates to addressing the real issues at the grassroots level. This has been the challenge of some of the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance members, particularly those based in Klang Valley, the urban cities situated in the capital of Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas. They found it difficult to coordinate projects that require garnering ground

¹ Malaysia CSO-SDG Alliance, *History, Current Status, and Governance*. Alliance Governance Paper. (Malaysia, 2022).

support and capacity building. This is necessary to build momentum and create a strong push factor to initiate change at the policymaking level. The APPGM-SDG solution providers use a grounded-based approach to understand the local needs and address local needs using a bottom-up approach. This requires a strong grassroots movement or rather, an army of grassroots champions to build change from the bottom up.

Social movements that originate from the grassroots of society often have the potential to shape history. For example, the social movements of the 1960s reshaped politics and society in the United States, Western Europe, and beyond. Their impact reverberates till today in the themes of civil rights, women empowerment, and the rights of gender diverse groups. These movements gave voice to the interests of the poor and neglected through various forms of labour, farmer, populist, religious, temperance, and anti-slavery movements throughout the United States and other nations. The ability of individuals to unite at the local level, and take collective action directed at improving their own situation and that of the larger society.²

Likewise, in Malaysia, the Coalition of Clean and Fair Elections, better known by its Malay acronym, *Bersih*, which means clean, held the first mass rally in 2007, to make four demands to ensure a clean and fair electoral process in Malaysia. People from all walks of life, from the grassroots joined the rally that year and the following years. These helped re-shaped the nation's history and evidently brought change in the nation's system, which led to greater transparency and accountability in administering a fair electoral process.

²Van Til, Jon, Gabor Hegyesi, and Jennifer Eschweiler, "Grassroots Social Movements and the Shaping of History," In: *Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research* (2007): 362-377, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-0-387-32933-8_24.

The APPGM-SDG solution providers on the ground are the ones that provide feedback on the ground needs and they are the grassroots champions that mobilise the local communities to address the ground issues. They also provide input for policy development for the respective parliamentarians to bring up at the Parliament in efforts to find concrete solutions on the issues that centre on three main themes - social, economic and environment.³

GROUNDED RESEARCH APPROACH IN LOCALISING SDGs

APPGM-SDG adopts and advocates a grounded research methodology as its operationalized framework that engages with the local community to understand the local issues, the ground needs and sentiments. This methodology gives equal focus to the process and achievement of the SDGs. It also serves as a policy evaluation on the development delivery of the global Agenda 2030 principle of “leaving no one behind”. The research methodology for localising the SDGs by the APPGM-SDG comprises four main scopes of work- issue mapping, prioritisation of issues, situational analysis, and solutions identifications.

To achieve the principle of “Leaving no one behind,” it requires active participation from all stakeholders as listed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals Charter, particularly, Goal 17.17 which reads, “Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnership.”⁴

³ Khoo Boo Teik, “The Profound Impact of the BERSIH Movement since 2007,” Perspective, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, accessed May 8, 2023, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_167.pdf.

⁴ Department of Statistics Malaysia, *Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators Malaysia 2019*, (Putrajaya: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), 27.

MICRO SOLUTION PROJECTS IN LOCALISING SDGS

The APPGM-SDG has embarked on a mammoth task to mobilise grassroots communities for sustainable impact and change by engaging local solution providers to undertake SDG micro solution projects. From the years 2020 to 2022, as of 31st December 2022, we approved 236 solution projects that have enabled local communities to become active enablers to resolve local issues. We have made inroads in the minds of the local champions or solution providers that SDG Micro Solution Projects are a means for grassroots mobilisation. Table 1 shows the current status of the solution projects from the first year 2020 to 2022, as of 31st December 2022.⁵

Table 1. Status of Solution Projects from 2020 – 2022 (as of 31st December 2022)

Year	2020		2021		2022	
	On - going	Completed	On-going	Completed	On-going	Completed
Status	0	34	0	87	111	4
Total (by year)	34		87		115	
Grand Total	236					

Source: APPGM-SDG (2022)

The establishment of APPGM -SDG was approved at the Parliament sitting on 19 October 2019. Subsequently, funding from the Ministry of Finance, Malaysia (MOF) was also released to undertake research and solution projects in the first 10 parliamentary constituencies in 2020. A total of 34 solution projects

⁵ James Ryan Raj and Paniirselvam Jayaraman, "Grassroots Participation Through Solution Projects" (unpublished manuscript, April 10 2023), typescript.

were organised in the local communities with the support of 25 community-based solution providers (Table 2).

In 2021, the number of parliamentary constituencies covered increased from 10 to 20 constituencies, and so did the ground projects, which grew more than two-fold, from 34 to 87 SDG micro solution projects. While the number of projects increased, APPGM-SDG also identified more grassroots-based solution providers to undertake local solutions. At the end of 2021, we had a total of 78 solution providers.

In 2022, we were in 27 new parliamentary constituencies with a total of 115 solutions projects undertaken by 97 solutions providers who were assigned to complete the projects. As of 31st December 2022, 111 projects were on-going while 4 projects were completed and the remaining projects were projected to end by April 2023. Therefore, from 2020 to 2022, we have had a total of 236 SDG micro solution projects introduced by the local community champions to address local issues identified and documented during the 3 days of the issue mapping visits at the respective 57 parliament constituencies.

Table 2. Number of Solution Providers from 2020 - 2022

Year	2020	2021	2022
Solution Providers	25	78	97

Source: APPGM-SDG (2022)

The projects are introduced in consultation with the local communities, members of Parliament, and the solution providers. The projects have been designed to take on the SDGs as the base framework to address the local needs. More often than not, the projects are not only related to one SDG since the nature of the issues is multi-dimensional which affirms the crosscutting nature of

SDGs. This multi-dimensional solutions approach gives a whole new approach to address local issues and has proven to be effective.

SOLUTION PROVIDERS AS GRASSROOTS CHAMPIONS IN LOCALISING SDGs

It is worthwhile to analyse the type of solution providers that APPGM-SDG engages with. Table 3 details the different categories and diverse groups of d actors that are involved in the efforts of localising SDGs at the local level.

Table 3. Categories of Solution Providers

Solution Providers	2020	2021	2022
Universities / United Nations University Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (UNU RCE)	6	8	7
Societies	12	41	47
Registered Companies with SSM / Social Enterprises	2	19	25
Youth Organisations	1	3	5
Foundations	4	1	2
Co-operatives	0	4	6
Parliament Office / State Assemblyman (ADUN)	0	2	2
JKKK Rh / KRT (Neighborhood Watches)	0	0	3
Total	25	78	97

Source: APPGM-SDG (2022)

From the table above, of the 8 categories of solution providers, organisations registered as a society form the largest block. From 2020 to 2022, there was an increase from 12 (48%), to 41 (52.6%) and then to 47 (48.5%) societies. Interestingly, in 2022, a number of new organisations emerged such as the Parliament offices, neighbourhood watches such as JKKK and KRT, and a number

of universities joined hands with APPGM-SDG. The second largest block is the organisations registered with Malaysia Companies Commission (SSM). A total of 19 (24.4%) small and medium enterprises embarked with APPGM-SDG in the year 2021 and in 2022, this increased to 25 (25.8%) organisations. This was a marked increase compared to when only 2 companies came on board in 2020. All these companies had one thing in common, that is to give back to the society with the specific expertise they have in their respective fields. These enterprises started with a mission to deliver social development objectives to marginalised communities with the aim of eventually becoming social enterprises.

On the other hand, local universities play a pivotal role in localising SDGs and setting up life labs to undertake local solutions with the local communities. This is a remarkable achievement for many local universities that have joined hands with APPGM-SDG. This model is effective as it moves from theoretical-based to actual action-based interventions that are grounded based on the research findings resulting in the setting up of life labs in the local community. Table 3 shows that 6 universities who partnered APPGM-SDG in 2020 gradually increased to 8 in 2021 but dropped to 7 universities in 2022. However, the role played by the universities in addressing ground issues remains significant and life changing and this is lauded and recognised by the local communities.

Movements of the Solution Providers from 2020-2022

Tracing back to 2020-2022, in the efforts of localizing the SDGs, some key solution providers who joined forces with APPGM-SDG have faithfully served the marginalised communities. Table 4 shows the movements of the solution providers during the project period.

Table 4. Movement of Solution Providers

Status / Year	2020	2021		2022	
New SP	25	68		53	
Continuation	-	Continue	Did not continue	Continue	Did not continue
		10	15	44	34
Total	25	78		97	

Source: APPGM-SDG (2022)

During the first cohort, 25 solution providers (SPs) began working with APPGM-SDG in 2020 to undertake SDG micro solution projects in 10 parliamentary constituencies. In the following year in 2021, APPGM-SDG had 68 new SPs. A total of 10 SPs (40%) continued the projects from the first year (2020) to phase 2 while 15 SPs (60%) decided not to continue. Solutions providers that decided not to continue were largely due to their organisation's decision to fund the projects and monitor the developments independently. This is most welcoming, as the projects did not stop after the SPs discontinued their journey with APPGM-SDG. Hence, the effort of localising SDGs continues.

In the year 2021, the word spread and more SPs were eager to join the mission to address local issues. Hence, we had 68 new solution providers with 10 SPs from 2020, bringing a total of 78 SPs who undertook 87 SDG micro solution projects. This progress was amazing as APPGM-SDG was gaining the support and partnership of the local champions to make a difference in the lives of the marginalised communities.

In 2022, a rather new scenario emerged. APPGM -SDG had only 53 new SPs compared to a higher number of new SPs of 68 in 2021. A total of 44 SPs (56%) from 2021 continued their partnership

in 2022, which was higher compared to 2020. However, 34 SPs (44%) did not continue. Their reason for discontinuing was the same as described in the preceding year. The projects continued with the local organisations' funding and other sources of funding such as from foundations and Members of Parliament. There was a total of 97 solution providers that undertook 115 solution projects.

The movements of SPs from 2020 till 2022 have built the capacity of the SPs in understanding the framework of SDGs in localising SDGs. They are committed to SDGs and have become the core drivers of grassroots movement in initiating change at the local level through continuous monitoring and handholding. This has created a network of active grassroots movements on the ground to address local issues. For organisations that did not continue, APPGM-SDG aims to touch base with these organisations to see how best to re-engage them in SDG-related work, whether as resource persons or mobilising the local neighbourhoods towards social change.

