



Looking Through the Gender Lens: Women in Sabah Under APPGM-SDG Solution Projects

Muhammad Rahimi Hasan¹, Muhamad Azwan Abd Rahman², Eko Prayitno Joko³

¹Malaysian Narrative Association (NARATIF)
c/o IKMAS, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 UKM Bangi, MALAYSIA

²The Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS)
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, MALAYSIA

³Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (FSSK)
Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Jalan UMS, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30880/jtet.2023.15.03.017>

Received 30th July 2023; Accepted 20th August 2023; Available online 29th September 2023

Abstract: In Sabah, five solution projects under the auspices of All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) were related to the 'Goal 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. One of the main aspects evaluated towards solution providers and beneficiaries is 'gender dimension'. Hence, this article underlines three research objectives. Firstly, to identify gender-driven issues faced by the women in their community. Secondly, to demonstrate the strategies executed by solution providers in collaboration with beneficiaries' groups. Thirdly, to analyze the impacts of the solution projects by utilizing four aspects: (i) deep (personal), (ii) clear (skills), (iii) wide (network), and (iv) high (system) as a measuring tool. In terms of research methodology, this study utilizes qualitative approach in data collection and analysis comprised of (i) observation, (ii) focus group discussion (FGD), and (iii) document analysis. Based on the analysis, three main findings were obtained in line with the objectives of this study. Firstly, main issues were based on local community experiences in education, household economy and health. Despite that, most of the issues require a national and global solution framework for the betterment of their community. Secondly, good synergy between solution providers (expertise and networks) and beneficiaries' groups (local wisdom and motivation) is 'the key to successes for solution projects. Thirdly, assessment on four aspects of this study shows the beneficiaries groups have been empowered through knowledge, skills, and networks. The most significant findings are that the beneficiaries' groups established a system—as a registered and licensed groups on their own and as a part of the larger groups to ensure their sustainability—thus, ensuring 'leave no woman behind'.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS), gender dimension, goal 5, Sabah women, TVET

1. Introduction

Gender imbalance is one of the major issues faced by women in Sabah. Looking through a gender lens perspective shows two sectors pertaining to gender imbalance in society. The State and civil society organizations (CSO) are two distinct entities that play a major role in women's matters. Under the authority of the Sabah State Government, two executive departments were established, namely Jabatan Hal Ehwal Wanita Sabah (JHEWS) and Majlis Penasihat

Wanita Sabah (MPWS) in 1988. JHEWS and MPWS play their roles in the implementation of the program, as well as in coordinating women's policies in Sabah (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Wanita Sabah 2023). On the other side, gender-based issues and problems, particularly violence against women, prejudice and injustice made a way for the women-based CSO namely Sabah Women's Action-Resources Group (SAWO) in 1985 (SAWO 2023).

The All-Party Parliamentary Groups Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) Solution Providers project has been working in this region since 2020 to reduce multidimensional inequality. The first cohort of APPGM-SDG Solution Projects was started during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreaks. This project focused on developing sustainable solutions that tackle underlying causes of inequality in communities, such as poverty, resource scarcity, and access to education. The project aims to empower the local communities by providing access to resources and education and creating economic opportunities for the population. Additionally, the project has been providing psychological support for those affected by inequality and advocating for policy changes to reduce inequality. In this sense, the highlight of this article is gender inequality in terms of opportunity for high-quality education, economic, health and social well-being. This project has incrementally impacted the Sabah region by reducing the gender inequality gap and allowing equal access for women to resources and education. By implementing the solution projects for women, the APPGM-SDG Solution Providers project aspires to create a more equitable society in terms of gender.

