

Youth participation in SDG-Oriented Volunteerism: Insights from Malaysia's APPGM-SDG Platform

Philus Thomas and Siti Ghazali***

Abstract

Engaging youth is paramount for progressing towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This quantitative research studies the active involvement of Malaysian youth as volunteers in initiatives centred around the SDGs, with a specific focus on the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) platform. Data was gathered from 323 volunteers who applied as volunteers at the Malaysian Youth SDG Summits, the Young Asian Voices for the United Nations We Need, and the Malaysian Youth SDG Agent 22/23 and 23/24 Cohort initiatives. The objective of the study is to identify the demographic involvement of youths in volunteerism through the initiatives of APPGM-SDG. This research analyses the nature of youth participation in SDG-oriented volunteerism, investigating their demographic concentration in active engagement, including engagement by gender, organisational affiliation, and prior experience in volunteerism and how these factors contribute to voluntary work related to the SDGs. Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the demographic distribution of youths toward the involvement in SDG-oriented volunteerism. Findings indicated a moderate distribution between males and females, a greater number of participants affiliated in organisations, and a greater number of participants with prior experience in volunteerism. By examining the quantitative nature of these volunteers with the comprehensive study of literature and discussion, we gain valuable insights into the dynamics of youth engagement in localising the SDGs. These insights, rooted in the context of Malaysia, can inform strategies for fostering youth-driven

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progress toward the SDGs both nationally and globally, providing recommendations to parliamentarians, civil societies, and youth groups as a whole.

Keywords: APPGM-SDG, Youth, Sustainable Development Goals, Volunteerism, Parliamentarian

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) initiated by the United Nations (UN) as a call to action in addressing global narrative issues entailing people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership necessitates the collaborative actions of stakeholders including governmental agencies and civil societies. Youths indefinitely play a pivotal role in the thrust of the agenda as partners.¹ Making up the largest age demographic in the world, the UN Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth quotes *"It is impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 without the active participation of the largest generation of changemakers."*² With the catalysing role of the UN, parliamentarians, civil societies, non-governmental organisations (NGO), and governmental agencies in optimising the involvement of the young generation in the civic space and integrating them into national and global agendas for a better future, it is important to identify the demographics of the current youth state in the active participation toward the 2030 Agenda. This will provide in depth and realistic propositions for raising the bar to activate and mobilise more youths in the social sphere of sustainable development.

Drawing attention to the central theme of this study, as highlighted in various stakeholder discourses including the parliament and civic spaces, the ideation of youth as the "torchbearers"³ continues to echo in initiatives aimed at involving youth in sustainable development and nation building. This research studies quantitatively the active

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- 1 United Nations Development Programme, Fast Facts: Youth as Partners for the Implementation of the SDGs (UNDP, 2017) <https://www.undp.org/publications/fast-facts-youth-partners-implementation-sdgs>.
 - 2 United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Youth SDG Dashboard (Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, 2020) <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-sdg-dashboard/> [Accessed 12 December 2023].
 - 3 Hakim, L., & Sallehuddin, Q., 'Dewan Rakyat Speaker: Youth Are Torchbearers of Country's Development' (NST Online, 14 September 2023) <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/09/955177/dewan-rakyat-speaker-youth-are-torchbearers-countrys-development> [Accessed 12 December 2023].

involvement of Malaysian youth in volunteer initiatives aligned with the SDGs, with a specific focus on the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) platform.

Background and objective of study

Youth in Malaysia is termed as the demographic of those between the ages 15-30 per the 2019 change instituted through Youth societies and Youth Development Act (Amendment 2019) which limits the cut off age from 40 to 30 years of age. However, the government has set Jan 1, 2026 for the Act to come into force. A trend that has been of recent youth inclination includes the entrance into gig economy preference over tertiary education; indicating a motivational factor that seems to be directing toward a causal relationship toward a downward national development and competence building in par with neighbouring nations. Similar to the aforementioned, literature also indicates a slack in the grand involvement of youth in volunteerism and civic spaces.⁴ Volunteerism has played a pivotal role in the social development of societies by addressing social and national concerns through various initiatives. The essence of voluntary work has been a catalyst to instil a moral and social responsibility that individuals play for their nation⁵. With regard to the platforms presented to the youth demographic in differentiation to adult involvement in volunteerism, the conversation on youth-led spaces and initiatives continues on from policymakers to civil society leaders. This sheds light on viewing youth not as mere leaders of the future, but as leaders of today.

The SDGs are provided as guiding frameworks with targets and indicators to contribute to the developments of social, economic, and environmental aspects through raising awareness and increasing conscious sustainable practices. The ultimate goal is to ensure a better and more inclusive future for all. Volunteering ensures that people are involved in planning and decision-making processes about their own priorities, thereby providing new channels for interaction between the government and people. The UN volunteers record that the engagement of volunteers fosters intergovernmental dialogue contributing to 149 out

4 Sparks, S. D., 'Volunteerism Declined among Young People' (Education Week, 17 July 2018) <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/volunteerism-declined-among-young-people/2018/07..>

5 Sahri, M., et al., 'Empowering Youth Volunteerism: The Importance and Global Motivating Factors' (2013) 3 Journal of Educational and Social Research.

of 288 VNR reports submitted that acknowledged the work of volunteers throughout the spectrum of the SDGs⁶. There was also an integration of volunteering work in the national SDG strategies and plans across the member states of the UN. This calls relevance to the present nature of activism amongst youth and underscores the need for localised studies specifically focused on youth engagement in volunteerism for SDG initiatives in Malaysia.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on sustainable development goals: Youth development

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) is a bipartisan initiative with the objectives to implement the SDGs in the two-hundred twenty-two parliamentary constituencies in Malaysia. The initiative strives to implement the SDGs as a common goal regardless of any political affiliations through the analysis of issues and solutions, policy research, and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships, including the raising of awareness and building capacity at the local levels⁷. The organisation consists of parliamentarians, academicians, solution providers, and civil society activists that work toward the accomplishments of the 2030 Agenda at the national level.