GRASSROOTS MOBILISATION AND THE IMPACT OF LOCALISING SDGs

The impact of our SDG micro solution projects is our focal point in creating sustainable communities. This impact evaluation serves as the report card of the projects and ensures better project outputs are achieved, which eventually translates to better outcomes achievable in the future. Below are examples of the impact stories from our impactful 236 SDG micro projects.⁶

Impact Story 1: Women's Empowerment in Baling, Kedah through Sewing Training

They worked tirelessly at the sewing machine for the past month to complete the clothing orders while juggling family commitments, taking care of children and the elderly, and continuing to fulfil the

⁶ Rima Rahman, "Lessons from SDG Solutions and Grassroots Mobilisation" (unpublished manuscript, April 10 2023), typescript.

orders having leg pain. This is the story of a group of women in Ana CB Enterprise whose story is a great example for all the womenpreneurs out there.

All their struggles paid off with the income earned, from a few hundred ringgit to RM 4,000 (depending on the hours of work). One woman experienced the joy of buying gold jewellery worth RM 2,000 for the first time in her life through the income earned.

This is the story of a group of 10 women from bottom-40 (B40) households, poor and hardcore poor category who took part in completing Merdeka (Independence Day) clothing orders along with Mrs. Farhana from Ana CB Enterprise, a prominent social entrepreneur in Baling, Kedah.

Baling is a rural, low-income locality and recently, the place was affected by flash floods. Although affected by the flood, Farhana did not give up on her social work reaching out to the needy. While she was helping flood victims with required necessities, she also continued to uplift the income of women by bringing in sewing orders for them. She even donated used sewing machines to flood victims and enabled them to generate income in their hard times.

With her community sewing centre, *Studio Jahitan Ana*, (Ana's Sewing Studio) Farhana is also handholding and mentoring more women in sewing-based entrepreneurship and income elevation activities.

APPGM-SDG supported Ana CB Enterprise in 2021, through a friendly sewing workshop that the participants completed well. Soon after, they started earning well from orders received on their own, orders through Farhana, and local corporate orders from schools and government offices. The project moved to the next phase focusing on creating more sewing trainers in the locality.

Participants from Phase 1 are now being trained as trainers and will be conducting classes in training programs organised by various organisations such as NCER Program, community colleges, and others.

Farhana is an inspiration to all of us. She is not only teaching sewing skills to local ladies, but she ultimately instils confidence and hope among women to live a dignified, uplifted, and income-elevated life in Baling.

Studio Jahitan Ana (Ana's Sewing Studio) has also become a holistic community support centre in terms of childcare while the mothers are doing their sewing work. Apart from that, the place has also become a one-stop support centre for local women who have clothing orders but have no machines to complete the job. They can come to Farhana's community sewing centre and complete their orders and earn some income.

These are only a few examples of her many social work efforts. With her community sewing centre, Ana will surely inspire more women to earn a better living. APPGM-SDG has always believed in local partnerships with committed social workers and organisations to deliver the best tailor-made solutions to the needy.

Impact Story 2: Community Learning Centres Impacting Lives

APPGM-SDG was formed in 2019 with the sole purpose of localising the SDGs. The solution projects started in 2020 with 34 projects and 87 projects completed in 2021. For 2022, we have 115 ongoing projects and will be reaching 200 projects by April 2022. All these projects are being conducted via partnership models with local organisations. We began with 25 solution providers in 2020 and currently, have 97 organisations conducting SDG micro solution projects throughout Malaysia.

This partnership model teaches us many lessons in handling ground challenges in localising SDGs. One of them was the need to have local infrastructure that serves as local community learning centres (CLCs).

When introducing alternative sustainable solutions to the community, the local community may be doubtful and have low confidence in the success of the program or project. It is a mammoth effort to win their trust and conduct programs, especially in rural localities, since they have not seen such solutions before.

Apart from building trust, the community is also in need of a physical building to function as an engagement centre for the local community and to conduct learning, uplifting, mentoring, and also hand-holding for a longer period.

Looking at all these necessities, CLCs are regarded as a crucial solution to engage with communities in the long-term. In 2021, APPGM-SDG, through local solution providers, has set up two CLCs, one in Kampung Song-Song, Kota Belud, and another in Kampung Saddani, Tawau, both in the state of Sabah. Both CLCs projects include physical infrastructure setup, purchase of training items, and training sessions for community members. The setup and purchase of items are also tailor-made to the needs of the locals. Based on the issue mapping discussions, Kota Belud requires local handicrafts making and sewing training and for Kampung Saddani Tawau, the community requires cooking and bakery training.

Both CLCs were built and successfully conducted programs with the local community. Both are also funded with Phase Two funding for extension and purchase of equipment. In Kampung Song-Song, they went the extra mile by setting up a women's association called Pertubuhan Wanita Kampung Song-Song (WANIS) who are

managing the centre on their own now. They are participating in craft promotion programs organised by Sabah Creative Economy Development Centre (SCENIC) and also getting corporate orders through WANIS and CLC Kampung Song-Song.

A community who was generationally poor before, are now having organisations to manage the CLC and are involved in the decision-making process. This is an example of a great empowerment that can be achieved through a CLC. Their progress can now be viewed on their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/wanitaasaltigakawasan>. The CLC in Kampung Saddani has elevated the community's income with an alternative income generation model through entrepreneurship and gradually moving into the income generation model.

CLCs showcase how establishing a well-equipped local learning centre is helpful for the community to come out from poverty and improve their lives through alternative income generation programs with continuous learning. APPGM-SDG sees CLCs as enablers of sustaining local empowerment and for 2022, we plan to build 5 more CLCs in rural and suburban areas to cater to the needs of the society. CLCs are an effective and sustainable model when it comes to community development.

Impact Story 3: Unique Youth Engagement Program for Sustainable Youth Development

Youths are an important asset to a country and the failure to empower them leads to non-productive youth development and eventually causes a decline in the socio-economic prosperity of a country. Youth development initiative is not an overnight process. Many fail to realise that it takes years of effective engagement and mentoring processes. In Malaysia, many focus areas in youth development are still in the grey. Sports, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), arts and culture, e-sports, and many

more attractive youth engagement initiatives are still yet to reach the mainstream youth. Another challenge is the imbalanced focus on Klang Valley, the heart of the urban capital city of Malaysia and its nearby vicinities, compared to other parts of the country when it comes to youth-based activities. We recognise that youth today are different in behaviour and areas of interest, so we need a completely new set of playbooks to engage them. APPGM-SDG has found one such playbook in Muar.

In 2021, a field visit was conducted in Muar, Johor and youth engagement was Prioritised as one of the main focus areas for solution projects. It came as a surprise that Muar, a sub-urban city, which is nearly an hour away from the highway, was already having an active youth engagement group, Pudipang Industries. After further discussion, Pudipang Industries came up with a project named 'THE ROOM'. This youth programme is not just a solution to occupy the youths' time with some activities, but it has very unique content which helps in addressing the issues of online safety, lack of confidence in public speaking, and self-defense when faced with bullies or criminals in the community.

Among the featured programmes under this project are REKAN, MARI BERCERITA, IKRAR PERWIRA, SEKOLAH KITA, TANAH KITA TANAH SYURGA, and RAPAT RIPTA. These various programs have varying impacts in a wide range of areas such as encouraging interracial interaction, amplifying the voices of youth, sports skills, building confidence, and self-defence training.

The youth engagement through THE ROOM by Pudipang Industries promotes positive outcomes by providing opportunities, cultivating positive relationships, and imparting the necessary support to help young people develop their skills and potential and avoid risky behaviours. This program contributes to their enjoyment as well as promotes good health and well-being.

“This program helps me to express my feelings because all this while I don’t know where to share my thoughts and ideas. Even though people can’t help me solve my problems, when I share what is hidden in my thoughts, I feel so relieved. Besides, through this program, I can point out my comments about school homework and education in Malaysia.”

(Fatin, A Program Participant)

This demonstrates that the program has had a positive impact on the youths’ emotions that may improve their mental health. The program also creates a space for communication among youth from different backgrounds. Discussions on the history and heritage of Muar among the youth are unique because there are not many youths who know the history. This can also develop and cultivate an appreciation of their place of origin.

Apart from that, the female youths have learnt how to defend themselves from harm through a traditional martial arts program called *silat*. Over time, through martial arts, the youths will develop the ability to think quickly and wisely. These skills and abilities are transferable to real-life situations where quick action is necessary to salvage a bad situation. Furthermore, these situations do not necessarily have to involve physical fights. Hence, women are exercising their equal right to protect themselves using martial arts, which will hopefully reduce the risk of violence against women and girls.

The sharing of ideas among the youth and their growth and development will ultimately positively impact society, especially the young generation. The programs are not only contributing towards good health and well-being (SDG 3) but also gender equality (SDG 5) and should serve as a replicable model for youth development throughout the nation.

SUSTAINABILITY IN MOBILISING GRASSROOTS COMMUNITIES IN LOCALISING SDGs

The SDG micro solution projects have brought about multi-faceted benefits. Firstly, through the projects implemented at the respective Parliamentary Constituencies there has been an increased level of awareness of the local issues. At the same time, the solution partners continue to develop the skills and knowledge required to address the issues using the SDG framework. Community leaders will also be equipped with the awareness and knowledge of the SDGs as a guide in planning activities that are aligned with the SDGs.

In addition, local actors will emerge as local champions in addressing and taking ownership of local issues. Besides that, a strong network and partnership will be established with local agencies and stakeholders. The local SDG-based innovative solutions that emerge will be a replicable model and serve as lessons and intervention strategies to address local issues in other parts of the states.



Figure 1. Sustainability Plan with Solution Providers in Localising SDGs. Source: APPGM-SDG (2022)

APPGM-SDG strongly believes that the local solution providers are the **REAL** agents of change in society and empowering them is a means of creating a sustainable support structure for the local community, state, and the nation as a whole. Based on this understanding, APPGM-SDG employs a 3-tier empowerment model

in efforts to empower our solution providers as illustrated in Figure 1. Solution providers enter our network as grant recipients (Tier 1). With continuous engagement, exposure, capacity building and networking through APPGM-SDG, they progress to become solution partners (Tier 2), conducting co-funded programs with us and other organisations, and sharing of resources. In the long run, we aspire to see these partners become independent and self-reliant project owners (Tier 3) with the capacity to function as an enterprise themselves through their organisations, and the local community they are working with. This is the sustainability plan that APPGM-SDG envisions for all our solution providers.