Localising SDGs in Sabah needs a 'gender dimension' to be operationalized across 17 SDG targets. Being a woman in Sabah is not about facing gender imbalance per se. It involves multidimensional identity in the body of a woman such as ethnicity, race, nationality, social status, as well as demographic factors that contribute to the factors of inequality—hence, the intersectionality approach (Crenshaw 2011; Collins 2019). Living in Sabah tells us about one of the reasons why women faced social inequality. Based on Mohamad & Ali (2017), the gap in educational access between the rich and the poor is also 'wider than in Peninsular Malaysia' due to the limited educational opportunities in Sabah, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage caused by the lack of resources. Women are not the only sex who face social inequality in Sabah. The inequality experience is shared by their counterparts—men. However, looking through a gender lens is always 'fascinating' and 'frustrating' because the social reality in Sabah tells us a lot about how being a woman is not easier compared to men. This can be explained through the findings of the evaluation of APPGM-SDG solution projects.

2. Related Works

This part will review several significant scholarly works and research that investigate the theme 'gender and SDGs' in the Malaysian context. Recent works on SDGs in Malaysia include Nurul Hidayat (2022); Nur Natasha Eiman & Nurul Hidayat (2023); Raj & Jayaraman (2023); and Rashila & Sity (2022). The gender and SDGs in the Malaysian context also need to be analysed by another empirical which is inequality. Recent literature about inequality from Google Scholar data crawling, Lee (2022); Rongen et al. (2023); and Rulia Akhtar et al. (2023) explain in different dimensions. However, the imperative finding from these past literature reviews is that the government needs a big push to combat poverty and reduce inequality. Looking back the gender dimension in these works is not fully neglected, this dimension was not extensively utilized as a framework of analysis in most of the past literature on SDGs in Malaysia. Hence, the application of gender dimension across all SDG targets will be filled in this article.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The fully qualitative approach and quasi-experimental are used in gathering data to analyse. The qualitative approach, there are consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data involves an evaluator observation, focus group discussion, and other methods that allow for a more in-depth understanding of the impact of the solution provider. Secondary data include books, journals, articles, official government reports, authorized official websites and online media. This type of data can provide insight into how the solution provider is perceived, being used, and impacting the beneficiaries. Babbie (2020) highlights those qualitative methods allow the researcher to explore the subjective and emotional aspects of the subject, as well as the underlying motivations and values of the research participants. Moreover, he emphasizes that "qualitative research makes it possible for researchers to see the research setting from the respondents' point of view" (Babbie 2020). This is especially important for impact evaluators who are attempting to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a particular issue that happened among solution providers and beneficiaries in Sabah.

Qualitative research is useful for exploring the relationships between individuals and their environment, which can help to shed light on how social systems and structures have an impact on individuals' lives (Babbie & Benaquisto 2001). Additionally, qualitative research can provide insights into the motivations, attitudes, and beliefs of participants, which can help to inform policy decisions and organizational strategies (Babbie & Benaquisto 2001). For instance, qualitative data collection can be beneficial in its ability to provide a more detailed and contextual understanding of the situation. It allows for a deeper exploration of opinions, attitudes, and motivations. Additionally, qualitative data collection can provide a better understanding of the impact of the solution provider by enabling the researcher to gain insights into the user's experience (Choy 2014). This article utilized primary and secondary sources.

Primary data was obtained from the selected six (6) focus group discussions, conducted by an impact evaluator at UiTM Tawau and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The FGDs involved different projects of solution providers and beneficiaries in each constituency such as Kota Belud, Papar, Tawau, Libaran, and Pensiangan. Other than FGDs, three (3) observations and site visits were selected by the impact evaluator. Two (2) projects included different solution providers in Tawau and one (1) in Papar. Meanwhile, another six (6) projects of solution providers that were not selected due to cost factors, underwent this impact evaluation process through the resources provided by the APPGM-SDG secretariat such as initial proposals, signed consensus agreements between APPGM and solution providers, monthly progress reports for every three months, final reports, and financial statements of allocated funds and photographs of conducted activities. Secondary sources were supported by desktop research that entailed journals, books, government reports and official data from APPGM-SDG CSO Alliance, authoritative websites, bulletins, and relevant newspapers.

