



Impact of Community Engagement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Global Goals to Local Implementation

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Abstract: The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia - Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) is a bipartisan initiative under the Parliament of Malaysia to implement and promote Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Malaysia. The SDGs projects in Malaysia were held through Non-Governmental Organization or the Civil Society Organization alliance with the purpose of raising awareness about the SDGs as well as providing capacity building projects that can give greater impacts on social, economy and wellbeing among Malaysian citizens. The main objective of SDGs projects is to analyse the impacts on SDGs in relations to targets and indicators from solutions providers. The Mixed Methods methodology were used in this project by integrating qualitative and quantitative analysis to discover solution providers expertise in delivering capacity building trainings and beneficiaries outcomes in terms of personal, skills, network, system, SDGs projects and gender constructs. The selected locations within Johor Parliamentary Constituency covered eight SDGs projects associated with community engagement context especially in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). In addition, the effectiveness of the SDGs projects was measured based on project planning, feasibility and implementation, the main parameters that influence the performance and quality of the SDGs projects by the solution providers. The findings showed the most substantial constructs that influence the greater impact of the SDGs projects to the beneficiaries were personal and technical skills. The lessons to be drawn from the experiences of the selected projects, among others are how effective the SDGs project can helped improve the household income, increased community engagement, and enhanced general well-being in overall.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), impact evaluation, sustainability, capacity building, community engagement, monitoring and evaluation, TVET

1. Introduction

Today's development is increasingly challenging, faced with inequality according to the level of education, socioeconomic, climate, and economic changes. The development process requires financial resources, education, skills, and the application of the latest technology to the society of a country (Aziman et al., 2023; Zhao & Cheah, 2023; Rahman, 2022). A more practical solution is needed to ensure that a development effort brings good change continuously and comprehensively. Therefore, the Sustainable Development (SD) approach is introduced, where the link between

development and prosperity, social cohesion, and planetary protection can be implemented. These three dimensions are formally combined to generate new fields of knowledge and contribute to the self-development of society and the country (Chin et al., 2022).

Malaysia has adopted the 2030 Agenda from the United Nations (Boluk & Rasoolimanesh, 2022; Li, 2023), together with 192 other world leaders, to implement sustainable, resilient, and inclusive development by involving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs in Malaysia include five dimensions: 1) People, 2) Planet, 3) Prosperity, 4) Peace, and 5) Partnership (Wey et al., 2022). The National SDGs Council, chaired by Malaysia's Prime Minister, is at the highest level of the SDGs governance framework. This Council oversees planning and monitoring SDGs implementation (Ministry of Economy, 2023). As shown in Figure 1, the Council is supported by a National Steering Committee (NSC) chaired by the Director General of the Ministry of Economics. The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on the Sustainable Development Goals (APPG-SDG) is one of the agencies in charge of implementing the SDGs in Malaysia. The APPGM-SDG is a one-of-a-kind organization. It is a bipartisan working group within the framework of the APPGM, with a specific focus on the SDGs. The SDGs are extremely important on a global, national, and local scale (APPGM-SDG, 2023). According to APPGM-SDG 2021 Annual Report, the goal of resolving local concerns and working with a bipartisan agenda to ensure that no individual or family is left behind.