LESSONS FROM GRASSROOTS MOBILISATION IN LOCALISING SDGs IN MALAYSIA

There are 5 key lessons that APPGM-SDG has gathered from our experience in grassroots mobilisation in localising SDGs in Malaysia.

1. Organising Local Communities to be Local Champions (Bottom-up Approach)

The APPGM-SDG adopts an innovative and grounded approach to understand the heartbeat and needs of grassroots communities. It is this bottom-up approach that enables the APPGM-SDG along with the solution providers to identify the issue in the communities. The outcome of the issues discussed with the communities are the localise solution projects implemented. These become co-designed solutions between the local communities and the solution providers who manage the projects, resulting in a community-driven project.

To quote an example, in the year 2020, a low-cost housing, *Projek Perumahan Rakyat*, PPR Desa Mentari was one of the flats where many white flags were raised during the height of the pandemic, indicating their dire need for help. Many had lost jobs, experienced loss of income due to the prolonged lockdown. MYPJ, a

local solution provider together with some women from the flats came up with an idea to help the families affected by setting up a soup kitchen and started providing free meals to families who were in dire need.

This was an initiative of the local women who were hired to cook the meals. The meals were sponsored and these women were paid salaries. This humble initiative has bloomed into a community kitchen where 10 women have set up a consortium of entrepreneurs and started a bakery. Therefore, through this bottom-up approach, communities can be strategically assisted with some training, handholding, and confidence building confidence, boosting their self-worth and esteem. Taken together, these produce local champions and other-centred grassroots community leaders.⁷

2. Capacity Building of Local Champions to Address Local Issues

To produce effective local champions, APPGM-SDG provides solution providers with allocated funds to carry out projects that can benefit the local community as programme participants. Usually, the solution providers will carry out several projects for the community after the issues obtained by APPGM-SDG researchers at the grassroots are highlighted. The programmes run by the solution providers are intended to help the community improve their resilience and skills. Another example of a local solution provider, the Gombak District Community Development Social Service Organisation (PSPK) provided marketing skills workshops for women entrepreneurs from the B40 community. This workshop was aimed at empowering B40 women with digital marketing skills so that they can improve their marketing skills and product sales. Therefore, it is very important to provide the community with skills-based training to build their skills and confidence as local champions

⁷ Rima Rahman, "Lessons from SDG Solutions and Grassroots Mobilisation."

3. Mobilising Women and Youth for Poverty Alleviation (Live in Dignity and Become Local Champions)

In empowering women and youth, it is important first to teach them the skills that they inherently are keen to learn and explore. The experience of APPGM-SDG noted that many women are keen to learn skills such as cake baking, agriculture or sewing.

These skills have enabled the women and youth to generate better income to supplement their household income. In this way, it not only increases the confidence of this group, but it also improves their livelihood. In the 35 impact stories at the grassroots level in 2020 and 2021, we see a clear example where 10 men and women from Selayang Baru have participated in the bakery program sponsored by the APPGM-SDG, which remarkably led to the setting up of a social enterprise called Bites and Beans Café which is now run by the 10 members in Selayang Baru.

For the youth, in addition to empowering them through skills for their economic improvement, quality education is vital for them to increase their knowledge and build self-confidence to communicate effectively in Malay and English. Thus, we endeavour to unearth the talents in youth and improve their skills in their fields of interest so that they can generate a better income.

This empowerment approach has also shaped the women and youth to be more prepared to face challenges during difficult times and to give back to their community. This, in turn, has also positively impacted their lives because they have the opportunity to improve their economic status and also their surrounding community members to ensure that no one is left behind.

4. Community Solutions - Long-Term Relationships and Building Trust

Building a strong partnership is just as important as building a close working relationship with our partners. Building trust is another important value that has to be first established in strengthening a cordial working relationship with our partners and with the local community.

Over the years from 2020 to 2022, we have established strong partnerships with 97 local champions that are undertaking SDG micro solution projects actively on the ground. To date, we have 137 active on-going projects and we have established 100% success in all our projects. This is simply because we have built trust among the partners and in turn, our partners have established the same trust and strong bonds with the local communities.

It is a process and it will take time to build trust. This involves being genuine, trustworthy, being willing to immediately respond positively to their challenges and shortfalls, and painstaking handholding throughout the project journey. This is a continuous journey to see our partners and the communities work together hand in hand to build a resilient community with the freedom to decide what is best for them and done with dignity and respect.

5. Role of Solution Providers as Catalysts and Enablers of Localising Sustainable Development

We reiterate that our solution partners are our local champions in localising the SDGs at the local level. They are the catalysts and enablers that bring change to the lives of marginalised communities. At APPGM-SDG, we do not treat our providers as mere grant recipients, they are changemakers. Hence, we introduce many capacity-building programs to them and connect them to both international and national organisations for continuous learning. This is to make sure they are efficient in the delivery of their projects

on the ground.

We are building an army of community mobilisers that will actualise the mighty aspirations of the 2030 Global Agenda. These include ensuring that all human beings are treated with dignity and equality and being inclusive to ensure no community is left behind. This translates to respecting women and giving them the rightful space and freedom to voice their concerns, to ensure the indigenous people are safeguarded and their voices are not shut down and providing the differently-abled person a platform for them to earn a decent income, and offering both urban and rural youths skills development and job opportunities to marginalised youths.

All these initiatives are made possible by empowering our solution partners and the local community leaders to take up the challenge and make a difference in the community. This will, in turn, impact the nation through a whole-of-society approach in addressing the local issues and fulfilling the SDG theme of leaving no one behind.

CONCLUSION

As local champions and grassroots mobilisers, the solution providers serve as a backbone, contributing significantly to the localising SDGs efforts at the grassroots level. Importantly, this has to begin from the pyramid base of the community. This can be the way forward for advocacy-based organisations, to build and maintain strong grassroots relationships. Building resilient communities require organisations to work closely with the community, handholding and building trust in the process for community cohesion and change.

Grassroots-based organisations who desire to see communities rising up as one voice to advocate local concerns and hopes for their communities need to recognize the importance of multi-stakeholder engagements and partnerships. This involves

taking ownership and working with the elected representatives, local government, state, and federal agencies in addressing community concerns, centred on a human rights approach. This is to ensure that the voices of the people are heard including the poor, children, youth, elderly, natives, those with disabilities, migrants and refugees as spelled out beautifully in the 2030 Global Agenda theme, “Leaving No One Behind.” To sum up, we echo the words of Margaret Mead, “*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.*”⁸

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A Mid-Term Review of Malaysian Civil Society Organisations in Engaging Youths in SDG Implementation

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INTRODUCTION

Youths are in the spotlight for the world in recovering from the pandemic as they make up one-third of the world's population. Youth is the first generation that can end poverty and the last that can end climate change. This mandate stems directly from the country's first National Youth Development Policy (1997), which views youth as *"a resource of tremendous potential...who can contribute significantly to the overall development of the nation"*¹.

The immediate action to include the youth in the SDG implementation framework is by including them into the SDGs localisation process, which has been described as the following:

*"... the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national, and subnational sustainable development goals. It includes the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators that measure and monitor progress."*²

The above interpretation indicates that the SDG localisation is a process of executing the SDG at subnational and local level by infusing the global agenda principles into their policies and its

¹ Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, *National Youth Development Policy* (1985; repr., Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, 1997), 9.

² P. D. Oosterhof, *Localizing the SDGs to Accelerate Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* (Asian Development Bank, 2018), 33.

implementation. Hence, it requires partnership among numerous SDG stakeholders at this multiple governmental system, including the youth. In localising the SDG, youth-based organisations play an important role. They help to raise awareness about the goals among youth and provide a platform for them to get involved in the process of achieving the goals. Such organisations also help to engage youth in different sectors of society and promote their participation in decision-making processes.

The implications that youth organisations bring toward the global goals are pivotal in view of the narratives of the future that societies and nations strive forward toward sustainability. David Aberle introduced the idea of the typologies of social movements in his book “The Peyote Religion Among the Navaho” where social movements that are initiated are classified by categories referred as the alternative, redemptive, reformative, and transformative movements.³ The nature of the organisations in the movements advocated for in the localisations of the SDGs in this research make up of reformative movements, redemptive movements, and alternative movements:

- a) Reformative movements in the context of the work of organisations in the advocacy of the global goals are enlarged in scope of societal or group change for a specified goal, such that the organisation advocates for social change in norms and values.
- b) Redemptive movements are radical in essence to which the change that is sought is a total change in individuals, such an example of the movement to provide context would be Alcoholics Anonymous.
- c) On the other hand, alternative movements are those that seek partial change in individuals, such as a specific

³ Jonathan Christiansen et al., “Theories of Social Movements the Editors of Salem Press” (Salem Press, 2011).

behavioural or cognitive change toward an issue. A greater number of organisations are alternative movements as they advocate for an alternative way of doing things, to which sustainable practices are key factors⁴.

This paper aims to explore the mechanism and view of organisations that engage with youths in localising SDGs since 2015 till today and to recommend some way forward to the future development. By referring to the literature, official SDG document and data from selected youth NGOs and CSOs, this paper illustrates the current progression of SDG localisation from the CSOs and NGOs perspectives which has significant contributions towards the country's SDG progression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of youth is dependent on the country and institutions⁵. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has defined "Youth" as those within the group of age "between 15 and 24". As for Malaysia, the youth age has been increased to 15-30 years old, concomitant with the legislation changes made by the government. This bold action is to guarantee that the younger generation can play more active roles and to ensure their voices could be heard. From the various definitions of youth, as presented above, it can be concluded that there is no single definition to constitute the youth. Hence, it depends on the governmental system and context of the interpretation.

The SDG implementation includes youth as one of the key players. Youths are recognised by the UN as Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGOS) which supports the idea of SDG multi-

⁴ Christiansen et al., "Theories of Social Movements," (2011).