The youth development arm of APPGM-SDG began with the agenda and thrust to mobilise and empower Malaysian youths under the training arm of MySDG Academy to take up the 2030 agenda and contribute to localising the SDGs in their respective localities. They are encouraged to participate in curated initiatives as well. The focal attention that the department involves itself includes organising the Malaysian Youth SDG Summit annually, coordinating the Malaysian Youth SDG Agent initiative, conducting research and development on Malaysian youths in the SDGs agenda. The department envisions the empowerment and coordinated mobilisation of Malaysian youths in the SDG implementation

6 UN Volunteers, 'Volunteerism and the SDGs | Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism' (knowledge.unv.org, 2023) <https://knowledge.unv.org/theme/volunteerism-and-the-sdgs>.

7 Mohd Yusof, D., & Sanusi, Z. A., 'The APPGM-SDG (All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia for Sustainable Development Goals): Towards Mainstreaming SDG in Issues and Solutions of Parliamentary Constituencies' (2021) 1 Journal of the Malaysian Parliament <https://journalmp.parlimen.gov.my/jurnal/index.php/jmp/article/view/39/23> [Accessed 12 December 2023].

agenda. Additionally, the department stands as a representative body between youth leaders across civil societies and the parliament through its initiatives. The thrust of the department is its ethos of a bottom-up approach in the involvement and development of youths through mentorship, and youth training programmes. Through the platform, the department envisions a local to global approach in sending Malaysian youth representation to national and global platforms on representing the youth in SDG developments of Malaysia⁸.

The current study contributes to the body of research on youth development from the data of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals. The objectives outlined are to study the nature of youth volunteerism in SDG oriented initiatives, specifically focusing on a descriptive nature of the data, including gender involvement among the youth demographic, prior experience, and organisational affiliation that contributes to the involvement in SDG-oriented volunteerism. The study discusses the practical ways in which stakeholders and parliamentarians can effectively engage youths from their respective constituencies in more voluntary work and civic spaces.

Significance

This study is significant to various stakeholders including research bodies, parliamentarians, and civil societies to encourage and enhance the factors of increasing the interest and rate of youth in the SDGs and its oriented voluntary activity. It holds significance within the academic and research community providing insights into the dynamics of youth engagement in SDG-oriented volunteerism. The quantitative findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge, offering an understanding of the factors influencing youth participation. It is hoped that researchers can build upon these insights to further explore the complexities of youth involvement in sustainable development initiatives, potentially informing future studies and methodologies.

In the context of parliamentarians, the findings of this research carry important implications for parliamentarians and policymakers. Understanding the demographic concentrations and influential factors in youth participation in SDG volunteerism allows for the formulation of targeted policies and initiatives that can be undertaken by the relevant

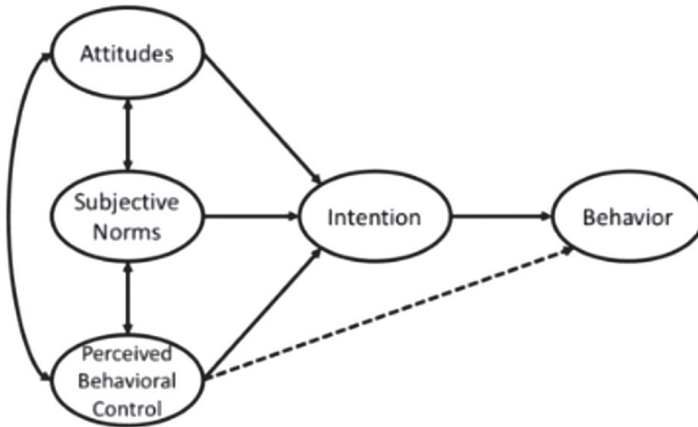
8 MySDG Academy, '2024 Target and Deliveries: Corporate Communication and MySDG Academy' (2023).

parties in building the capacity and involvement of youths for national developments through the SDGs. Parliamentarians can leverage this research to design strategies that encourage and support youth-driven progress towards the SDGs. It provides evidence-based information that can guide the creation of legislative frameworks fostering youth engagement in the national development agendas.

Civil societies and organisations (CSOs) play a key role in the encouragement of youth involvement in volunteerism. This research outcomes offer CSOs valuable insights into the specific characteristics and preferences of youth volunteers. This knowledge can be instrumental in tailoring outreach efforts, volunteer recruitment strategies, and programme designs to effectively engage the youth demographic. Furthermore, CSOs can use the research findings and discussion to enhance their advocacy and collaboration efforts, ensuring a more targeted and impactful approach to achieving the SDGs through youth involvement.

Theory of planned behaviour and youth engagement in volunteerism

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (2005) provides a valuable lens for understanding youth engagement in volunteerism. According to TPB, individuals' behavioural intentions are crucial predictors of their actual behaviours, where these intentions are shaped by three main factors, namely; attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of youth volunteerism, attitudes refer to the individual's evaluation of volunteering activities, recognizing the positive outcomes such as personal development, skill acquisition, and community impact. Subjective norms capture the perceived social pressure or approval regarding engaging in volunteerism, reflecting the influence of peers, family, and societal expectations on the youth's intentions. Perceived behavioural control which is the third factor, reflects the individual's belief in their ability to successfully carry out the behaviour. For youth considering volunteerism, perceived behavioural control encompasses their confidence in overcoming barriers, accessing opportunities, and effectively contributing to community initiatives. The interlinked three factors affect the intention of the youth to cognitively decide on their participation in volunteering, therefore affecting the behaviour to participate in volunteerism.

Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behaviour adopted from Ajzen (2005)

The present study outlines the focus on the norms of the volunteer pool, where data collects the demographic concentration of the volunteers originating from based on gender based involvement, affiliation, and prior experience. It then provides, recommendations to stakeholders on steps to increase youth participation in voluntary work related to the SDG agenda and increase accessibility to opportunities within societal norms. Youth active participation in volunteerism is the conscious decision and action that they take to dedicate their time purposefully in helping communities and initiatives without any form of expectation for material or monetary reward.⁹

Literature review

The role of youth in the sustainable development goals

Youth participation in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals constitutes a significant role for advocating social change. The tradition of youth and activism in grassroots movements globally has resulted in the change of policy, organisational transformation and development of healthier communities and ecosystems.¹⁰ Youth are the driving force

9 Siti Raba'ah Hamzah et al., 'Understanding the Reasons for Malaysian Youth Participation in Volunteering Activities' (2015) 3 Athens Journal of Social Sciences 39.

10 Larsson, J., & Holmberg, J., 'Learning While Creating Value for Sustainability Transitions: The Case of Challenge Lab at Chalmers University of Technology' (2018) 172 Journal of Cleaner Production 4411 [<https://research.chalmers.se/en/publication/?id=253757>].

behind progress in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their activism, advocacy, participation in various SDG-based programmes, and efforts to raise awareness about the SDGs are important to advocate for these goals, mobilise communities, and influence policies. By bringing attention to issues such as climate change, social inequalities, and education, they can make an impact within the communities and on a global scale. This is supported by studies that emphasised on the ability of youth to effectively fill the important gaps in SDG implementation.¹¹

According to Ng and Thomas (2023), youth actively participate in implementing and leading SDG-oriented projects and programmes, contributing their time, skills, and energy to create positive changes aligned with the SDGs. This can be illustrated by their participation in APPGM-SDG organised programmes such as the Malaysian Youth SDG Agent.¹² Engaging youth in the SDGs is considered crucial due to their demographic significance, as they bring innovative perspectives, fresh ideas and potential for long-term impact. Their creativity and adaptability contribute to finding new solutions to complex global challenges addressed by the SDGs. Similarly, UN agencies highlight the role of youth engagement in achieving the SDGs, as these 17 goals directly shape the future that today's young generation will inherit. Furthermore, studies emphasise the need of perceiving youth not merely as beneficiaries but as active contributors and agents of change in sustainable development initiatives. Demographically, in the engagements with the SDGs, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) indicated a balanced involvement of volunteers in 2019 and 2020 originating from gender involvements, which contributes to the gender equal engagements. Furthermore, many volunteers were affiliated with organisations, and a higher percentage of those who continued in civic spaces as adults had prior experience in the contribution of their volunteerism as youths, as was noted in similar research. Even though, this connotes a demographic involvement, regional perspectives were found to be at a deficit.

Mohd Yusof and Ariffin (2021) in their research stated that youth engagement in SDGs activities within ASEAN countries can be grouped

11 Lee, B., et al., 'Students Leading Students: A Qualitative Study Exploring a Student-Led Model for Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals' (2022) 24 *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*

12 Ng, Z., & Thomas, P., 'Perspectives, Experiences, and Involvement of Youths in Promoting Sustainable Development Goals in Malaysian Parliamentary Constituencies' (2023) 3 *Journal of the Malaysian Parliament* 110 [<https://journalmp.parlimen.gov.my/jurnal/index.php/jmp/article/view/85/43>].

into three. Firstly, the 'providers' for activities related to the SDGs and voluntary work engagement, which include youth organisations and government partners. This group participates in reporting on SDGs, collecting data, and initiating roles in community projects aligned with SDGs. Second group is SDG 'receivers' who take on the role as participants in education, health services, training and development and are involved in multi-tier meetings based on respected capacities. This is the group that has often been targeted by most of the SDG-based programmes. Lastly, the 'providers and receivers' who act simultaneously and participate in policy making with the government and are involved in high-level discussions.¹³ However, the strength and volume of the engagement varies upon the desire and the willingness of governments to accept youth as their partners.

Youth engagement in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiatives has also been observed globally. The United Nations recognized 17 young advocates who lead efforts to combat global challenges thus inspiring a better future.¹⁴ UNESCO also highlighted the role of media and information literacy in promoting green skills among youth, empowering them to navigate complex environmental issues and contribute to a more sustainable future.¹⁵ However, youth-led efforts face challenges such as climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration despite being known by the world for a tech-savvy generation..¹⁶ Despite these challenges, lessons learned from these efforts emphasise the importance of equipping youth with the tools to promote sustainable development.¹⁷ These lessons underscore the need for active listening, acknowledging and acting

13 Mohd Yusof, M. I., & Ariffin, M. M., 'Youth Engagement in the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) in Asean Countries' (2021) 10 International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development.

14 'Leveraging Youth to Shape a Better Future, UN Announces 17 Young Leaders for SDGs' (UN News, 18 September 2020) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072732> [Accessed 21 April 2024].

15 UNESCO, 'Empowering Youth for Sustainable Development' (Unesco.org, 2023) <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/empowering-youth-sustainable-development>.

16 'World Youth Report: Addressing the Complex Challenges Facing Young People Today' (UN DESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 20 February 2019) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/social/world-youth-report-addressing-the-complex-challenges-facing-young-people-today.html>.

17 Martin, 'UN SG Launches #Youth2030 Strategy' (United Nations Sustainable Development) <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/09/youth2030-launch/>.

upon information learned and supporting the roles that young people want to assume and cultivate.