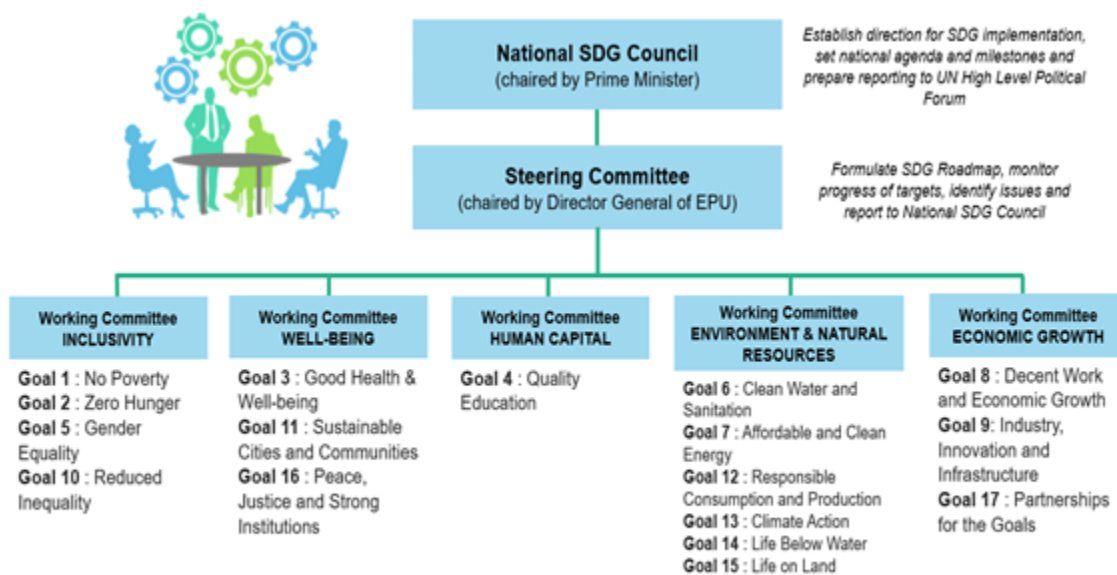


Fig. 1 - The SDG governance structure in Malaysia (Ministry of Economy of Malaysia, 2023)

In this cross-sectional study, we explore the impact of community engagement on the SDGs in Malaysia focusing on the southern region. The purpose of the study is to explore various issues and key challenges related to the community engagement in Malaysian to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The objective of the impact evaluation in this study are: 1) to conduct a capacity building program for evaluators, 2) to analyse impact of Solutions projects on beneficiaries and stakeholders, and 3) to analyse impact on SDGs in relations to targets and indicators. The study employs a mixed-methods approach.

1.1 Community Engagement

The term community engagement has broadened the scope of engagement from the individual to the collective to achieve long-term and sustainable outcomes. Communities will often come together to address this issue. Numerous past researchers have the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) definition of community engagement as a collaborative process involving groups of individuals who share common interests or experiences, working together to address issues affecting the well-being of those people (CDC, 1977). The United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace define community engagement in a similar manner, describing it as a process that actively involves local people in all aspects of decision-making, policy development and implementation (United Nations, 2020). This can help to ensure that local people feel a sense of ownership, skills and knowledge in decision-making that benefits the community. The provided definition offers a comprehensive framework for organizations seeking to establish more meaningful and impactful engagements with communities. The perspectives of Born (2012) and Nursey-Bray (2020) are complementary as they emphasize the importance of collaboration, inspired action and learning in creating a better future for their community. The authors also highlighted the key aspects of community engagement involving shared power, empowerment, and sustainability toward environmental and behavioural changes. When these key aspects are present, community engagement can be a powerful tool in improving

the well-being of the community. These studies agree that these elements can help to build strong and resilient communities or societies.

While there is no consistent definition or single model of community engagement, some past researchers have developed numerous principle of framework related to community engagement such as consultation, participation, collaboration and empowerment but it does not cover all aspects of the concept (Fawcett et al., 1995; Head, 2007; Nkoana & Dichaba, 2017; Mthembu & Chimbari, 2023). According to UNICEF (2019), there are five key elements of community engagement in the global context that can link a broad range of sector-specific development and humanitarian aims shown in Figure 2. There are many different combinations of strategies or principles that can be used in community organizing. The best approach will vary depending on the specific needs of the community and the issue at hand. Moreover, active participation in community engagement efforts empowers individuals to actively contribute to positive changes within their community, rather than only accepting the existing circumstances. Community engagement not only enhances the sense of community spirit but promotes higher levels of social inclusion and belonging among its members. When more voices are acknowledged, it leads to the development of superior solutions for the community. Strong community involvement is also essential because it ensures that the solutions that are developed are relevant to the needs of the people who will be using them.