⁵ J. T. Vambe, "Impact of Youth Participation on Attainment of Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria," *Journal of Progressive Research in Social Sciences (JPRSS)* 8, no. 3 (2018)

stakeholders who will work toward the SDGs. Past literature and official documents considered youth as the SDG “torchbearer”. and pillars for its success.⁶ This is based on the prediction that the youth group was projected to become 1.3 billion by 2030 as compared to 1.2 billion in 2015. As for Malaysia, the population is recorded to have reached 32.7 million as of 2022, with youth groups making up the majority. In the context of SDG advancement, it makes sense to take youth (and their organised entities) into account while planning the nation’s development around the SDGs. Since there is a likelihood that youth may be impacted by the current sustainability decisions, their involvement in the sustainable development action is necessary.⁷

Youth and Their Roles to Localise the SDG: A Global Perspective

There is consensus that youth participation is essential to achieving the SDGs by 2030, whether at the national, organisational, or societal level.⁸ Few studies and official publications have also emphasised youth responsibilities, contributions, and SDGs awareness.^{9,10} This indicates that the study of youth and their SDGs roles is becoming increasingly prevalent. However, discussion on the SDGs localisation process including youth and entities is currently limited, necessitating the conduct of additional empirical research. Similarly, in the Asian context and Malaysia, there was a population gap on the involvement of youth in SDGs localisation until recent studies on the development of the SDGs and the involvement of multi-stakeholders in the process in Malaysia.

In localising the SDG, youth was regarded as the government’s partner in implementing the community-related projects relevant to

⁶ Wan Kalthom Yahya, “Engaging Youth Participation in Making Sustainability Work,” *Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*, November 30, 2019, 1–10.

⁷ T Borojević et al., “Youth Attitudes towards Goals of a New Sustainable Development Agenda,” *Roblemy Ekorozwoju-Problems of Sustainable Development* 12, no. 2 (2017)

⁸ Vambe, “Impact of Youth,” 8, no. 3

⁹ Vambe, “Impact of Youth,” 8, no. 3

¹⁰ Yahya, “Engaging Youth,” 1–10.

sustainable development and to protect the environment. The role of youths has also been mentioned in supporting the sustainable development (and SDG localisation) by referring to the Agenda 21 as the leading agenda in promoting the sustainable development at the local level.¹¹ Moving to the SDG as the present sustainability commitments, it has presented 17 goals which are integrated, inseparable, and universal in that they provide complete system guidelines for governments, private sectors, and community. This focus on community is the essence of SDG localisation that needs to be steered and led by the youth as the young sustainability leaders. Furthermore, youth have the ability to be the person in charge to bring sustainable changes. However, it is most important to take note that the SDGs are focused more on participation and empowerment as compared to the previous sustainability agenda. Hence, youth is considered as the best group of stakeholders that need to be guided and authorised in materialising their sustainability actions towards the SDG localisation process.

Localising the SDG is challenging and it is not easy. SDG has upheld the three basic tenets of sustainable development: Economy, Social and Environment. To be precise, all the elements were incorporated into its 5Ps: People, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership, and Planet. In doing so, it requires the following support system: good governance which include a sound policy that encourages youths to actively involved in SDGs implementation^{12,13,14} and opportunities for youth to participate in the SDG process.^{15,16}

¹¹ J. Petković et al., "Youth and Forecasting of Sustainable Development Pillars: An Adaptive Neuro-Fuzzy Inference System Approach," *PLoS ONE* 14, no. 6 (2018): 1–25.

¹² Petković et al., "Youth and Forecasting," 1–25.

¹³ Vambe, "Impact of Youth," 8, no. 3

¹⁴ Yahya, "Engaging Youth," 1–10.

¹⁵ Borojević et al., "Youth Attitudes," no. 2

¹⁶ Patricia Solís et al., "Engaging Global Youth in Participatory Spatial Data Creation for the UN Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of Open Mapping for Malaria Prevention," *Applied Geography* 98 (September 2018): 143–55

Youth participation was deemed crucial for the advancement of the SDG. In practice, it depends on the extent to which the government has chosen to incorporate youth into the SDG governance system. This was evidenced by the SDG reports and documents that referenced the global agenda’s advancement at the global levels. The following Table 1 presents several exemplary methods demonstrating how youth were integrated into the SDG framework in various nations. It demonstrates how youths were involved in executing the SDGs at the multi-governmental level, indicating their existence at the SDG localisation process. The following information was obtained from the Voluntary National Review (VNR) submitted and presented by respective countries to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF):

*Table 1. Example of Youth Involvement in the SDG Implementation
(As Reported in the Countries VNR)*

Country	Youth Involvement in the SDG Implementation/SDG Localisation Process (By referring to the SDG VNR)
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth were contributing towards SDG VNR ● Youth were considered as the SDG Partner ● Danish Youth Associations assisting the government in campaigning for SDG at numerous educational system ● Danish Youth Organisations has engaged with SDG at global and national platforms
New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth at universities were engaged at the National SDG Summits with other SDG Stakeholders
Papua New Guinea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The country commitments to engage the youth in SDG was affected by COVID-19
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth were engaged with SDG through voluntary activities

Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth organisations support the SDG localization process through voluntary programmes and disseminate the SDG awareness ● Youth organisations were included in the VNR preparation
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth were selected as delegates at HLPF
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth were among the parties engaged in VNR preparation
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Swedish youth council were consulted in preparing the VNR ● Youth representative for HLPF delegate
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth point of view were illustrated in each SDG progression

The aforementioned table indicates that only a small number of best practices from other countries have been successful in catalysing youth participation to localise the SDG. Only a few countries actually consult and prepare VNR by considering the youth as one of their partners. Generally, youth involvement in assisting the national government, SDG has been underreported. However, there is evidence that some of the country's National Youth Councils actually participated in the SDG process and dialogue process.

Civil Society Organisations in Malaysia and Their Roles in Localising the SDG

Civil Society organisations have been involved in nation building and policy developments in Malaysia with a significant influence toward the works and services that pin sustainable developments.¹⁷ This, affirmed further during the COVID-19, such that civil societies and social enterprises were considered as “crucial stakeholders” to the

¹⁷ Sarune Beh, Nurhidayah Abdullah, and Makmor Tumin, “Universal Periodic Review: The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Malaysia,” *Journal of Administrative Science* 17 (2020): 156–85.

nation's road to healing.¹⁸ Similarly, in the engagement of youths, youth-led organisations are voluntary organisations that serve young people aged 15 to 30. Youth organisations have served as the foundation of Malaysian youth policy since 1948, formalised within the Ministry of Youth and Sports. There are four major categories of associations: (1) uniform associations (e.g., Scouts and Girl Guides); (2) religious associations (e.g., Malaysian Hindu Youth Organization); (3) ordinary associations (e.g., 4B Youth Movement); and (4) student associations (e.g., Federation of Malay Student Unions). Although, Malaysian policy does not specify which programmes or activities must be sponsored by youth organisations. However, all associations are required to emphasise three components in their programming. All activities undertaken by youth associations, in particular, must include education on the Rukun Negara (national principles), a focus on youth personality development, and opportunities for participation in community development programs.

There are not many studies that have been done in Malaysia within the context of SDG localisation. Nevertheless, Malaysian authors had produced their review and empirical evidence by exploring the SDG localisation practice in Malaysia within the context of local government, local community, civil society organisations and youth.^{19,20,21} From an examination of the literature, it can be inferred that Malaysian youth participated in the localisation of the SDGs

¹⁸ Saidi, "CSOs Play Important Role during COVID-19 Recovery Period – Tengku Zafrul," Kementerian Kewangan Malaysia, November 17, 2021.

¹⁹ Fatin Nabilla Ariffin and Theam Foo Ng, "Understanding and Opinion on Sustainable Development among Youths in Higher Educational Institutions in Penang, Malaysia," *Social Indicators Research*, July 29, 2019.

²⁰ Tuan Nooriani Tuan Ismail et al., "Youth and Their Knowledge on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal* 7, no. 19 (March 31, 2022): 329–35.

²¹ Y. H. Khoo and L. I. Tan, "Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Civil Society Organizations' (CSOs) Strategies and Challenges in Malaysia," *Asian Development Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (2019).

through their involvement in the educational system and activities organised by CSOs and NGOs.^{22,23}

Even though there is limitation, few local governments in Malaysia have begun the process of localising the SDGs, and they have also incorporated youth from educational institutions and NGOs in their SDG-related programmes, suggesting the existence of youth-stakeholder partnerships.²⁴ At the local level, youth were seen as partners or participants in SDG-related programmes. It was discovered that local governments place a greater emphasis on including the local community in the process of SDG localisation. The roles of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in the SDG localisation process, concentrating on the human rights-based approach was also emphasised in the literature.²⁵ It is a shifted viewpoint to look at the SDGs from a developmental approach, and there must be an effort to localise it by taking the values of human rights into consideration.

Although the empirical evidence in the Malaysian context is not exhaustive, it does show that the NGO, especially among the youth, is making efforts and taking initiative to localise the SDG. The civil society in Malaysia has taken the lead in advocating for the SDGs at the governmental level, as opposed to during the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).²⁶ On a larger scale, Southeast Asian nations, including Malaysia, have engaged with youth organisations in their SDG localisation process. It was made a reality by diverse volunteer efforts in the nation's local communities, and for

²² Mohd Idham Mohd Yusof, Mariani Ho Nyuk Onn@Ariffin, and Dwi Harsono, "Stakeholder Engagement in Implementation of Youth-Led SDG-Related Programmes in Malaysia," *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal* 7, no. 19 (March 31, 2022): 323–28.

²³ Mohd Idham Mohd Yusof and Mariani Mariani Ariffin, "Youth Engagement in the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Asean Countries," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 10, no. 3 (September 17, 2021).

²⁴ Yusof, "Stakeholder Engagement," 323–28.

²⁵ Khoo, "Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals,".

²⁶ Khoo, "Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals,".

some countries, they established a strategic collaboration with various SDG players. However, the extent to which the government acknowledges the youth's contributions to the localisation of the SDGs relies on the governmental system, structure and their political will.

Based on the abovementioned review, youth and SDG progression is inseparable. Therefore, it is necessary to report on the youth's contributions to the country's SDG advancement. According to statistics, Malaysia has more than 80,000 active organisations registered under the Register of Societies (ROS) and 9,433 active youth organisations registered under the Registrar of Youth (ROY).^{27,28} The data suggests that these organisations in engaging youths, may have made implicit or explicit contributions to the SDGs. Hence, this paper makes an attempt to address the issue by outlining the SDG localisation progress being pursued by Malaysian youth for the period of 2015 - 2022, the engagement of youths in the organisations through the mechanisms outlined, and the general view of organisations toward youths' involvement in local and global developments. It will clarify the situation and provide an insightful understanding of how the SDGs were carried out by the younger generation.