Platforms and parliamentary support to encourage youth volunteerism in Malaysia

Mohd Yusof and Ariffin (2021) reported that youth engagement in SDGs within ASEAN countries is readily accomplished through voluntary works and youth-led activities. In the Malaysian context, efforts to encourage and facilitate youth engagement in SDGs are channelled through various platforms and parliamentary mechanisms.¹⁰ APPGM-SDG spearheads initiatives dedicated to fostering an environment conducive to youth volunteerism.¹⁸ Collaborations between parliamentary bodies, government agencies, civil society organisations, and youth-led initiatives further enhance the landscape of youth volunteerism in Malaysia. These collaborations highlight volunteerism as a tool for addressing societal challenges and advancing the SDGs.

The chairman of the Malaysian Red Crescent Kapitan Chapter noted the decrease in the spirit of volunteerism, attributing the decline to the rapid pace of development and modernization, leaving individuals overwhelmed to cope with the demands of their daily lives.¹⁹ Malaysia's then serving prime minister had announced 2013 as the year of Volunteer and allocated RM100 million for 1M4U volunteer programme to constantly instil the spirit of volunteerism among youth. The 1.2 million students within Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEI) were highlighted to be empowered to actively contribute to the country's development. One crucial aspect of their contribution involves fostering strong character, idealism, skills, and leadership qualities to become valuable assets to society; offering experiential learning opportunities that complement formal education. These qualities are not solely acquired through classroom lectures but through active engagement in social initiatives and volunteer programmes which emphasises the significance of hands-on experiences in fostering critical thinking and cultural competence among volunteers. Thus, in the 2024 budget, the

18 '2022 Annual Report, All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG)' (2022) <https://www.parlimen.gov.my/resources/files/rsaindex/pdf/0-%202022-APPGM-SDG%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

19 'MRC Kapit Takes up Challenge to Host Event' (*Borneo Post Online*, 2 October 2014) <https://www.theborneopost.com/2014/10/02/mrc-kapit-takes-up-challenge-to-host-event/> [Accessed 20 December 2023].

Malaysian government had indicated monetary incentives to be given to youths between 18 to 20 years of age to engage in voluntary work in government recognised bodies.²⁰

In addition, educating the youth should not be narrowly defined with an emphasis solely on academic achievement. Volunteerism has also been a method to promote active learning, providing experience that will strengthen their commitment to civic participation, expand their educational experience, and better serve their communities. In order for the quality of youth to move in tandem with the current societal concerns based on 17-SDG needs and to inculcate pro-social behaviour in the youth, volunteerism is essential. This active involvement is essential in shaping robust characters and cultivating invaluable human capital toward the nation's development. Additionally, the United Nations Volunteer programme highlights the role of volunteering and social activism in promoting social inclusion and participatory development.⁸

Volunteers are seen as valuable sources of knowledge in development programmes, ensuring the relevance and legitimacy of advocacy campaigns. There are several studies that emphasise the substantial contribution of volunteer efforts to address social challenges and promote the well-being of the community. At the same time, economically viewed, it demonstrates how volunteerism positively influences economies by creating job opportunities and enhancing community resources. A study conducted in the UK indicated that volunteering contributed an estimated 40 Billion Pounds annually, ranking as the nation's third-largest contributor to the Gross Domestic Product. Moreover, according to Independent Sector, volunteering programmes conducted by non-profit organisations in the USA have been approximated to equate to 9 million full time positions. In Canada, out of 24 million individuals aged 15 or older, 7.5 million engage in volunteer work. Additionally, volunteerism generates job opportunities within the community.²¹

In recent years, there has been a growing momentum to mainstream Education of SDGs (ESD) at HEIs, including advancements made to curricula and student engagement programming which have long been viewed as incubators of innovation in sustainability, achieved through research, curricula and empowering staff, faculty and students as change

20 Bernama, 'Gov't Provides RM500 Incentive for Youths Involved in Volunteerism' (*Bernama*, 13 October 2023) <https://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2234689> [Accessed 29 December 2023].

21 Maniam, V. A, 'Volunteerism for Youth Development' (2004) *INTI Journal*.

agents.²² One Study conducted in Canada aimed to better understand how student-centric SDG programmes can advance SDG engagement in the campus by introducing an active leadership role in the SDGA. The findings recommend integrating youth into institutional SDG-based initiatives, demonstrating that youth-led models for SDG action which possess unique capacities to foster empowered youth leaders while boosting institutional efforts to advance the SDG. Participants assumed roles such as executive members, advisors and event planners, enhancing their understanding of the SDGs beyond the classroom and linking learning to personal experiences. This heightened self-awareness, empowerment, and the drive to assume leadership positions aimed at instigating systemic changes. In particular, the study also emphasised the importance of collaboration between individuals, government, and civil society in implementing the SDGs. Accordingly, the incorporation of SDG workshops through platforms like APPGM-SDG in Malaysia reflects the country's commitment to mainstreaming SDGs into educational spheres.

Furthermore, achieving the SDGs by 2030 necessitates the inclusion of stakeholders' collective voices through a multi-layer governance model, treating youth as essential partners and empowering them with specific SDG initiatives, thus leveraging the youth as a catalyst of change. By recognizing the youth as the future generation, their involvement in these initiatives contributes to their country's development. Stakeholder engagement and youth empowerment promote significant cooperation across various levels to create sustainable policies. However, study unveils a significant finding that stakeholder engagement in youth-led SDG-related programmes in Malaysia depends on the commitment of the youth movement²³. Moreover, it highlights limited engagement between international SDG stakeholders and Malaysian youth movement, contrasting with moderate engagement with state, local governments, associated institutions, legislators, and the private sector. The landscape of youth movement in Malaysia engaging with SDGs involves varied partnerships at national levels. One of them is that they collaborate extensively with government agencies, legislative members, NGOs

22 Karatzoglou, B., 'An In-Depth Literature Review of the Evolving Roles and Contributions of Universities to Education for Sustainable Development' (2013) 49 *Journal of Cleaner Production* 44.