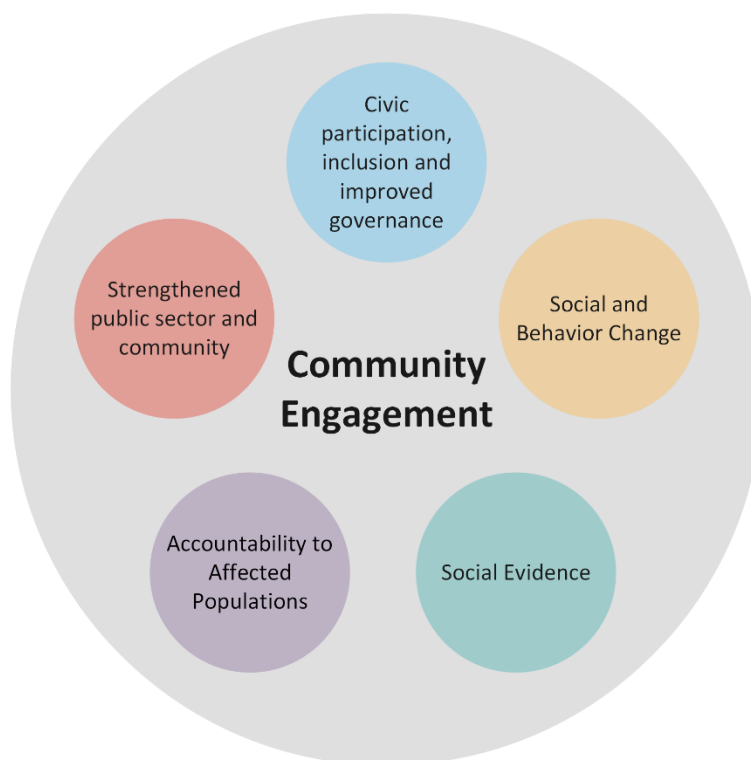


Fig. 2 - Element of community engagement in the global context (UNICEF, 2019)

1.2 Importance and Impact of Community Engagement in Achieving the SDGs

Local governments that inform residents and directly involve them in actions or projects towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more likely to achieve progress and ensure that the measures taken are adapted to the specific needs and directly serve the community. This is because community members have a personal interest in the success of these projects, making them more likely to provide the support and actively participate in their implementation. There has been many explorations and benefits of community engagement that can help to achieve the SDGs through various past studies. One of the importance aspect is in the health sector, study by Singh (2021) found that community engagement and communication can help to identify the needs of communities, build trust and rapport between communities and health workers, promote behaviour change and improve access to health services. By engaging with communities, it can also improve the health of people around the world. There is significant impact on the utilization of health care and service that relate to several SDGs (Alhassan et al., 2019). By engaging with communities, health providers can better understand the challenges that communities face and develop interventions that are more likely to be effective.

In the context of quality education or SDG 4, community engagement plays important role especially among academic libraries (Bangani, 2023). The researcher identifies that there are four key areas in which academic libraries can contribute to the development of SDG 4 which are empowering learners and teachers through information literacy;

fostering a culture of reading and writing; addressing the digital divide; and building partnerships with other organizations. Therefore, through these initiatives, it can ensure that everyone can achieve high-quality education. In addition, universities have a significant part in implementing the SDGs. They can contribute by providing access to quality education, conducting research that is relevant to SDGs, collaborating with communities to tackle social and environmental issues and committing to sustainability (Mawonde & Togo, 2019). One of the initiatives is via Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The aim of TVET programs is to provide students with the skills, knowledge and right attitudes or competencies they need to succeed in their chosen career or future job (Salleh et al., 2016; Puteh et al., 2011). TVET is a critical factor in addressing knowledge, skills, and attitudes challenges to achieving the SDGs. To enhance the economic growth in Malaysia including SDGs, TVET is one of the main contributors to the national socio-economic development (Salleh et al., 2016). TVET not only provides workers with technical skills but also a higher in level of generic skills (Salleh et al., 2016; Puteh, Nor, & Zulkifli, 2012).

The study by El-Jardali, Ataya and Fadlallah (2018) emphasized the role of partnerships in community engagement and the benefits that these partnerships can bring not only to the higher institutions, governments and communities themselves but also to the students that are involved. For the universities, it can improve the university's reputation and research capacity meanwhile for the students, it can develop new skills besides knowledge that they can use in their careers. This can make students more marketable and build connections with potential employers. Community engagement also has an impact in facilitating effective climate (Leknoi, Yiengthaisong & Likitlersuang, 2022). The researchers discovered that there are several factors that can serve as significant indicators of the success of community engagement initiatives in the transition towards becoming a low-carbon city. They argue that these factors are important because they can help to build trust, cooperation, and a sense of ownership among community members. This is similar to a "community of practice" within the same workgroup that leads to success (Puteh, 2018). However, there are some challenges based on the study and one of the challenges are the lack of awareness of the community most of the respondents did not have a clear understanding of climate change and they were therefore unsure about how they would contribute to the adaptation efforts of the projects. Therefore, community engagement is important for achieving the SDGs because it helps to ensure that the goals are relevant to the needs of local communities. SDGs cannot be achieved without having transformative partnerships and collective exchange across networks among communities all over the world. Therefore, prior research suggests that more research is required and needed to identify the most effective ways to engage communities and communicate with them about health, education and other sectors that contribute to the sustainable development of countries (Singh, 2021; Bangani, 2023).