METHODOLOGY

Several data sources were analysed to compile this report including current literature on youth engagement in SDGs via civil society organisations, official SDG publications such as the SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR), an open-ended survey, and desktop analysis. A phasic data collection and analysis was conducted for this research beginning with the primary data that was collected utilising an open-

²⁷ Jabatan Pendaftaran Pertubuhan Malaysia, "Jabatan Pendaftaran Pertubuhan Malaysia," www.ros.gov.my, 2022, <https://www.ros.gov.my/www/portal-main/home>.

²⁸ Registrar of Youth, Malaysia, "Registration Statistic," [Kbs.gov.my](http://kbs.gov.my), 2021, <https://roy.kbs.gov.my/en/>.

ended Google Form for input from the Malaysian CSOs and NGOs that recorded the mechanism of involving youths in SDGs, the opinions of CSOs and NGOs as stakeholders on youths in SDGs development, and the activities pioneered and participated by youths through the organisations for the SDGs a total of 57 organisations are listed. Secondly, data was gathered from a desktop study on youth-based organisations and other civil society organisations that promoted and localised the SDGs.

The study was done by keying in keywords (youth-based organisations in Malaysia, organisations promoting SDGs in Malaysia). Information on the engagement of youths from more than 50 CSO/NGOs based in Malaysia were gathered and analysed. The sought information linked to their SDG-related programmes initiated between 2015 and 2022, indicating their SDG commitment, their mechanism of engaging youths in SDGs developments, and their view of youths in sustainable developments and national growth were analysed thematically. The data was organised thematically in accordance with the qualitative analysis methodology. The findings indicate the details of organisations selected by random sampling. The integration of all these data sources could provide a comparison of the SDG localisation process and its development since its inception in 2022. It enables researchers to draw conclusions about the current status quo regarding youth contributions to the SDG localisation process in Malaysia.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Mechanisms of CSOs/Organisations on Including Youths in SDGs Implementation

CSOs/NGOs and SDGs oriented organisations are the drive for youths in aspects of the provision of the platform to exercise, educate and advocate the SDGs in respective localities, and represent themselves to the global platforms. The “how” (i.e., methodology or apparatus) by which organisations have actively engaged in is pivotal to the

analysis of the findings, as representations of youth in SDGs is oriented toward the trends and concurrent developments of the world, where there ought to be a system of operation by which organisations engage the youths in, for SDGs implementation. Therefore, mechanisms that have been narrowed down by thematic analysis are represented in this report including a) knowledge learning, b) skills training, and c) advocacy, these are also oriented through support and empowerment of youth led initiatives in essence.

a) Education

In line with the frame-of-work underlined in SDG 4.7, CSOs and initiatives with respect to youth involvement in the implementations and mobilisations of the SDGs curated activities and learning oriented initiatives for literacy in the SDGs and the movement toward sustainable living. As a result of workshops, collaborations, partnerships from like-minded organisations, these initiatives oriented themselves to the focal of learning and informational development. The “how” in invigorating active participation of youths in the SDGs begins with education of the said topic. Such that, only with an orientation of SDGs literacy, can the SDGs be advocated and accordingly implemented based on issue mappings in the relevant localities.

To increase literacy on SDGs. The findings indicate the agency of organisations in empowering the involvement of youths in SDGs. Such of the same are listed below:

1. Education through learning and development programmes, bootcamps, campaigns, webinars, and symposiums.
2. Education through podcast series and infoposts.
3. Education through event promotions and awareness.
4. Education through creative dialogues and sharing sessions.
5. Education through annual assemblies and forums.

6. Education through grants to promote youth SDG movements
7. Education through youth representatives for speaker series.

The impact of educational orientation for youths in SDG related themes initiated by organisations give are meant to give youths an edge to the perspectives of the issues that revolve around the SDGs addressed, hence, developing an ideological nourishment and direction to the youth in being mobilised for the sustainable development goals and competent for the future.

The channel of operation in the inclusion of youths in SDGs are evident from the activities and initiatives driven by organisations. Below are listed 3 excerpts from the data collection of the activities in the involvement of youths in SDGs through knowledge-based education and learning. The organisations below indicate the factors that constitute building SDG literacy based on the data sample collected; the organisations were selected at random from the data pool.

Firstly, Persatuan Promosi Pembangunan Matlamat Lestari (PPMPL), indicated the engagement of youths for education for the SDGs via The Malaysian Youth SDG Summit; a platform for youth leaders to share their experiences of localising the SDGs through their organisations and a place of learning and empowerment for youths to be mobilised in SDGs developments. The youth development arm of the organisation holds talks and speaker series on the orientation and introduction of the SDGs to youths; such an example included the orientation talk at Taylor's University on SDGs which aligns with the SDG 4.7.

Secondly, Malaysian Olympism in Action Society implements educational awareness on the SDGs via sport-based programmes to the community conducted in person or virtually to create awareness on the spirit of Olympism and how Olympism is the way of healthy

living. Certain initiatives also targeted primary school children (Show us your sport), secondary school children (Personal narrative on Olympism), and tertiary education students (National Youth and Sports Symposium) which addressed SDG 3.

Thirdly, I Culture Berhad; programs that were conducted such as “I Culture Academy free online seminar platform” gives opportunities to learn and educate through the invitations from speakers from relevant fields related to entrepreneurial stories, local history and culture, and historical writing projects as efforts of awareness to preserve history and culture of individuals, societies, and institutions, to create a sustainable community through the preservation of historical records in the midst of modern development. This is to align with a sustainable community.

b) Skills Training

Proceeding the accumulation of knowledge and awareness, impact is curated from the orientation of action, however, action requires a structure of development and functioning, therefore, an instrumental priority of organisations is skills training, for impactful inclusion, engagement, and mobilisation of youths in SDGs. The focality of direction in this aspect is for the organisations to evoke the rigorous energy and grit of youthfulness to positively direct them into local, national, and global narratives of the goals.

To build the competence of youths to live sustainable lives.

The findings are positive in its indication of the mechanism in training youths to be equipped with the skill sets needed in implementing the SDGs in the localities. Examples are followed as below:

1. Providing youths platforms to help scale, sustain, expand, and multiply impact.
2. Providing training, certification, assessments and awards for sustainable impact.

3. Providing workshops for practical training.
4. Providing capacity building initiatives.
5. Providing a support system for youths to stay motivated.

The initiatives oriented in skills training is defined in the context of the SDGs, in that youths receive mentorships and workshops to best integrate the SDGs in the different lifestyles and context they interact in. The impact of the programmes initiated included that youths were mobilised to actively practise sustainable lifestyles. Not only so, but such that, the youth is empowered, supported, and trained to practical application through the organisation objectives and narratives. Hence, proving an active participation of youth in training, mentorship, personal, and professional development. Skills are also categorised as, soft skills and hard skills; where soft skills are such as leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem solving. On the other hand, hard skills would include those specific to the objectives and initiatives of the activity, such as urban farming and entrepreneurship. Below are listed 3 examples of activities conducted by organisations that are oriented toward skills training indicated in the findings. Similarly, the organisations were selected at random from the data pool.

Firstly, Malaysian Youth Diplomacy conducts initiatives to build capacity, and train youths in diplomacy through initiatives such as “Diplomacy Lab” to equip and empower youths to understand and participate in the process of making Malaysian foreign policy inclusive with partnerships. Also, having the “Ambassador Series” to have direct engagements with Heads of Missions to be inspired and empower change aligning with SDG 4 and SDG 17.

Secondly, Majlis Belia Malaysia (MBM) indicated involvement in the SDGs through the dimensions of capacity building, community work, consultation awareness campaigns, and network. Where among the projects or programmes specifically related to SDGs are

the *“Youth Ideas – Engaging Malaysian Youth Community for SDG Project Implementation Roundtable, SDG Literacy and Mapping Workshop, Local Agenda 21 Project Sacred Areas, Parallel Sessions in conjunction with the SDG Malaysia Summit 2019, the SDG MBM-Eco Tourism Programme of the Orang Asli Youth Council and strategic partnership to the Malaysia SDG Youth Summit on November 6, 2021”*, aligning the activities and initiatives with SDGs including SDG 3, 4, 10, 12, 13, and 17.

Thirdly, Pertubuhan Pemuda Gema Malaysia curated activities and programmes including the aspects of enrichment and personal growth through skill based practical initiatives to both the beneficiary of their programmes and the benefactors of their programmes (i.e., youth volunteers). This includes *“Tuisyen Ikhlas”* (tuition classes for refugee kids); aiming to meet the educational needs of Rohingya kids in the local area, to produce youths who will utilise knowledge, time, energy and opportunities to be an agent of change and serve the community, and to provide exposure and cultivate an attitude of tolerance towards cultural differences among the youths and the Rohingya ethnic population of the local area. The organisation also curated initiatives with former drug addicts *“Negative Heros: We Ride Together & Kisah Dari Lorong”* with the reasoning to reduce stigma and discrimination against former drug addicts, to help and support former drug addicts to recover from their addiction and be free from drugs, and to empower self-esteem and confidence. The initiatives were oriented toward SDGs 4 and 10.

c) Advocacy

Advocacy brings to the action-oriented impact that is curated by the confluence of the organisational initiatives and the active participation of youths in the same, for advocating on the goals through the various means that is provisioned by the organisations. The structure of organisations toward the orientation and engagement of youths in SDGs advocacy brings to account the

narrative of their classifications of advocacy that the findings has indicated in actively engaging youths in sustainable development advocacy and lifestyle.

To involve youths in effective implementations of the SDGs.

Organisations orient themselves to the sustainable impact that is curated from each initiative, especially with regard to SDGs, such that the indicators provide a guideline of assessment. Nonetheless, in the inclusive involvement of youths in advocacy, youths are given the hand to implement the SDGs. Examples of how the advocacy mechanism is utilised are listed below as per the findings:

1. Youth in policy advocacy
2. Youth in partnership and networking advocacy
3. Youth in project implementation

The context of advocacy is the involvement of the youths in putting practices into action from the prior learned knowledge, and training. As such, the findings indicate many activities and representations of youths in the local, state, national, and global levels in the advocacy for the specific goals that are respectively addressed by each parent organisation through the initiatives. Advocacy oriented activities conducted by the CSOs/Organisations follows.