Other than FGD, observation, and site visit, this report also takes a position to do a quasi-experiment. Quasi-experiments can provide useful insight into social and psychological phenomena without the need for a traditional, randomized experiment (Burnham & Kurzban, 2005). Quasi-experiments are advantageous in comparison to traditional experiments because they can be conducted more quickly and with fewer resources, and they can provide results that are applicable to real-world situations (Burnham & Kurzban, 2005). Therefore, a quasi-experiment is a particular type of research method which seeks to establish cause-and-effect relationships between specific events. Even though it is not a true experiment, a quasi-experiment still involves manipulating independent variables while attempting to control any potential extraneous variables. However, it differs from an experiment in that it does not involve the random assignment of participants to different conditions. Instead, participants are assigned to conditions based on pre-existing characteristics or other factors. For example, the framework developed for this evaluation is deep, clear, wide, and high, and targets SDG and gender dimensions. This element is a condition or factor to evaluate the effect of six (6) projects of solution providers and the beneficiaries that are not involved in FGD and site visits due to certain obstacles through existing resources.

Analysing data from a focus group discussion is a complex process that requires careful consideration of a variety of factors. The first step in this process is to transcribe the data from the discussion into a written form. This step is essential to ensure that all the information is accurately recorded. Additionally, it is important to analyse the data to identify main themes and patterns. Escalada & Heong (2009) suggest that this should be done by breaking the data down into “smaller units of information” and assigning labels to the various topics. This will enable the researcher to group the information into categories and draw conclusions from the data. Finally, it is important to review the data and ensure that it is accurate and complete (Escalada & Heong 2009). This is the best way to ensure that the analysis is meaningful and reliable.

Simple numerical assessments from a quasi-experiment, derived from an evaluation, evaluated by an impact evaluator from a final report review, observations on-site, and focus group discussions, have been conducted. The evaluation conducted by impact evaluators allows for a more precise analysis of the situation and helps to highlight any discrepancies in the data from observations on-site and FGDs. The process of impact evaluation towards solution providers and beneficiaries depends on a strong and fundamental model that consists of six (6) elements. The elements are deep, clear, wide, high, targeted SDGs and gender dimension. These elements were used by an impact evaluator to synthesise the effectiveness of the projects that had been conducted by the solution providers. This scoring evaluation indicates each element can reach the highest mark which is 5 marks. The lowest mark number will illustrate that the projects are ineffective and need action to be taken by APPGM structurally or vice versa regarding the challenges and recommendations given in this article.

Overall, qualitative and quasi-experiment data-gathering methods provide direct insight into the impact that the solution provider has on beneficiaries. With these in-depth observations, the regional impact evaluator can better understand the perception and use of the solution and make informed decisions on how to improve its effectiveness. Thus, the use of both qualitative data-gathering methods is essential for this impact evaluation of the regional report of Sabah in aiming to gain a thorough understanding of the effect of the solution provider and its benefit to the beneficiaries.

3.2 Sample

There are 15 projects in Sabah; six projects had undergone the FGD sessions, and three physical site visits were conducted by impact evaluators at solution providers' community learning centres (CLCs). Nine questions were constructed according to the APPGM Module, incorporating evocative input through prompt discussion from the FGD with solution providers and beneficiaries. The selection of evaluation of solution providers through FGD and site visits also included the consideration of impact evaluators on successful and risky projects based on initial resources provided by APPGM. These resources included an initial proposal, a signed consensus agreement between APPGM and solution providers, monthly progress reports for every three months, a final report, financial statements of allocated funds, and photographs of conducted activities. As a result, only six out of 15 projects were evaluated using the resources provided by APPGM. This report adopted a qualitative

approach and quasi-experiment to critically analyse the impact of solution providers' projects on the beneficiaries. Numerical assessments were used to indicate non-equivalent groups of solution providers and beneficiaries on how successful the projects were in achieving meaningful elements. In total, 15 solution providers from each constituency under the APPGM-SDG fund were involved in this impact evaluation, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 - List of solution providers and projects