1.3 Different Ways to Engage Communities in SDGs Work

Community engagement can be consists of multi-stakeholder from different sectors such as the governments, businesses, civil society organizations and academia to work together towards common goals of SDGs (Haywood et al., 2019; Eweje et al., 2021). Besides, there is a growing body of evidence which suggests that the younger generation is a driving force towards achieving the SDGs. According to Yamane and Kaneko (2021) and Hamadeh (2022), generation Z or young generation play a key role in improving community literacy about the SDGs for social change, economic growth and technological innovation. The generation is a diverse group of people with different interests and concerns that contribute to the development of the community. One of the ways to catalyse youths' skill building among generation Z is through involvement in community-oriented social ventures, civic participation, and involvement in societal activities (Sharifah Syahirah, Fatimah Bibi, & Muhd Bazli, 2018). They can use their creativity, innovation, and passion to create a sustainable future and achieve SDGs. The study by Dibbern and Serafim (2022) argued that the scientific community can play a valuable role in engaging communities by providing them with information and resources and by working with them to co-create solutions to the SDG challenges. Everyone has a role to play in achieving the global agenda regardless of their position or status. It requires the participation of everyone, from individuals to governments to businesses. Nonet et al. (2022) introduced the framework of three process of collaboration that can be used to improve the engagement of multi-stakeholder for the SDGs. The three processes are multi-sector alignment (relational coupling) where it focuses on the relationships between different stakeholders to foster more effective collaboration and engagement towards achieving SDGs; operational perception alignment (cognitive coupling) on the shared understanding of the issues among the stakeholders that can lead to the same actions for SDG implementation; and the third process are goal and strategic alignment (material coupling) that should be focus on aligning the goals with the SDGs shown in Figure 3. By focusing on the relationships among the stakeholder community especially toward the same vision, researchers and practitioners can help to ensure that the engagement between the community can be a contribution and valuable tool for achieving the SDGs.