Firstly, Boleh Space; a platform of advocacy on issues under ableism and disability in Malaysia put together the effort in localising the SDGs through their initiatives and activities of advocacy. Such follows SDG 1, SDG 2, and SDG 3 to raise awareness and advocating for an increase of the minimum wage requirement for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) to be eligible for monthly assistance by means of protesting JKMPay implementation adding barriers to PwDs to access their monthly assistance; *Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccine for PwDs*. Further advocating SDGs 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 16 through

awareness campaigns, webinars, capacity building, social media advocacy, and the *“Disability Data Portal Boleh Lab”*, to empower PwDs through the sharing of available disability data, articles, parliamentary data, lived experiences, and findings since 2021.

Higher Education Malaysia Association (HEYA) indicated providing opportunities for participatory fieldwork, exposure of youths to global governance, and professional capacity building for the empowerment of youths to elite (HEYA, 2021). In localising the SDGs, HEYA conducted webinars exploring on SDGs 4, 8.3 and 13.3 correlating to how the various topics implicate the sustainable living of Malaysians, understanding and advocating for the action of stakeholders in SDGs implementation, and representing youths to policy makers through advocacy. Activities that were held with regard to the same include the webinar on *“Exploring ESG: Climate Change and Youth Empowerment”*, *“Budget Townhall: Sustainable Economic Enhancement”*, and a workshop on the *“National Student Leadership Conference (NaCLeC)”*.

Finding 2: View of organisations/CSOs on Youths in Malaysia for SDGs

In engaging youths for communal developments and societal change in the implementations of the SDGs, organisations are driven by perceptions and apperceptions of the role of youth in the future and the role of them in creating a sustainable future. Nonetheless, this is a driving force of organisations in effective engagement, inclusion, and collaboration through the years in developing representations of youths in the SDGs. Findings show common themes to which organisations perceive youths to be in the face of the world in sustainability, such are a) youths as agents of change, b) youths as agents of partnership, and c) youths as agents of creativity and innovation.

The data obtained on the nature and view of organisations on the role of youths with regard to their contributions toward the SDGs included youths playing an integral part in realising the SDGs through awareness. On the resources available for the utility of youths, data also indicated perspectives that *“the present generation youth is the most powerful generation in the whole human history, not because they are smarter, but because they start their lives with technology in their hands”*. Youths were also regarded as the leaders in sustainability for the country’s social, environmental, and economic development; therefore, their commitment for driving the vision for a better future was of priority.

The civil societies also held the demographic responsible for becoming initiators, drivers, and those who ought to be aware of social causes around them (youths). And indicated the positioning of youths being at the forefront in connecting and collaborating within the communities driven by technology to accelerate the solutions in social, economic and political progress. Being considered as *“vital disseminating agents of peace through various platforms, be it social media, mainstream media and even on the street organising speaker corners & gatherings. They come up with creative & unique approaches to get people to pay attention to their causes”*. Similarly, the organisations also opined that the involvement of youths in SDGs is essential as they will be the change makers with the skills, knowledge, energy and ideas that we require to make that change and that they have strengths, unique creativity and capacity, and they know their generation better than others. They hold an important role to engage their peers and facilitate them to work alongside people of other generations in addressing the most pressing needs of the community, especially among the youngsters.

Key concepts toward generating platforms and mechanisms for the involvement of youths in the SDGs include the adoption that youths are changemakers, innovators, futuristic, potential leaders, collaborators, creative oriented, and those with capacity.

Finding 3: Objectives, Activities, and Initiatives of Civil Society Organisations in Youth Engagement for SDGs

Table 2 shows the findings that include SDG oriented objectives, activities, and initiatives undertaken by selected CSOs whether explicitly or implicitly, therein where these organisations actively engage the youths in their community in the works and services of sustainable advocacy and lifestyles. This shows such a strengthened macro development in SDGs localisation from 2015 to 2022, especially in the involvement of CSOs to garner content, initiatives, and communities to work toward the goals. There is an increase in awareness of the need for implementing the goals and involving youths as the frontiers to make changes for stability and positive sustainable living. The data does not represent the whole of activities and initiatives conducted by the organisations. However, it is meant to provide perspective of the works done for the SDGs from 2015 to 2022. The organisations listed in alphabetical order in table 2 are organisations relevant to the sub-theme of youth engagement by thematic analysis from the pool of CSOs in the primary data collected.

Table 2. Objectives, Activities, and Initiatives oriented toward SDGs by CSOs

Organisation	Objectives, Activities, and Initiatives
Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)	ABIM, a national Muslim youth organisation, one of the exco members for APPGM-SDG, works closely with the interreligious community under the coalition of Malaysian Interfaith Climate Change Network. In addition, ABIM has its own institutions/agencies i.e., schools, college cooperative,

	companies, hospitals etc where they impose their own Green Policy and SDGs elements in practice.
Asian Youth Network Resources	Engages youths through various online programmes related to SDG 16.
Boleh Space LLP	Advocates and raises awareness for youths with disabilities with the SDGs
Borneo Komrad	Provides education and economic empowerment to the stateless youth in Sabah in order to break their cycle of poverty.
Champs Education	The organisation teaches ChampSpeak, a communication collaboration and creation SDG problem-based programme, connecting teenagers to volunteer with NGOs of their choice. Also, consistently guiding students in hosting livestream campaigns on YouTube and Facebook on SDG themes. The teenage students are given volunteering opportunities via ChampsAct community Initiative where Champs connect eager students to charities and NGOs who need volunteers.
Community Transformation Initiative Berhad	Engages youth as staff, volunteers and as participants / clients with the urban poor on SDGs 1 to 4
Green Hero	Green Hero organised programmes to give people experience to be volunteers to pitch to F&Bs to join the organisation. Also, Green hero organised a programme in which citizens were hired to be part of the food rescue movement by rescuing food and giving it to either those in need or those who ordered them. Green Hero also has a quarterly

	programme where the public sponsors the food rescue programme so that the NGO is able to receive the edible surplus food with no charges at all.
Hands of Hope	Projects and programmes cater to at least a few of SDG goals. For the most part the goals that are showcased through the events and initiatives are SDGs 4 and 10. Initiatives include: volunteering programme, sponsor a child project, charity musical night, sowing seeds of change campaign, my one-day uni life, Anonymous Hope, and Hope Bazaar.
Higher Education Malaysia Association (HEYA)	Organises various types of events and sharing sessions to build youths into elite youths to face the future. Through projects HEYA practises SDGs 4, 8, 10, 16, and 18.
Hope Worldwide Malaysia	Organised a Sustainable Green Programme. Urban farming (B40 community). 300 families and primary school (100 students)
I Culture Berhad	Allows creativity and awareness to flourish in order to discover and practise more sustainable communities through their initiatives
Junior Chamber International Malaysia (JCIM)	Providing a platform for youths to learn and create positive change, JCIM has a total of 73 local organisations throughout Malaysia, the organisation also has a school club named JCI Junior (11 club) and JCI Youth (5 club). JCIM advocates the SDGs through their platforms and provides a station for youths to represent themselves for SDG implementation, training, and advocacy.

Kumpulan Latihan Kelanasiswa Malaysia (Malaysian University Rovers Training Group)	Through scouting activities Scouts for SDGs is an unprecedented mobilisation of the Scout Movement that aims to see 50 million Scouts to make the world's largest coordinated youth contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
Majlis Belia Malaysia (MBM)	MBM's involvement in the SDGs generally includes various aspects that cover all 5 dimensions including capacity building, community work, policy advocacy, consultation, awareness campaigns, public education, network building and so on.
Majlis Belia OKU Malaysia	Encouraged and empowered the Disability community to participate in translating the 2030 Agenda into local, national and regional policy.
Malaysian Indian Youth Council (MIYC)	Through youth-based programmes from schools, locality and socioeconomic based programmes, MIYC promotes SDG based topics through online sessions besides conducting programmes or projects based on Socioeconomic Empowerment of youths.
Malaysian Olympism in Action	Organises educational webinars and other online programmes with sport and empowerment as the base and focus point.
Malaysian Youth Diplomacy	Initiated Belia4SDG campaign, which aims to promote SDG in Bahasa Melayu among youths via a series of podcast, infoposts and webinar to spread awareness on the SDGs
Penggerak Belia Selangor	Organises activities for youths based on the core thrusts which comprises of education and training, community, networking and

	volunteerism, culture and arts, youth and fitness, religion and spirituality, leadership and organisation, health and wellness, internationalisation, entrepreneurship and employment, as well as information and communication technology related to SDGs 3, 11, 13 to create awareness among the youths.
Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam - KUASA	Works with the forest-dependent community & the youth for five years, educating them on their environmental rights, strengthening the environmental democracy literacy amongst them and empowering them to be knowledgeable, proactive, progressive & able to mobilise their own action to achieve environmental protection and justice.
Pertubuhan Kota Kita Sabah	Initiates youth advocacy for community-centric regional-city planning that is walkable, inclusive and sustainable.
Pertubuhan Pemuda Gema Malaysia	Organises activities and initiatives that are oriented toward the SDGs including MySaveFood at Ramadan, tuition classes for refugee children, and programme with former drug users.
Projek57	Conducted campaigns such as the Unity Ride & Unity Ribbon, speaking engagements, workshops, projects with youths, mostly on SDG 16. Also engaging Orang Asli youths under SDG 4.
Selangor Youth Community (SAY)	Provides "Belia Juara" grants to promote other youth movements to do programmes in promoting the SDGs in their local community; this is not limited to Selangor.