Project Group Code and Location	Project Name
SP001 Kota Belud	Establish Kampung Community Water Pipe management
SP002 Kota Belud	Empowering the Association / Society for Hawkers and Small Business
SP003 Kota Belud	Community Learning Centre (CLC) Managed by the Women's Association
SP004 Libaran	Empowering Libaran's Women Entrepreneurs: Single Mothers and Housewives
SP005 Libaran	Empowering Youth Socio-Economy
SP006 Libaran	Small Economic Centre
SP034 Papar	Youth Skill Development in Agriculture Machinery Operation
SP035 Papar	Siakap Hatchery Skill Enhancement for Youth
SP036 Pensiangan	Community Herbs Garden Social Business for Rural Women Entrepreneurs
SP037 Pensiangan	Health and Wellness Phase 2
SP072 Tawau	Pau Community Training Centre
SP073 Tawau	Pusat Pembelajaran Komuniti: Usahawanita
SP074 Tawau	Community Task Force on Community Safety and Well-Being
SP075 Tawau	Program Komuniti Bersih dan Sihat
SP076 Tawau	Breast Cancer Awareness Month "I Wear Pink"

Sources: APPGM 2022 cohort 2 fieldwork

3.3 Data Collection

For observation and site visits, an impact evaluator went to Tawau, Sabah (SP075) on the 20th of November 2022 and Papar, Sabah (SP035) on the 24th of November 2022. Focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with a single focus group that involved all participants and a team of facilitators discussing a topic together in one place (Nyumba et al. 2018). On the 21st of November 2022, a total of three (3) solution providers and six (6) beneficiaries from the projects were present at UiTM Tawau for SP004, SP073 and SP072. A similar process was also adopted for the FGD that was conducted at UMS on 23rd November 2022 for SP003, SP034 and SP037.

As mentioned in the methodology section, three observations and site visits were conducted by impact evaluators. On 20th November 2022, an impact evaluator conducted the evaluation process while doing a site visit to Tawau, Sabah (SP075) clean and healthy community programme. On the same day, the impact evaluator decided to do a site visit and observation at the SP072 project venue. The next site visit was on November 24th, 2022, at Papar.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analysing data from a focus group discussion is a complex process that requires careful consideration of a variety of factors. The first step in this process is to transcribe the data from the discussion into a written form. This step is essential to ensure that all the information is recorded accurately. Additionally, it is important to analyse the data to identify main themes and patterns. Escalada & Heong (2009) suggest that this should be done by breaking the data down into 'smaller units of information' and assigning labels to the various topics. This

will enable the researcher to group the information into categories and draw conclusions from the data. Finally, it is important to review the data and ensure that it is accurate and complete (Escalada & Heong 2009). This is the best way to ensure that the analysis is both meaningful and reliable.

Simple numerical assessments from a quasi-experiment, derived from an evaluation, and evaluated by an impact evaluator through a final report review, on-site observations, and focus group discussions, have been conducted. The evaluation conducted by impact evaluators allows for a more precise analysis of the situation and helps to highlight any discrepancies in the data from observations on-site and FGDs. The process of impact evaluation towards solution providers and beneficiaries depends on a strong and fundamental model that consists of six (6) elements. The elements are deep, clear, wide, high, targeted SDGs and gender dimension. These elements were used by an impact evaluator to synthesise the effectiveness of the projects that had been conducted by the solution providers. This scoring evaluation indicates each element can receive the highest score, which is 5 marks. The lowest mark number will illustrate that the projects are ineffective and need action to be taken by APPGM structurally or vice versa regarding the challenges and recommendations given in this report.

Overall, qualitative, and quasi-experiment data-gathering methods provide direct insight into the impact that the solution provider has on the beneficiaries. With these in-depth observations, the regional impact evaluator can better understand the perception and use of the solution and make informed decisions on how to improve its effectiveness. Thus, the use of both qualitative data-gathering methods is essential for this impact evaluation of the regional report of Sabah to gain a thorough understanding of the effect of the solution provider and its benefit to the beneficiaries.