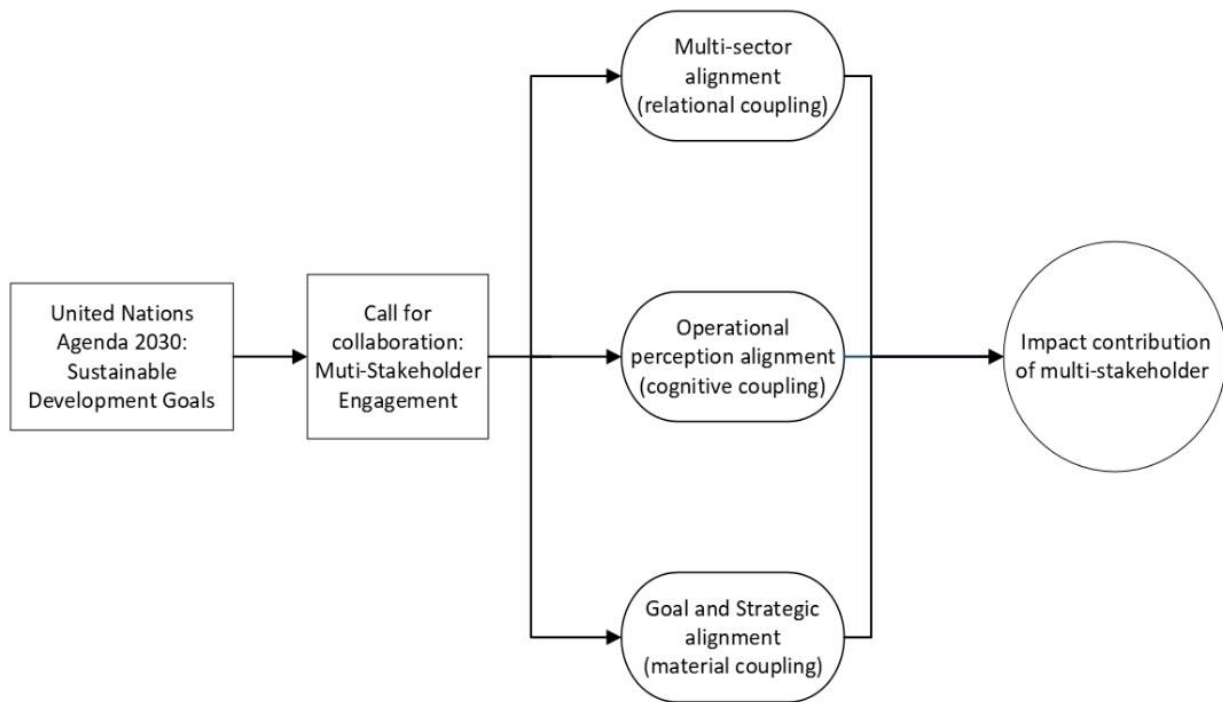


Fig. 3 - Collaborative strategies based on principles to promote in the SDGs (Nonet et al., 2022)

Bottom-up approaches are characterized by emphasizing local knowledge and active participation while top-down approaches focus on expert knowledge and decision-making by central authorities (Rauss & Pourtois, 2013). The study by Eicken et al. (2021) provides a valuable overview of the challenges and benefits of using bottom-up and top-down approaches in decision-making and community planning towards transformational change. UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGs) involve local communities in the development and management of geoparks through a bottom-up approach (Mammadova et al., 2022). This means that UGGs work with local communities to identify their needs and priorities and then develop projects that meet those needs by providing training and education, awareness about tourism development and environmental protection. Thus, by working together, UGGs and local communities can promote and protect the area's geological and cultural heritage while also creating opportunities for economic development.

1.4 Factors That Influence the Success of Community Engagement in SDGs Work

The study by Mhd Sarif et al. (2022) emphasized that elements of mutual cooperation and leadership has led to increased levels of trust, cooperation and commitment among community members. These factors, in turn, led to the increased levels of community engagement. The findings of the study have implications for stakeholders especially the policymakers, practitioners and community members who are interested in sustaining community engagement can apply the strategies and interventions in their communities. In relation to the factors mentioned, Ozaki and Shaw (2022) argues that information sharing is also vital for community engagement to build trust, cooperation and commitment among community members. This can help to facilitate the communities for the implementation of the SDGs along can strengthen the trust between citizens and government. Similarly, Pozi, Rahman, and Raziff (2021) purported that learning institutions also play an important role in shaping society through knowledge and community engagement. Besides, the level of commitment and inclusive participation from the community and the people or organizations working can also influence their interests in working together despite any circumstances faced by them. Thus, by building commitment and inclusive participation, it can create a more positive and productive working environment including life quality for everyone involved especially in SDGs work. Many studies suggested a life quality such as economic status, education level and environment in Malaysia performed better than 90% of all states in the world (Awang et al., 2016; Syahirah, Norfarhanis, & Arif, 2015). By applying SDGs, not only it contributed to better life quality in Malaysia but SDGs also improved the sustainable quality of life to ensure the well-being of the local community.

1.5 All Parliamentary Parties Group Malaysia for Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG)

All Parliamentary Parties Group Malaysia for Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) was established on 19 October 2019 with the aim of localizing SDGs to the Malaysian context. Localizing SDGs to the Malaysian context by APPGM-SDG involves providing solutions or projects to address any 17 SDG mandates underlined by the United Nations

(UN). There are four phases of APPGM-SDG program execution including 1) Issue mapping (Design), 2) Capacity Building (Planning), 3) Solutions Implementation, and 4) Impact Evaluation. Impact Evaluation is the last phase of APPGM-SDG execution for all solutions projects. There are three main methodologies employed to conduct impact evaluation including 1) impact identification, 2) impact verification, and 3) impact validation. The SDG projects aim to provide sustainable solutions for the three main aspects including 1) economy, 2) social, and 3) environment. The economic solutions or projects aim to create or increase participants' income through entrepreneurial initiatives, the social solutions or projects cover key national issues and focus on sustainable solutions, and environment solutions or projects on the other hand, aim for environmental conservation, especially more endangered ecosystems.

2. Methodology

In this research, the research design has been selected to align with the main research objectives and research questions of this study. A mixed methods research design was adopted for this research as it can best address the complexity of the research questions. Furthermore, the study used mixed methods because the data were obtained from various aspects of the data source during the study period. Mixed methods research is an approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods into a single study to provide a broader and more complete vision of a problem. A mixed method is a research approach whereby researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. A mixed methods research design can provide directions for the data collection and analysis from multiple sources in a single study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Similarly, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2010) defined mixed methods research as a type of research in which the researcher uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques in either sequential or parallel phases.