23 Mohd Yusof, M. I., Ho Nyuk Onn@Ariffin, M., & Dwi Harsono, 'Stakeholder Engagement in Implementation of Youth-Led SDG-Related Programmes in Malaysia' (2022) 7 *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal* 323.

and educational institutions, enhancing their SDG knowledge and youth participation. However, associations with government agencies, politicians, and private firms remain selective and limited as they are more mutual with the fellow NGOs and educational institutions. Meanwhile, for the youth movement affiliated to national and state youth councils, significant support in terms of financial and material support for SDG implementation is received. Yet, they struggle with exposure to the SDG and face selective involvement in consultation processes. Next, non-affiliated youth movements usually prioritise independence, avoiding partnerships that might compromise their autonomy. This movement, is more focused on advocating for youth issues despite facing economical constraints. There are also some youth movements now gradually forming partnerships to boost their visibility of advocacy for SDGs as it strengthens the funding of the movement and the implementation of large-scale initiatives.¹⁰

The global progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals faces notable slowdowns despite universal support. Overcoming these challenges necessitates global solidarity, cross-sectoral support, and intergovernmental leadership. Malaysia's utilisation of platforms and parliamentary mechanisms reflects an effort to foster youth engagement in achieving the SDGs. However, to achieve the localization of the SDGs, the decentralisation of authority and dedicated actions from the specified officials to drive it forward are required. The execution of SDGs at the national level hinges on the political determination of a country's leadership. There are three stakeholders' support that play an important role. Firstly, the non-political executive which functions as the SDG implementer across various administrative tiers. Government institutions will align their objectives with the SDGs, reflecting the services they provide to citizens. Consequently, the execution of it will entail both horizontal and vertical responsibilities across multi-tier governance levels.²⁴ Second is the legislator's involvement in evaluating SDG-related legislation that has to be framed and appraised in the parliament.²⁵ Next, the statistical agencies and consultants who provide

24 Cummings, S., et al., 'Critical Discourse Analysis of Perspectives on Knowledge and the Knowledge Society within the Sustainable Development Goals' (2018) 36 *Development Policy Review* 727.

25 Goyannes Gusmão Caiado, R., et al., 'A Literature-Based Review on Potentials and Constraints in the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals' (2018) 198 *Journal of Cleaner Production* 1276 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652618320754> accessed 18 October 2019..

reliable SDG-related data.²⁶ Following this, audit agencies and institutions are responsible for scrutinising the accountability of the SDGs.²⁷ Thus, the role played by parliamentary bodies, government agencies, and civil society organisations, particularly through the APPGM-SDG, demonstrates a commitment to promoting youth involvement in SDG-oriented initiatives.

In the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), various multi-stakeholder partnership models have emerged as effective strategies. Public-private partnerships have been instrumental in mobilising resources and expertise, leveraging the strengths of both sectors to address complex challenges. The SDG Fund supports the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development by implementing innovative joint programmes and focuses on public-private partnerships to accelerate the achievement of SDGs in more than 20 countries.²⁸ Civil society collaborations have played a crucial role in ensuring inclusivity and grassroots participation, often serving as a bridge between local communities and larger institutional structures. This has been shown when Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from around the world, including the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), called on governments and other global development stakeholders to redouble their efforts to address gaps and work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.²⁹ Academia-industry partnerships, on the other hand, have fostered innovation and research, driving technological advancements aligned with SDGs during the development and implementation of all projects. In addition, the SDG Partnership Guidebook provides a practical guide in building high-impact multi-stakeholder partnerships for Sustainable Development Goals.

26 Allen, C., et al., 'Indicator-Based Assessments of Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Case Study from the Arab Region' (2017) 12 *Sustainability Science* 975.

27 Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, S., Dahl, A. L., & Persson, Å., 'The Emerging Accountability Regimes for the Sustainable Development Goals and Policy Integration: Friend or Foe?' (2018) 36 *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 1371.

28 Duran y Lalaguna, P., & Dorodnykh, E., 'The Role of Private–Public Partnerships in the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals: Experience from the SDG Fund' [2017] *World Sustainability Series* 969.

29 Myarcia, '13 CSOs Launch Report on SDGs Implementation' (*CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness*, 24 February 2022) <https://csopartnership.org/2022/02/13-csos-launch-report-on-sdgs-implementation/> [Accessed 21 April 2024].

Methodology

This study utilises a quantitative descriptive research methodology. Quantitative research methods quantify and analyse variables to obtain results, encompassing the use and analysis of numerical data through specialised statistical techniques in order to address inquiries of who, what, where, when, and how in the scope of study. Data was compiled from 323 volunteers who participated in the APPGM-SDG Youth Development initiatives that were SDG-oriented namely; Malaysian Youth SDG Summit 2022 and 2023, The Young Asian Voices for the United Nations We Need 2.0, and Malaysian Youth SDG Agent 22/23 and 23/24 cohort. Demographics, including gender distribution, organisational affiliations, and prior volunteerism experiences, were analysed to identify the nature of youth participation in SDG-oriented volunteerism. Data was collected via questionnaire on google forms while informed consent was obtained stating that the data gathered will be used for research and development purposes. Inclusion criteria included (a) youths 30 and below, (b) initiatives as volunteers with the organisers. The participant recruitment was done for the initiatives through the sharing of applications via the APPGM-SDG network of organisations and strategic partners. The instrument was designed specific to the project initiative of the department that gathered demographic data of youths who applied as volunteers to the initiatives. The questionnaire was circulated prior to each of the initiatives across 2022-2023 through snowball sampling. Google forms were circulated through APPGM-SDG youth department's strategic partners consisting of civil societies, non-governmental organisations, social enterprises, think tanks, government agencies, and institutions that later circulated them among their networks across Malaysia. The forms to express interest included demographic questions, which covered gender distribution, organisational affiliations, and prior volunteerism experience. The data collection process prioritised ensuring diversity within the sample to capture a representative picture of youth engagement in SDG initiatives. Data was collected across 2022-2023 via these initiatives. Descriptive statistical analyses, including mean, standard deviation, and variance, were conducted in SPSS to identify the distribution of the variables in relation to the involvement of youth in SDG-oriented volunteerism. The findings derived from this methodology aim to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of youth engagement, thereby informing strategies for fostering localised progress towards the SDGs, both at the national and global levels.