4. Findings

The evaluation process of solution providers in Sabah is a critical tool to help assess the impact of local projects. It can work to identify what successes or areas of improvement are needed, as well as to understand if the projects are meeting their goals and objectives. Essentially, the evaluation should be conducted to determine whether the changes are sustained and beneficial to both the participants and the provider after the program has been carried out (Maurish Sofie, Agus Wedi & Sulthoni 2023). A model of six elements - deep, clear, wide, high, targeted SDGs and gender consideration - forms the anchor of the evaluation process. Furthermore, to strengthen the FGD data, numerical assessment is used by the impact evaluator based on the salient rubric to indicate the project's success in achieving meaningful elements within Sabah. The numerical assessment allows for a more accurate representation of the impact of the solution provider. Additionally, the simple numerical assessment model allows organizations to effectively identify areas of improvement and create more targeted training programs for their solution providers. The evaluator scores each element on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest mark. The results of the evaluation indicate the effectiveness of the projects and provide recommendations for improvement. Regarding that evaluation, the elements of deep, clear, wide, high, targeted SDGs and gender dimension were analysed through the FGD, observation, site visit, and quasi-experiment scoring to lead into another imperative discussion, focusing on policy areas.

4.1 Gender Dimensions

The gender dimensions still face a big gap in terms of participation, scoring 61 marks as shown in Table 3 and Figure 1. Gender dimension evaluation is about understanding the different roles and responsibilities of men and women, recognizing the uniqueness, strengths and abilities of each gender, having the ability to identify and address areas of gender inequality, and creating an environment that is inclusive and supportive of all genders.

Based on Table 3 and Figure 1, the gender gap is real, and it is especially evident in activities that involve a community dominated by women, as shown in Figure 1 below. This situation happened due to the traditional worldview on women's role in society. Women are often seen as the primary caregivers in society, thus, they are more likely to be involved in activities that involve compassion for others. Additionally, men may not be interested in activities that involve a community dominated by women because they may feel that they are not welcome or accepted in such activities, or that their contributions are not as valued or appreciated as those of women. It is imperative to note that gender roles should not dictate one's involvement in activities, and more should be done to create a sense of community and acceptance that includes everyone, regardless of gender.

Table 2 - Overall dimension evaluation by impact evaluator

No.	Project Group Code and Location	Deep	Clear	Wide	High	SDGs	Gender	Total
1	SP001 Kota Belud	5	5	5	5	4	5	29
2	SP002 Kota Belud	5	5	5	5	5	4	29
3	SP003 Kota Belud	5	5	5	5	4	5	29
4	SP004 Libaran	5	5	5	5	4	5	29
5	SP005 Libaran	4	4	4	3	3	5	23
6	SP006 Libaran	5	5	5	4	4	5	28
7	SP034 Papar	5	5	5	5	3	2	25
8	SP035 Papar	3	5	4	4	5	4	25
9	SP036 Pensiangan	5	5	5	5	4	5	29
10	SP037 Pensiangan	4	4	4	4	4	3	23
11	SP072 Tawau	3	4	4	4	5	3	23
12	SP073 Tawau	5	5	4	3	3	4	24
13	SP074 Tawau	5	4	4	3	3	2	21
14	SP075 Tawau	4	4	4	4	4	4	24
15	SP076 Tawau	5	5	5	4	4	5	28

Source: Synthesized by Sabah regional impact evaluator 2023

Table 3 - Score of solution provider's projects in SDGs dimension

Project Group Code and Location	Gender Dimension Score
SP001 Kota Belud	5
SP002 Kota Belud	4
SP003 Kota Belud	5
SP004 Libaran	5
SP005 Libaran	5
SP006 Libaran	5
SP034 Papar	2
SP035 Papar	4
SP036 Pensiangan	5
SP037 Pensiangan	3
SP072 Tawau	3
SP073 Tawau	4
SP074 Tawau	2
SP075 Tawau	4
SP076 Tawau	5
Grand Total	61