The evaluation of the projects is conducted based on several constructs. The evaluators delve into the four phases of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Design, Planning, Implementation, and Impacts. Furthermore, the evaluators were guided by the Valorisation of the evidence framework based on the availability, accessibility, and usability of activities. The project's evaluation on qualitative had used three methods namely: 1) document analysis (DA), 2) focus group discussion (FGD), and 3) site visit (SV). Documents related to the projects were derived from three main documents including 1) Project Proposal; 2) Monthly Report; and 3) the Final Report. Besides these main documents, the evaluation was also conducted based on the photos and videos attached by the solution provider in the reports. Evaluation through document analysis was conducted on all eight projects without exception. There were eight projects in the Southern region and all the projects had their own objectives/ goals based on their proposal to the APPGM and its alignment with the SDG. Other than that, the evaluation method also utilized site visits (SV). Initially, four (4) projects were selected for site visits. However, because of miscommunication, only three (3) projects were visited, namely SP061 (Muar), SP020 (Simpang Renggam), and SP048 (Tanjung Piai). The purpose of SV observation is to further confirm and validate the feedback obtained from the beneficiaries during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session. Details of the report based on document analysis can be found in an individual report as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Methods of impact evaluation

No	Project Code	Project Name	Evaluation Method
1	Y21-SP061	The Room (Muar Youth Hub)	DA, SV
2	Y21-SP063	Skills Training for Marginalized Communities	DA
3	Y21-SP071	Fisherman Income Generation Project	DA
4	Y21-SP019	Tuition Rakyat "The Lost Generation"	DA
5	Y21-SP020	Entrepreneurship, Skills, and Business Development Hub	DA, FGD, SV
6	Y21-SP032	Simpang Renggam NGO Coalition Assistance to B40 Families	DA
7	Y21-SP048	Litter Clean-Up & Installation of Buy-Back / Recycling Centre to Address the Unsustainable Livelihoods & Litter Problem in the Water Settlements of Kg. Air Masin & Kg. Melayu Jalan Benteng	DA, SV
8	Y21-SP065	Mangrove School	DA, FGD
Total			DA: 10; FGD: 4; DV: 3

Note: DA=Document Analysis; FGD=Focus Group Discussion; SV=Site Visit

3. Findings and Discussion

In this study, the researchers carefully designed and controlled the data collection and data analysis procedures to ensure the credibility of the research results. To be accepted as trustworthy, during the evaluation process all the findings and data are carefully examined and verified by the researchers. It is important for the researcher to consider reliability and validity during the research design, methods planning, and results writing stages (Salleh, Sulaiman, & Gloeckner, 2023). Based on the tabulated data, the highest score associates with the personal gained by the beneficiaries and application of

SDGs by solution providers. The findings indicates that the objectives of all projects in localizing the SDGs is achieved. The key challenges faced by the solution providers are lack of knowledge and skills on the project they proposed. Most of the experts are not from the solution providers. Second challenge is funding. For project that involved in construction or project based, solution providers facing difficulties when the funding is given by progress/ phase. There are several other challenges facing by the evaluator(s), solution provider(s), and 3) beneficiaries.

The first phase of the evaluation is doing the qualitative analysis. To conduct impact evaluation using the qualitative analysis method, the selected solution projects were identified and selected after careful analysis of the main documents. To measure the impact of the solution projects deeply, from a total of eight projects in the Southern Region, three projects from Muar, Simppang Renggam and Tanjung Piai have been selected at random based on the site location for further validation through focus group discussions (FGDs) session with the support with three site visit (SV) observations. The selected projects were SP061, SP020, and SP065 respectively for FGDs and projects SP061, SP020, and SP048 were selected for site visit. There are six respondents involved in the FGD session that was conducted by asking several questions related to six dimensions: 1) Deep (Personal), 2) Clear (Skills), 3) Wide (Network), 4) High (System), 5) SDG, and 6) Gender. Besides qualitative analysis, the solution impacts of eight projects in the Southern Region were also evaluated using quantitative analysis. This analysis supports the findings in the first phase (qualitative analysis). The quantitative evaluation was conducted based on analysis of main documents including: 1) proposal, 2) monthly report, 3) final report, 4) video, and 5) photos. For each of the solution project, the analysis based on the documents was carried out by calculating the mean value for each five dimension namely: 1) Deep, 2) Clear, 3) Wide, 4) High, 5) SDG, and 6) Gender. The range of mean value and its interpretation are shown in Table 2. Summary of mean score for all projects are shown in Table 3 and Figure 4.