Findings and discussion

The findings recorded a descriptive analysis of the data collected from the pool of youths who joined as volunteers in the initiatives of APPGM-SDG in youth and SDG developments. Mean, and distribution of the data were documented from the data obtained.

Summary of demographic profile

Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percentile (%)
Gender:		
Male	148	45.8
Female	175	54.2
Age:		
15	4	1.2
16	5	1.5
17	10	3.1
18	14	4.3
19	13	4.0
20	30	9.3
21	38	11.8
22	35	10.8
23	41	12.4
24	35	10.8
25	24	7.4
26	22	6.8
27	16	5.0
28	8	2.5
29	19	5.9
30	9	2.8
Organisational Affiliation:		
Affiliated	247	76.5
Non-Affiliated	76	23.5
Prior Experience in		
Volunteerism	233	72.1
Has prior experience	90	27.9
No prior experience		

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the demographic variables studied in the research, focusing on the representation of the data of youth in SDG-oriented volunteerism. Firstly, on gender distribution, the mean gender score is 0.54, indicating a relatively balanced distribution between male and female participants. The standard deviation and variance values suggest a moderate level of variability in gender representation within the sample. Secondly, on the organisational affiliation of participants, mean score is 0.76, pointing to a significant proportion of participants having affiliations with organisations that include NGOs, CSOs, or Think Tanks. The moderate standard deviation and variance suggested diversity in organisational affiliations among the participants. Thirdly, participants, on average, have a prior experience score of 0.72, suggesting a substantial presence of individuals with past volunteerism engagement. The moderate standard deviation and variance indicated some variability in the extent of prior volunteerism experience among the participants.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of gender, organisation affiliation and prior experience in SDG-oriented volunteerism participation

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	323	1	2	1.46	.499
Organisational Affiliation	323	0	1	.76	.425
Prior Experience	323	0	1	.72	.449
Valid N (listwise)	323				

The frequency measure of the nominal value of the data presents findings that are influential to understand further the nature of youth participation in the SDG-oriented initiatives as volunteers.

Table 2: Frequency table of Gender demographic involvement in SDG-oriented volunteerism

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	175	54.2	54.2	54.2
	Male	148	45.8	45.8	100.0
Total		323	100.0	100.0	

Based on the frequency table breakdown of the gender involvement in SDG-oriented activities, it appears that more women than men engage in SDG-oriented volunteerism. However, the difference in distribution is not significant to conclude a difference. 54% of participants in the SDG-oriented volunteerism activities organised by APPGM-SDG were females; this orients to the literature indicating women’s participation in volunteering in the social and health fields is higher than men.³⁰ The findings thus complement existing research.

Table 3

Frequency table of organisational affiliation demographic involvement in SDG-oriented volunteerism

		Organisational Affiliation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	76	23.5	23.5	23.5
	Yes	247	76.5	76.5	100.0
Total		323	100.0	100.0	

Results show that 76.5% of participants in the SDG-oriented volunteerism were those who had an affiliation with an organisation. In context of the platform’s recruitment, affiliation referred to those who were attached to any non-governmental organisation (NGO), civil society organisation (CSO), and think-tanks. A difference can be seen where, more participants who have been previously in organisations, continue to engage in volunteerism and activism, while on the contrary, participants without any form of affiliation constituted 23.5% of the participants. The pool of participants were garnered from the network of strategic partners of APPGM-SDG Youth Development, consisting of non- governmental organisations, social enterprises, think tanks, government agencies, and institutions that were oriented in their work toward youth empowerment across Malaysia. The motivating factors that encourage participants to join in the Youth SDG programmes with or without affiliations with organisations could be a topic for future research. Nonetheless, it can be classified that aligning with the Planned Behaviour Theory, participants

30 United Nations Volunteers, ‘Beyond Averages: Do Gender Disparities Exist in Volunteering?’ (United Nations Volunteers, 2021) <https://www.unv.org/Success-stories/beyond-averages-do-gender-disparities-exist-volunteering>.

who volunteered to the initiatives stem from the individual alignment of their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control.

Table 4: Frequency table of prior experience demographic involvement in SDG-oriented volunteerism

		Prior Experience			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	90	27.9	27.9	27.9
	Yes	233	72.1	72.1	100.0
	Total	323	100.0	100.0	

Participants who engaged in the SDG-oriented initiatives as volunteers were found to constitute 72.1% of those already with prior experience in volunteerism, while 27.9% of them without any prior experience in volunteerism. This provides insights that youth who have previous engagement and experience in voluntary work continue to engage in their voluntary portfolio through a variety of initiatives. Previous experience is connoted by the defining narrative of volunteerism, constituting the conscious participation on a pro-bono basis for a cause or to engage in community development. Thus the findings are expanded to confer that 72.1% participants had experience in volunteerism prior to joining as volunteers with APPGM-SDG's youth development initiatives.