Source: Synthesized by Sabah regional impact evaluator 2023

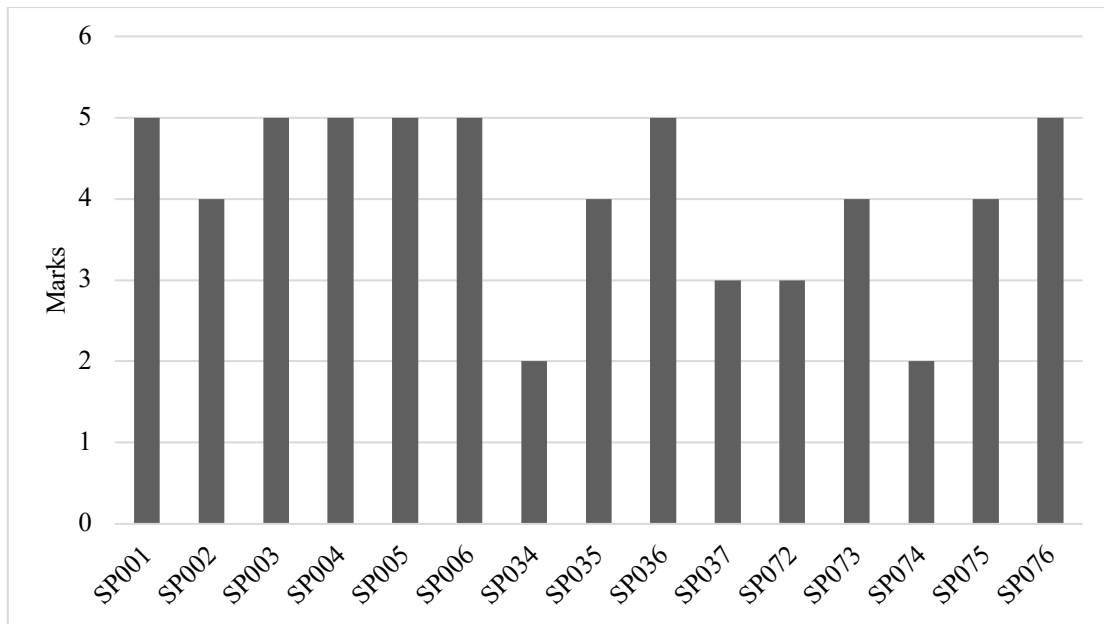


Fig. 1 - Gender dimension in Sabah's solution projects
 Source: Synthesized by Sabah regional impact evaluator 2023

Based on the analysis, this study identifies seven out of 15 solution projects as directly related to SDGs - Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Six out of seven solution projects are specifically designed to address women's issues in the community, whereas the other one indirectly contributed to the attainment of SDG 5. Although all of the 15 solution projects have their significant gender dimension, those solution projects as listed in Table 4 below should be highlighted as it reflects how important gender dimension is in localizing SDGs in Malaysia. Almost half of the solution projects in Sabah take SDG 5 into account.

Table 4 - SDG 5 identified solution projects

Project Group Code and Location	Theme
SP003 Kota Belud	Self-development; skills, small enterprise - community learning centre (CLC).
SP004 Libaran	Education; entrepreneurship.
SP036 Pensiangan	Education; entrepreneurship.
SP037 Pensiangan	Community dialogue; leadership.
SP072 Tawau	Small enterprise.
SP073 Tawau	Entrepreneurship; community learning centre (CLC).
SP076 Tawau	Health education

5. Discussion

The gender dimension is one of the challenges to ensure that the project is sustainable for all. It does not only concern women's participation but also active participation by men. When it comes to community projects, 15 solution providers in Sabah agreed, that it can be difficult to attract participation from men and to avoid gender bias. However, from the lens of an impact evaluation, many projects created by solution providers do not consider the inclusivity planning of the project execution. Therefore, it is important to create an inclusive environment that values and respects everyone, regardless of gender. This includes providing equal opportunities for men and women to take on leadership roles, designing the project to be accessible to all genders, and promoting the project in a gender-neutral way. Additionally, it is important to reach out to men in the community to make sure they are aware of the project and feel welcome to participate. This means that the solution provider must be able to develop strategies to ensure that the project is able to continue to provide value

to the funders and the community members. This includes being able to identify potential opportunities for growth and development.