Society for the Promotion of Human Rights Malaysia (PROHAM)	Provides capacity building programmes through PROHAM's youth wing; PROHAMuda.
Sustainable Business Network Association Malaysia (SusTNET)	Provides training, certification, assessment and awards for sustainability impact assessment on projects for youth and professionals. Also supporting youth in schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities, where most of the youth that the organisation is in touch with are driving sustainability projects and SusTNET is their assessor.
Teens4CAP (The Blue Ribbon Global)	Teens and youth trainers are trained on living a sustainable lifestyle at home and building a sustainable city and community by working together on transforming underutilised lands into edible garden, and sharing the surplus crops and starter kits with low-income communities, primarily B40 families, and the underprivileged, such as forced migrants.
The Association of Family Support & Welfare Selangor & KL (Family Frontiers)	Family Frontier's approach is multi-pronged, consisting of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, utilising parliamentary mechanisms, leveraging UN human rights mechanisms and treaty bodies and public outreach to highlight the impacts of gender-discriminatory nationality laws that stunt the nation's development. FF also participates as a promoter and enforcer of Overarching Legal Framework and Public Life, Violence Against Women, Employment and Economic Benefit, and Marriage and Family.

The Malaysian Hub	Promote events and increase exposure for events catered towards university students, including to increase literacy in the SDGs.
Women of Will (WOW)	Focuses on entrepreneurship development programmes that aim to empower B40 women entrepreneurs by providing them with training on entrepreneurship skills, business coaching and interest free business capital.
Yayasan Usahawan Malaysia	Promotes development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises including through access to financial services towards the youths in Malaysia.
Youth Trust Foundation (myHarapan)	Empowering young Malaysians by supporting youth projects and initiatives that contribute to current nation-building efforts by providing various platforms and opportunities that help them scale, sustain, expand and multiply their impact.
YWILD Malaysia	Educating teenagers on 9 main SDGs through learning and development programmes; bootcamps, campaigns, webinars, symposium since 2019 May

Table 2 sheds light on the organisations that envision the youth development of the nation and engage the said group in the localisations and promotions of the SDGs. The data does not represent the whole of the organisations registered either in ROS or ROY, rather it presents the data of the objectives, activities, and initiatives of the organisations in the pool of data collected via google-forms.

DISCUSSION

The indication of the findings is aligned with the recorded literature on the situational analysis of Malaysia in the context of the engagement of youths in the SDGs whether it be explicitly or implicitly through the registered and active civil society organisations. There may be a lack of data with regard to the impact analysis of the organisation's engagement of the youths, and the dimensions of the measurements of the impact varies. Nonetheless, the descriptive data on the mechanisms of involvement that CSOs utilise in engaging youths, the view of the organisations with respect to the role of youths in the implementations of the SDGs, the data indicates coherence with the findings such that the findings and the literature gives prominence of the grit and vigour of youths in their roles as the "torch-bearers" of sustainability and the future.

Regardless of the vision and mission of Civil Society Organisations that invoke the SDGs targets in various ways, the involvement and engagement of youths throughout the approaches are systematically driven based on the interest of the youths in engaging and networking in the relevant fields in the advocacy, localisation, and capacity building.

In curating initiatives that are oriented toward the SDGs for the cooperative involvement and engagement of youths toward the global goals, organisations and initiatives require impactful and influential partnerships, collaborations, and purpose driven narratives that have an influential impact to the growth of the youth with respect to the trends of the world. Nonetheless, partnership models are ecological in nature, such that a mechanism to sustainable partnership is important in its aspects of creating changemaking and long-lasting impact. Congruently, partnership is viewed not just as a collaboration for an activity or initiative, rather an alliance for ideology, responsibility, and influence garnered through the activity. Therefore, in positive engagement of youths to implementations of

the SDGs, and general developments of societies, and the nation, organisations can effectively encourage the participation and leadership of youths through models of partnership to network, to develop skills, and to engage youths in the system.

It is pivotal for youths to be given the platform to partner with stakeholders as a mode to network and align themselves with the vision of the respective organisations (i.e. partnership to network). Organisations have the capability and resources to engage youths in positive networking. Given the narrative that the age of youths is malleable being the time of ideological shaping²⁹, it is pivotal for stakeholders to connect and network youths to positive prosocial communities, societies, and organisations. This especially has been seen in the organisations that curated platforms for the engagement of youths with multiple organisations and networking opportunities through awareness and education.

Partnership to develop skills. Once there is a network curated and collaboration that is garnered to the networking, stakeholders should have the ideology, resources, and capability to nourish the skills and empower the youth in fields of sustainable living, community developments, and advocacy of the same. This is relevantly identified in the findings of the organisations that engage the youths in capacity building and training.

Partnership to engage youths in the system. Once positive ideologies are aligned, networks are garnered, and skills are developed, as a chronological order, stakeholders and organisations encourage the collaboration and engagement of the youth in the next level of organisation growth, and advocacy, which is, to engage in the system, to take leaderships and to create sustaining impacts. This

²⁹ Nouman Riaz, *Ideology and Character Building vs Social and Developmental Issues of Youth*, *Www.grin.com* (Institute of Administrative Sciences, University of the Punjab, 2019), <https://www.grin.com/document/456223>.

is seen especially in the youth-led CSOs which in nature provides the rightful platform for the youths to succeed in the organisational leadership and engage as stakeholders and decision makers of the system to localise the SDGs through the vision and mission of the respective organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS: PARTNERSHIP AND DYNAMIC EXPOSURE TO APPROACH YOUTHS

Recommendations are given to enable an orientation of perspective to organisations in order that youths may be actively engaged in the SDGs and the practise of sustainable living. Such as to answer the question of how organisations can actively engage youths in sustainable practices, advocacy, and national and global developments. Youths are the dynamic forefront of societies that are capable of making impactful change. To reach out to youths, organisations are recommended to be strategic oriented in creating interests in youths. Even as “youth” is a category of its own, there are different categories of youths at stake including, a) youths at high school, b) youths at tertiary levels, c) youths in urban areas, d) at-risk youths, and e) youths in rural areas. Therefore, engaging youths in the different levels of societal growth ought to take into account the background and the category of youth that is approached.

1. Collaborate with the identity of the youth. This implies that every organisation that engages with youths needs to identify with the youth, the ideals of the youth and the background of the youth. This is an interactional process, and occurs vice versa.
2. Appreciation. Youths need to know and feel that their efforts are appreciated and valued, as such, organisations play a pivotal role to credit the work of the youth and the impact curated, as it further encourages personal, professional, and organisational growth.

3. Finally, is affiliation. This is the aspect that further into the engagement of the youth in the system of the organisation and the curated initiatives for sustainable changes, and lifestyles curated, youths need to have the motivation of affiliation, and that they can identify themselves with the change that they have made for the growth of the organisation and society.

Table 3 in appendix includes the list of CSOs that advocate the SDG localisation based on their respective capacity. Table 3 lists the organisations from the primary data that directly partner with Malaysian youths to implement the SDGs or are even youth-led organisations themselves. Examples include World Merit Malaysia, that envision impact in SDGs 4, 8, and 13; partnering and led by youths to utilise the SDGs as a framework to create impact, MyDiplomacy, a youth-led organisation that aims for the diplomatic skills training of youths through their initiatives via local and international partnerships.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations in this research include such that it does not account the details of all organisations that are registered either under the registrar of society or registrar of youth. The findings and analysis are restricted to the datapool of Civil Society Organisations that participated in the primary data collection. Another limitation is that the in-depth mechanism of the Civil Society Organisations on a specified level is not accounted and not all initiatives are recorded in this research; however, the data presents the analysis from the available content that relates to the engagement of the organisations specifically in the context of youth development and the SDGs.

REFLECTIONS

There is a need for researchers, especially in the context of Malaysia to amplify the literature on the impact analysis of the involvement of youths in localising the SDGs and being part of global citizenship in advocacy for social, environmental, political, and economic change. The synthesis of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) developed by United Nations Economic and Social Council underscored the need for cooperation and inclusion to implement the SDGs, particularly "with civil society, local authorities, indigenous peoples, local communities, academia, and all other relevant actors". Youth-led initiatives have illustrated the potential of youth and multi-stakeholder coalitions to scale impacts to meet SDG development targets through youth service and social media campaigns, and partnerships with multilateral agencies, nongovernmental organisations, corporations, and research institutes.

To sum up, Malaysian Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations driven in the involvement of youths have significantly advanced the SDGs. Youth have participated in carrying out SDG-related activities on various platforms since 2015 up to the present. Youth, however, is one of the key SDG players, thus, their contribution must be recognised, acknowledged, and reported. Their participation in each SDG process is essential for a better future because they are the generation that will create the sustainable policies. Malaysia needs their active roles and only then can we achieve the SDG together with other SDG stakeholders. Collaborative efforts in sight with the impact that youths have in the SDGs implementation can be garnered to increase competence, and make ready the society for future trends and sustainable living.

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APPENDIX

Table 3. List of Civil Society Organisations that advocate to localise the SDGs

Civil Society Organisation
1. Adab Youth Garage
2. AIESEC Malaysia
3. Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)
4. Asian Youth Network Resources
5. Batu Lanchang Vocational College
6. Boleh Space
7. Borneo Komrad
8. Community Transformation Initiative Berhad
9. Earth Rescuer
10. Girl Guides Association Malaysia
11. Green Hero
12. Greenpeace Malaysia
13. Hands of Hope
14. Higher Education Malaysia Association (HEYA)
15. Hope Worldwide Malaysia
16. I Culture Berhad
17. Jeffrey Sachs Center on Sustainable Development
18. Junior Chamber International Malaysia (JCIM)
19. Kumpulan Latihan Kelanasiswa Malaysia (Malaysian University Rovers Training Group)
20. Majlis Belia Malaysia
21. Majlis Belia Negeri Selangor Daerah Klang
22. Majlis Belia OKU Malaysia
23. Malaysia Olympians Association
24. Malaysia Scout Federation
25. Malaysia Youth Delegation
26. Malaysian Indian Youth Council
27. Malaysian Olympism in Action Society
28. Malaysian Youth Diplomacy (MyDiplomacy)
29. MyBIM (Malaysian Sign Language and Deaf Studies Association)
30. myIMPACT

31. Penggerak Belia Selangor
32. Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam - KUASA
33. Persatuan Promosi Pembangunan Matlamat Lestari
34. Pertubuhan Kota Kita Sabah
35. Pertubuhan Pemuda Gema Malaysia
36. Philandure Sdn Bhd
37. Projek57
38. Regional Centre for Expertise Greater Kuala Lumpur (RCE GKL)
39. Regional Centre of Excellence
40. Selangor Youth Community (SAY)
41. Society for the Promotion of Human Rights Malaysia (PROHAM)
42. Sustainable Business Network Association Malaysia (SusTNET)
43. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Youth
44. Teens4CAP
45. The Association of Family Support & Welfare Selangor & KL (Family Frontiers)
46. The Blue Ribbon Global
47. The Malaysian Hub
48. Trash Hero Malaysia
49. United Nations Association Malaysia Youth
50. Women of Will
51. World Merit Malaysia
52. World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
53. Yayasan Usahawan Malaysia
54. Youth Trust Foundation (myHarapan)
55. YWILD Malaysia

**LOOKING BACK,
AND FORWARD
TOWARDS THE
2030 AGENDA -**

Looking Back, And Looking Forward Towards The 2030 Agenda

Nur Rahmah Othman, Teo Lee Ken and Debbie Loh

The 2022 SDG Conference - *A CSO & Academic Perspectives - Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the SDGs in Malaysia (2015 - 2022)* has served as a platform for inclusive participation, reflection and conversations. It has created a space for civil society organisations and academia nationwide to share their knowledge, experience and endeavours towards actualising the 2030 Agenda in Malaysia. This forum has also been an opportunity to take stock of our progress, celebrating successes, identifying challenges and highlighting priorities for action. It has also allowed for the publication of this book based on selected papers that have been edited and compiled in this work. This concluding chapter will present a final summary of key observations and a brief progress review of the implementation of SDGs from 2015 to 2022, garnered from the findings of the selected articles in this book.