Gender demographic variation was average between the males and females; with females slightly higher in percentage. In coherence with this, literature indicated a larger percentage of females who engaged in voluntary engagement and civic spaces especially in the social and health sectors.³¹ Similarly, the United Nations Volunteers data indicated a 50-50 engagement from males and females between 2019 to 2020. The findings indicated a reduction in gender disparity and involvement of youths in SDG oriented volunteerism moving towards gender equality in the civic spaces.

Data collected on the organisational affiliation of participants shows results that lean toward higher youth involvements from organisations. However, this can be an effect of the marketing of the initiatives from which participants are involved in, as the recruitment was done from the

31 Mohd Ramlan, et al., 'Gender Differences among Youth in Volunteerism' (2015) 12 Journal of Administrative Science https://jas.uitm.edu.my/images/2015_DEC/5.pdf accessed 23 March 2024.

network of organisations directly or indirectly affiliated with APPGM-SDG. Literature also indicated the relatedness of increased voluntary engagement that was subsequent through the activism of non-profits and organisations; indicating that many voluntary engagements originated from an affiliated body that promoted the action. Unique to the findings, the percentage of the volunteers that joined the initiatives independently are noteworthy; this shows such a prospective growing audience of youths that are exploring in the field of social activism and meaningful engagement to gain experience via voluntary works. Although the group constituted below 30% of participants, it should be taken to hope for greater engagement of youths from various groups to join volunteerism activities and be involved in the larger civic spaces. Promotions and marketing of various kinds play a pivotal role to the accessibility of information to voluntary works across the nation to engage youths.

On the concentration of participation of volunteers that had prior experience, results indicated a larger mean of participants that had prior experience in volunteerism. This indication aligns with research that suggests many who engaged in volunteerism as youths also engaged in volunteerism as adults. In literature, the impact that volunteerism has towards a national and global narrative calls for attention to the demographic encouragement and factors to involve more youth to participate in the civic space with encouragement from parliamentary processes and civil movements. Through active participation in volunteer activities, individuals not only contribute to community welfare but also hone essential skills; fostering personal growth. The symbiotic relationship between volunteerism and human capital development underscores its potential as a transformative force in shaping knowledgeable and empowered societies.

Literature also indicated that youth participation in voluntary activism had an impact on the national economy.³² Volunteer-driven initiatives generate social values, promoting economic sustainability by addressing societal needs transcending traditional GDP metrics. By quantifying this social capital, the holistic economic benefits should also be acknowledged. Therefore, the present study indicating the demographic factors should enable stakeholders to focus on developments and diversify participation from different groups of individuals who join the voluntary movements for the SDGs and national developments.

32 Mohd Hafiz Mohd Nor, Asmidar Alias, & Mohd Faizal Musa, 'Social Capital in Youth Volunteerism' (2018) 16 *Planning Malaysia Journal*.

Volunteerism is a versatile and dynamic tool in addressing a spectrum of societal challenges. From poverty alleviation to environmental sustainability, the collective efforts of volunteers are the driving force for positive change. The clear indication of the distribution of demographics found in participation at SDG-oriented volunteerism initiatives connoted that, actionable steps proposed in the recommendations are relevant in being the cornerstone of increasing interest and participation for the 2030 agenda from a local to global perspective.

In line with the potentiality of youth participation in the SDG oriented voluntarism lies the potential struggles that stakeholders face in activating youths into the social sphere for national and global developments as voluntary networks. Some of these struggles identified in light of the decline of youth participation can be taken as a starting point to improve services to cater to the need-based and passion-driven initiatives aimed at actively engaging the youth demographic in the voluntary action. This is demonstrated by the model used at APPGM-SDG youth development to align the interest of the youth SDG Agents with their passion to the SDG themes and to themselves while leading and honing their skills as teams to push the SDG agenda. Challenges that literature indicated in essence include the lack of awareness on the platforms and initiatives that drive youth voluntary programmes, which shows a gap in accessibility to information especially in the larger scheme of the demographics. Extrinsic and intrinsic value found within the initiatives are also factors that influence participation. Engaging youth in volunteer work requires tapping into their interests and motivations. Relevant stakeholders may face challenges if the volunteer opportunities do not align with the passions and causes that resonate with the youth. Thus, the need to create diverse and appealing projects is essential to capture their interest. Youth also may prefer short-term commitments due to changing priorities or uncertainties about their future plans; thus affecting participation. Moreover, a lack of recognition and feedback often associated with post-participation in voluntary work will also affect the future engagement of youths in volunteerism, calling for civic spaces to be open for dialogue, recognition and encouragement.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in upscaling youth participation in volunteerism

The theory of planned behaviour as proposed by Ajzen connotes that human behaviours are shaped by intentions, which are influenced by factors including attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural

control.³³ The framework presented in TPB can be of essential utility in the context of volunteerism and activating the youth involvement by increasing focus towards demographic encouragement to engage in voluntary work in relation to the SDG agenda. The behaviour (ie. volunteerism in SDG-oriented initiatives) is influenced by the intentions to volunteer, which in turn is influenced by the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control of the individuals.

The attitude referred to in TPB coheres with the individual predisposition of youths towards engaging in volunteer activities aimed at achieving sustainable development. This encompasses their beliefs about the importance and effectiveness of volunteerism in creating positive change. Concurrently, the subjective norm, i.e. the accessibility to information on the APPGM-SDG youth development initiatives for volunteerism, availability of resources and time willingly spent to volunteer enhances the possibility of engagement in volunteerism for the SDGs. The perceived behavioural control includes internal constraints such as skills, resources, and self-efficacy needed to take action, while external constraints may involve logistical barriers or societal limitations. When the youth feels confident in their capacity to overcome these barriers and perceive volunteering as feasible, they are more likely to take action.