As mentioned by Wong & Chua (2021), APPGM-SDG has the potential to reduce inequality of income and consumption and improve the quality of education for Sabah's local community. Therefore, the impact evaluator agreed that this kind of solution provider's project model needs to be continued. However, the communication plan, particularly the involvement of the impact evaluator from the project's commencement, is essential to ensure that the suggested policy areas are aligned. Nevertheless, APPGM-SDG cannot solely execute these transcendent works on its own. The initiative aims to promote greater economic and social inclusion by leveraging existing resources, which should include cooperation with JHEWS and MPWS, as well as gender or women based CSO in Sabah to ensure the long-term development of the region. Through this, the initiative seeks to create a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities that will benefit women as the members of local community. Additionally, the initiative aims to promote the development of skills and capabilities within the community to improve the quality of education. Furthermore, the initiative's key strategies include the promotion of quality basic education, the improvement of skills and capabilities, and the provision of access to financial services for the local community. These strategies will help to reduce inequality of income and consumption and improve the quality of education. As such, the APPGM-SDG initiative is an important step forward in ensuring that the local community in Sabah has access to resources and opportunities that will enable them to lead a better quality of life (Wong & Chua, 2021).

Eventually, policy interventions are important for federal and state 'to work together' to address the impact of income and consumption inequality, and the quality of digital education for the Sabah local community. The Sabah local community faces a unique set of challenges when it comes to income and consumption inequality, as well as the quality of education. The synergy between solution providers and beneficiaries in the solution projects reflects its importance. To maintain an affirmative policy in these areas, the next batch of solution providers and APPGM-SDG must work together with the state pragmatically to provide the necessary resources and support. Only by ensuring that everyone has equitable access to the same standard of services and resources can the local community be empowered to open their doors to the possibilities of equitable development, fulfilment and growth.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, women's gender-based issues in Sabah are a complex issue. Poverty is a major challenge in rural areas and is compounded by the lack of economic opportunities, skills education and networking for women. Most of the population is dependent on subsistence farming and fishing for their livelihoods, and there is limited access to formal employment opportunities. In addition, the demographic area of women (in this project) is situated in rural areas of Sabah. It is vulnerable to natural disasters, such as floods and landslides, which can have a devastating impact on the local economy. The socioeconomic status of women in Sabah requires urgent attention and action to improve the lives of the women, families, and children. This can be achieved through increased investment in infrastructure and services, as well as the creation of more economic opportunities. Only then can the women in Sabah can enjoy a more balanced gender experience and the people living in these areas be given the chance to lead better lives, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The impact evaluation process is an important tool for assessing the effectiveness of programs and interventions, and for informing decision-making and policy. Early appointment of an impact evaluator by APPGM can help to identify what works and what does not and provide evidence to support or refute claims about the effectiveness of a program or intervention. Early impact evaluation when the projects commence can also help to identify policy areas for improvement and inform the design of future programs and interventions. This regional report highlights the challenges faced by impact evaluators in executing an evaluation, as well as the different patterns of the impact of solution providers towards beneficiaries in each constituency in Sabah. It also raises the question of strengthening communication plans among solution providers, beneficiaries, and impact evaluators during the pre-evaluation process. This is to address gender inequalities faced by beneficiaries such as accessibility, and connectivity, which can influence the evaluators' considerations. Ultimately, the success of any program or intervention depends on the ability of the impact evaluator to accurately assess the effectiveness of the solution providers and provide evidence-based recommendations for improvement.

Several significant results were obtained from this impact evaluation. Firstly, most of the solution providers in Sabah regional are overly optimistic about their reported projects, while certain challenges faced by women beneficiaries exhibit different patterns in receiving an intended impact. Secondly, most of the beneficiaries involved in the focus group discussion shared various women's lived experiences with the project conducted by solution providers. Thirdly, it is suggested that women's issues should no longer be seen as women's issues per se. Goal 5 of the SDGs is gender balance. In this sense, it needs more men to be involved as a social support system for the sustainable development of women in Sabah.