Table 2 - Range of mean value and interpretation

Range of Mean Value	Mean Interpretation
1.00 - 1.80	No Impact (NI)
1.81 - 2.60	Low Impact (LI)
2.61 - 3.40	Moderate Impact (MI)
3.41 - 4.20	High Impact (HI)
4.21 - 5.00	Extreme Impact (EI)

Table 3 - Summary of mean score for all project

No	Project Name	Deep	Clear	Wide	High	SDG	Gender
1	The Room (Muar Youth Hub)	4	4	4	3	3	4
2	Skills Training for Marginalized Communities	4	3	4	3	3	4
3	Fisherman Income Generation Project	2	2	1	1	2	1
4	Tuition Rakyat "The Lost Generation"	4	4	3	3	3	4
5	Entrepreneurship, Skills And Business Development Hub	5	5	4	5	4	5
6	Simpang Renggam NGO Coalition Assistance to B40 Families	3	3	5	3	3	4
7	Litter Clean-Up & Installation of Buy-Back / Recycling Centre to Address the Unsustainable Livelihoods & Litter Problem in the Water Settlements of Kg. Air Masin & Kg. Melayu Jalan Benteng	4	4	3	3	4	3
8	Mangrove School	4	4	3	3	4	4
	Total Score¹	30	29	27	24	27	29
	Mean Score	3.75	3.63	3.38	3.00	3.38	3.63
	Mean Interpretation²	HI	HI	MI	MI	MI	HI

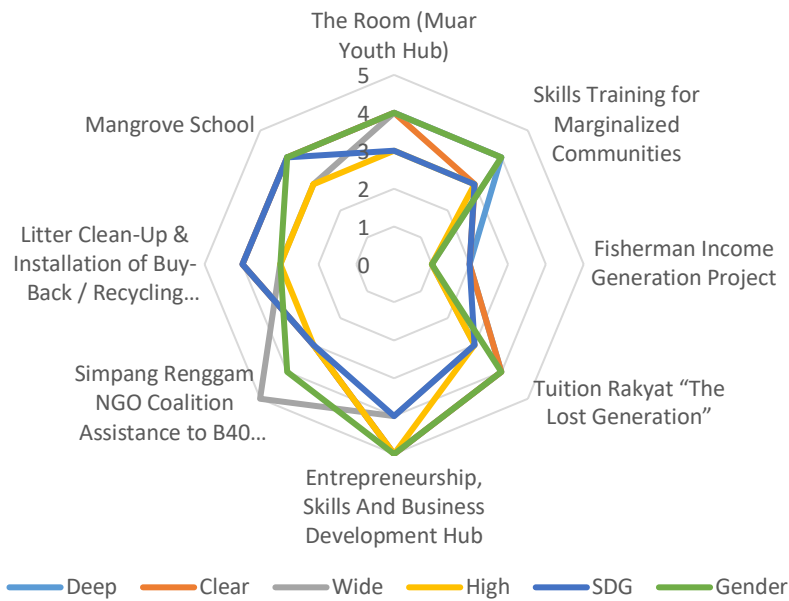


Fig. 4 - Summary of mean score for all projects

Key policy area analysis was carried out to all eight projects to check the relationship and impact on the evaluation process. It was found that the solution projects that have been implemented are related to several key policy areas. Impact evaluation analysis indicated that there are at least eight related policy areas addressed by the solution projects. Further analysis indicates that the highest policy area is on poverty where 6/10 (75%) solution projects are involved, second highest is Income generation about 5/10 (62.5%) solution projects involved respectively. Other solution projects range between 3/8 to 1/8 related to policy areas. Table 4 and Figure 5 summarize the solution projects with related SDGs and policy areas.