Overall Achievements and Gaps in the Implementation of SDGs

Once again, these articles provide evidence that the SDGs has been a positive force for change and is gaining momentum nationwide. The localising of SDGs is taking place progressively through grounded research (bottom-up approach), capacity building programs in creating awareness for civil servants and local community leaders and micro-SDG projects.

There is a growing awareness, ownership and visibility of SDG-driven initiatives across the nation amongst various communities. These localised approaches championed by grassroots leaders in synergistic partnerships with CSOs, academia and government have proven effective. The APPGM-SDG is humbled and committed to be part of this wave of transformation, witnessed in pockets of communities throughout Malaysia.

Several key areas of the SDGs were lacking and thus, are recommended for future research. These include SDG 6 on water, sanitation, waste management, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong partnerships including issues on corruption. While acknowledging a few significant contributions on SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDGs 13, 14 and 15 revolving round planetary health were present, there is room for more discourse on these key topics.

Not only does capacity building of SDG awareness at all levels remain crucially important, the influence of politics on any significant societal change cannot be undermined. At APPGM-SDG, in the spirit of SDG 17, we are committed to remain bi-partisan and ensure that this ethos is upheld by our partners throughout all our initiatives. Hence, in efforts to forge strong partnerships across the continuum of beliefs, political inclinations and viewpoints, we resolve to respectfully navigate differences, embrace diversity and leverage on each other's strengths. We truly believe that a whole-of-society and whole-of-nation approach is pivotal so that no one is left behind.

Thematic Progress Review of SDGs Implementation from 2015 - 2022

This thematic progress review is based on the papers presented at the 2022 SDG conference.

From a *governance* perspective, there is an enabling environment to push the 2030 Agenda forward through the alignment of SDGs in National Plans such as the 11th and 12th Malaysia Plans. This is a significant step in integrating universally accepted global goals and provides a strategic direction, development priorities and implementation strategies for Malaysia. This has cascaded and translated into strong support from the Parliament, the Economy Planning Unit and the Ministry of Finance of Malaysia for an institutional structure (APPGM-SDG) in getting the buy-in from

Parliamentarians. Herein, APPGM-SDG acts as a mechanism to provide a space and platform for engagements and dialogues while upholding the bi-partisan spirit in localising SDGs.

The silo-approach between the government institutions at the federal, state and local levels, federal-state relationship and political dynamics continues to be of concern. Hence, an integrated approach is required and with that, greater coordination, continued commitment, advocacy and support for local governance and improved service delivery.

In terms of *policy*, the inclusion of various SDGs in national policies has been noted. Importantly, policy agenda does not necessarily translate to policy change. An imbalanced progress towards SDGs, particularly SDG 5, SDG 13, 14 and 15, has been identified. There is a clear need for policy coherence and reforms, from areas of social protection to corruption. Additionally, without disaggregated data, identifying targeted groups that are left behind will be a challenge.

Since its formation in 2015, the Malaysia CSO-SDG Alliance continues to harness and actively spearhead the collective strengths, expertise and experience of *civil society organisations* in Malaysia. There has been a notable recognition of the third sector's contributions and substantial role in policy input, capacity building and localising the SDGs. This includes the VNR 2017 and VNR 2021. With that, the need for an increased awareness of SDGs, effective localisation, citizen participation and empowerment including indigenous peoples, must be kept front and centre.

From a *gender* lens, a stronger and united voice advocating gender mainstreaming and culturally-sensitive feminist governance continues to be heard. Conversations and considerations for gender-responsive budgeting are now on the agenda. That said, there is a lack

of meaningful inclusion of minority groups in SDGs implementation, for example, the LGBTIQ community.

When *health* is considered, a disease or curative-centred healthcare services instead of a preventative model, is prevalent. In that vein, the social determinants of health including education, housing and income, largely remain unaddressed. This has resulted in a social gradient in health, whereby those who are disadvantaged socio-economically are more likely to suffer from unfavourable health outcomes, compared to those who are more advantaged. To disrupt this pattern of health inequalities, healthcare systems must focus on community care, preventative services and reach the furthest left behind, particularly the underserved and marginalised communities to honour their basic human right to health.

Scanning the *education* landscape, the slow progress and in fact, regression in refugee education implementation in Malaysia is disheartening. In order to move the needle, a national steering committee, regional collaboration and societal readiness are key prerequisites.

Looking at the *environment*, climate change and the call for action are now on the agenda with encouraging developments across sectors. The undeniable impacts of extreme weather patterns and biodiversity loss on food and water security and livelihoods, demand sustained attention and concerted action. This includes an openness to explore and adopt indigenous knowledge and nature-based solutions. Among the challenges that have surfaced include policy coherence, measuring progress (nature's capacity vs GDP growth) and greenwashing.

Gaps, Review and Updates

Stepping back and moving out of the boundaries of this book and the edited articles, we would also like to highlight the theme or issue of power as a crucial field that needs deliberation. Discussions on this field can open up other conversations on theories of power and theories of change that can interrogate the different meanings of change. Consequently, we can then identify the sources or points of authority that require reform and improvements so as to affect change that can impact real life issues and unresolved issues. It brings back the debate of whether policy change is adequate, or a larger scope of social change is necessary. Such analysis and discussions can complement the localization and realization of the SDGs.

In addition to discussions on power, more literature and analysis is also needed in the field of the economy and the environment. The concerns on the cost of living and quality of life, and inequality between and within ethnic groups, among regions and generations, and the patterns of climate and environmental sustainability in our cities, towns and villages, form two of the most vital issues faced by Malaysian society. Within the matrix of the SDGs agenda and framework, the aspects of environment and the economy also constitute central goals and indicators, and thus should be expanded.

Finally, in the discussions of the SDGs, the question of nation building and social cohesion as well as national unity remains central. National debates and polemics influence the localization process of SDGs decisively. By nurturing the nation and building the state, we focus also on the institutions that reflect and safeguard the integrity and stability of the state. This includes the institutions that are tasked to deliver public services to the various communities who are in need. Locating the writing and action of SDGs within the frame of the nation enriches the SDG agenda.

Suggestions for the Way Forward

In the *short-term*, the APPGM-SDG continues to act as a mechanism to identify, highlight and follow-up on unresolved local issues and concerns, strengthen CSO-private sector partnerships in addition to build on-going awareness of SDGs with a top-down approach.

We humbly call on all quarters to utilise the **quintuple helix model** which brings together the *government, academia, industry, communities and nature*. It is suggested that **the Parliament** play a role in amplifying the need to prioritise biodiversity conservation and advocate a rights-based approach for vulnerable and marginalised groups by reaching the further behind first. Additionally, important considerations need to be given to realign allocations for MPs and state assembly persons to be more SDG-centric. Further, availability and access to **disaggregated data** on vulnerable and marginalised groups need to be prioritised.

Collectively, raising the awareness and **strengthening the capacity** of grassroot communities, empowering them through innovation and creativity as well as **strengthening the research methodology** of local researchers (qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods) are additional building blocks necessary as we strive towards actualising the SDGs.

In the *long-term*, the **Parliament's role** in strengthening the bi-partisan resolve towards achieving the SDGs remains pivotal. There is a clear call for the **government** to bridge the Federal-State-Local Government relationships, strengthen the integration and implementation of policies including gender mainstreaming, consider institutionalising the third sector and prioritise a rights-based approach for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

In the push to localise SDGs, the key SDG players and stakeholders are encouraged to secure **alternative funding** and develop multi-faceted solutions including nature-based solutions that prioritise societal impact. The needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups should be addressed through **local, national, regional and global collaboration**.

Amidst the multiple crises besetting the global scene, we stand at the mid-point of SDGs implementation. This runway of six and a half years remaining in this Decade of Action is an opportunity for nations including Malaysia, to accelerate sustainable solutions to all pressing challenges to deliver progress for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships.

The year 2023 marks the midway point of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda. In light of this, this book brings together 24 writers from across various fields to discuss and reflect on Malaysia's progress in realising the 2030 Agenda. As the world and private troubles and public issues become ever more interconnected and multifaceted, the future and well being of humanity, and closer to home, Malaysian society, is at stake. Guided by the framework of the SDGs and values of inclusion, the writers examine the improvements, regressions, achievements and success, best practices and challenges in the implementation of SDGs in Malaysia. The issues and communities covered range from the Orang Asli to entrepreneurs to youths, to the themes of health, to the environment and coral reefs to civil society, and straddling the spheres of public policy and governance, community organizing and social work, and research and methodology. The outcome is a canvas of Malaysian society confronting a multitude of social, environment and economic issues, nevertheless simultaneously safeguarded by redress to social programs and community empowerment driven by formal and informal sustainable development advocacy and groundwork. While the trajectory thus far is commendable, fundamental and systematic challenges remain, and more has to be done to realize in full the ideals and targets of the SDGs. This book will be valuable to law and policy makers, researchers and analysts, academics, activists, social workers and community organizers who desire grounded and analytical perspectives to the development of SDGs in Malaysia.

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