Acknowledgement

This Consolidate Regional Report of Solution Provider for Cohort 2 in Sabah was received and supported by the Malaysian Social Science Association (MSSA) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia through the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia (APPGM) Fund (OO-2022-009) which was granted to the authors and impact evaluators.

References

- Babbie, E. R. (2020). *The practice of social research*. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Babbie, E. R., & Benaquisto, L. (2001). Qualitative field research. *The practice of social research*, 9, 298-300.
- Burnham, T. C., & Kurzban, R. (2005). On the limitations of quasi-experiments. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 28, 6. 818-819.
- Choy, L. T. (2014). The strengths and weaknesses of research methodology: Comparison and complimentary between qualitative and quantitative approaches. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19, 4. 99-104.
- Crenshaw, K.W. (2011). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-Racist Politics. In. Lutz, H., Vivar, M.T.H. & Supik, L. (Eds.). *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, pp. 25-42. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Escalada, M., & Heong, K. L. (2009). Focus group discussion. Retrieved from <http://ricehoppers.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/focus-groupdiscussion.pdf> [27/12/2014].
- Jabatan Hal Ehwal Wanita Sabah. (2023). The main role of the Sabah Women's Affairs Department. <https://jhewa-mpws.sabah.gov.my/content/peranan-utama>
- Jabatan Hal Ehwal Wanita Sabah. (2023). Objectives and roles of the Sabah Women's Advisory Council. <https://jhewa-mpws.sabah.gov.my/index.php/content/objektif-peranan-mpws>
- Lee, H.A. (2022). Soc. justice and affirmative action in Malaysia: New Eco. Plcy. after 50 years. 18(1), 97-119.
- Maurish Sofie Rahmi Batita, Agus Wedi & Sulthoni. (2023). Fully Online In-demand Skill Training: Understanding Participant' Reason and Reaction. *Journal of Technical Education and Training*, 15, 2. 106-118.
- Mohamad, M. S., & Ali, M. M. (2017). Inequality in education: Experience of critical pedagogy and community engagement with orang sungai in Paitan, Sabah. *ASEAN Journal of Community Engagement*, 1, 2. 1.
- Nurul Hidayat Ab Rahman. (2022). Accelerating SDG 11: achievement during Covid-19 crisis: protecting children living in slums' rights. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 7, 11. 1-10.
- Nur Natasha Eiman Abdullah, Nurul Hidayat Ab Rahman. (2023). Adapting Sustainable Development Goals 1 (SDG 1) there is no poverty to combat the phenomenon of child beggars in Malaysia. *Kanun J Undang-Undang Malaysia*. 35, 1. 69-94.
- Nyumba, O., Wilson, T., Derrick, K., & Mukherjee, C. J. N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Eco. & Evolution* 9, 20-32.
- Raj, J.R. & Jayaraman, P. (2023). *SDG Solution Projects: Best Practices Impacting the Grassroots*. Petaling Jaya: Society for Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals.
- Rashila Ramli & Sity Daud. (2022). *From Global to Local: Experiences and Impacts in Localising SDGs in Malaysia*. Bangi: Malaysian Social Science Association.
- Rongen, G., Zainab Ali Ahmad, Lanjouw, P. & Simler, K. 2023. Regional and ethnic inequalities in Malaysian poverty dynamics. *The Journal of Economic Inequality*. doi: 10.1007/s10888-023-09582-w
- Rulia Akhtar, Muhammad Mehedi Masud, Nusrat Jafrin & Sharifah Muhairah Shahabudin. (2023). Economic growth, gender inequality, openness of trade, and female labour force participation: a nonlinear ARDL approach. *Economic Change and Restructuring*. 56. 1725-1752.
- SAWO. 2023. About us - Sabah Women's Action-Resources Group (SAWO). <http://www.sawo.org.my/about-us.html>
- Wong, L. C. Y. & Chua, R. (2021). Rethinking Malaysian Rural Development and Transformation in Relation to the SDGs. *Making SDGs Matter: Leaving No One Behind*, 69.