Table 4 - Summary of solution projects and related SDGs

No	Project Name	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)										
		1	3	4	5	8	10	11	12	13	14	17
1	The Room (Muar Youth Hub)			X				X				
2	Skills Training for Marginalized Communities			X			X					
3	Fisherman Income Generation Project	X										
4	Tuition Rakyat "The Lost Generation"			X								
5	Entrepreneurship, Skills and Business Development Hub	X		X	X	X	X	X				
6	Simpang Renggam NGO Coalition Assistance to B40 Families	X	X				X					X
7	Litter Clean-Up & Installation of Buy-Back / Recycling Centre to Address the Unsustainable Livelihoods & Litter Problem in the Water Settlements of Kg. Air Masin & Kg. Melayu Jalan Benteng			X					X		X	
8	Mangrove School			X					X	X	X	X
	Total Score	3	1	6	1	1	3	2	2	1	2	2
	Percentage (%)	37.5	12.5	75	12.5	12.5	37.5	25	25	12.5	25	25

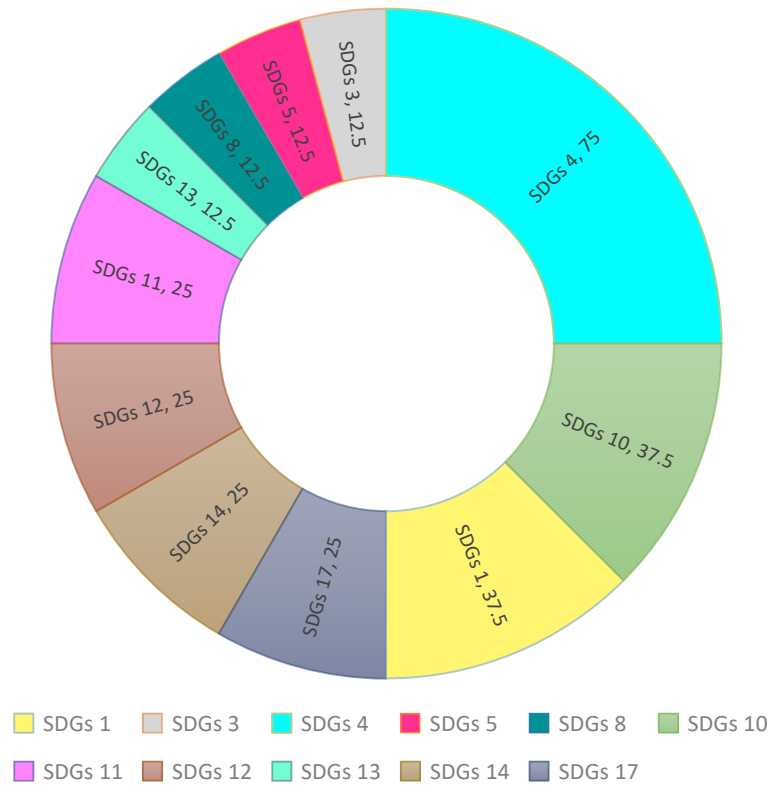


Fig. 5 - Summary of solution projects and related SDGs

Based on the monitoring and evaluation process, for the next SDGs project, it is recommended that the selection of beneficiaries is done by the evaluators. The Solution Providers should provide the list of beneficiaries and let the evaluators make the selection. This process will minimize the bias and eliminate the possibility that the Solution Providers cooperate with the beneficiaries to get good ratings. Secondly, it is also recommended that the Solution Providers submit the full written report with a detailed explanation with all related attachments including pictures, videos, etc. to the secretariat for monitoring purposes. It is also recommended for the next SDGs; the monitoring should be done at the earliest stage before the impact evaluation. This step can avoid any problems or issues with the project implementation or mismanagement by the Solution Providers. Once the evaluators detect any problems or issues, they can flag the secretariat and proper risk analysis can be done.

4. Conclusion

Based on the impact evaluation that we have done, our conclusion remark is most projects were targeted at the B40 families (the Bottom 40% of the Malaysian household income), local communities, and marginalized groups. It aims to uplift their economic and social well-being, generate independent income, and continually develop their skills and knowledge for work, especially in TVET. To be successful in community engagement, Malaysia must encompass strategies and processes to ensure its skills development system especially TVET is relevant, quality-based, adaptive, and cost-effective. In conclusion, it is hoped that this report will be able to provide insights for APPGM-SDG to better regulate the solution projects in the future as well as propose sound and feasible strategies and plans of action to the policymakers and decision-makers. It is also our hope to see the projects that have higher ratings, good reports, and practicality can be continued in future with bigger objectives, Recommendations by the impact evaluators also should be considered when selecting continued projects in future.

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