The study focusing on the demographic involvement of youths in volunteerism, indicated the gender percentage participation, affiliation participation, and prior experience participation-; Hence, it can be undertaken that the norms of the youth demographic as a whole has its sub-category of preference of groups that engage in the voluntary initiatives. Stakeholders can utilise the framework of TPB to encourage a greater number of participation from youths in SDG-oriented volunteerism without nullifying the quality of the engagements. By the involvement of parliamentarians and civil society organisations in improving the environment that promotes youth engagement in voluntarism by impacting the subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behaviour control of youths, the greater engagement can be encouraged. This begins with breaking the negative stereotypes of voluntarism, increasing social awareness on voluntarism, and having knowledge of the intrinsic and extrinsic value of volunteerism.

This study recommends a bottom-up approach, where by stakeholders are able to influence and encourage subjective norms of the focus group

33 Ajzen, I., *Attitudes, Personality and Behavior* (Open University Press, 2005).

(i.e. youths), to improve their intentions, and to enhance participation of the community in SDG-oriented volunteerism. Recommendations are drawn from this approach to encourage and mobilise youths, creating a conducive norm among youths to actively engage in volunteerism for the SDGs.

Recommendation

Recommendations are presented for parliamentarians, civil society agencies, and youths in general for the promotion of active engagement in volunteerism and SDG developments from a local to global narrative. The Malaysian government offered RM500 as incentive for youths between 18-20 years of age to increase their engagement in volunteerism with government recognised bodies. Similar incentive-based encouragement may have its benefits of engaging more youths in social work and volunteerism. However, their motivation system may be queried from a qualitative approach. Nonetheless, incentive-based approaches can be implemented more frequently in various forms including educational credits and tangible benefits. Secondly, parliamentarians could advocate for increased budgetary allocations to support youth-led initiatives and programmes focused on SDG-oriented volunteerism to enhance the impact and reach of such initiatives. Thirdly, by increasing support for the development and implementation of educational programmes within parliamentary constituencies to raise awareness about the SDGs and the importance of youth engagement, parliamentarians will encourage more involvement in the developments through passionate involvement. Partnership from government agencies with youth led organisations and platforms especially bridging the gap between youths and constituency development hand-in-hand with government agencies will promote the involvement of youths in contributing to the SDGs and localised solutions.

In terms of the recommendations presented for civil societies in increasing or promoting the increase of volunteerism among youths, firstly, the provision for youth-based capacity building is pivotal. For instance, training and capacity-building programmes for youth groups which include workshops on project management, advocacy, and sustainable development can enhance their skills and knowledge in SDG-oriented volunteerism. An example is the work of the Malaysian Youth SDG Agent platform that provides training and capacity building for youths. Besides, a larger outreach to the unreached and marginalised communities, and focused demographic of youth can enhance the

directory of youth in SDG-oriented volunteerism. Secondly, network and partnerships among civil societies to create an SDG-Youth Community can boost the outreach to various groups, networks and explore more trendy ways of attracting the current youth generation. Recognition and award programmes also should be tied with the efforts to encourage participation for outstanding youth-led initiatives contributing to the SDGs. This will motivate and celebrate the efforts of young volunteers. A further development in research should be done in this scope of topic to contribute greater insights for informed decision-making among stakeholders.

Recommendations are also outlined for the youth demographic to involve actively in volunteerism and align their efforts with the themes of SDGs for personal, local, national, and global developments. Youths should be encouraged to take advantage of skill development programmes offered by civil societies and other organisations to enhance capabilities in contributing to SDG-oriented volunteerism. Thirdly, the importance of data collection and reporting should be emphasised within youth volunteer initiatives with tools such as surveys to gather meaningful data that can inform future projects and demonstrate impact. Finally, incorporating sustainability planning into youth initiatives can facilitate the considerations for long-term impact and scalability of projects to ensure they contribute to lasting change in alignment with the SDGs. It is hoped that these recommendations are implemented with the right framework and suitable theoretical approaches from evidence-based work, cross-cultural perspectives, and research in the Malaysian context.

Limitations

Firstly, the study acknowledges the limitations present including the sample size, which comprised volunteers from specific programmes and summits conducted by APPGM-SDG only and does not include representation of the broader population of the Malaysian youth involved in SDG-oriented volunteerism. Thus, generalizability to the broader population may be constrained. Secondly, the data was collected via the network of organisations under APPGM-SDGs network, which influences the findings on organisational affiliation participation. Thirdly, due to the cross-sectional design, the study may identify associations between variables but cannot establish causation. Understanding the causal relationships between demographic factors and youth engagement requires a more longitudinal approach. Finally, the study predominantly relies on mean, standard deviation, and variance, providing quantitative

insights. Instead, a more comprehensive understanding of youth engagement could be achieved by incorporating qualitative methods to capture the richness of experiences and motivations. Despite the limitations, the study outlines the need to identify the demographic engagement within the context of the organisation while increasing the provision of insights in the recommendations to activate and encourage more youth participation in SDGs volunteerism.

Conclusion

This research studies demographic involvement of youth in SDG-oriented volunteerism, focusing on the APPGM-SDG platform and drawing data from dedicated volunteers participating in the Malaysian Youth SDG Summits, the Malaysian Youth SDG Agent cohorts, and The Young Asian Voices 1.0 and 2.0 programmes. These programmes are platforms initiated bringing Malaysian youths to discussions, forums, and focus groups in the agenda of accelerating the UN SDGs. Through a quantitative lens, the study provided insights focusing on gender distribution, organisational affiliations, and prior volunteer experiences that offered comprehension of the engagement of youth in volunteering with initiatives aimed at localising the SDGs. While the findings illuminate the quantitative nature of dedicated volunteers, the research acknowledges the study's limitations. In addition, the research contributes to the understanding of youth-driven progress towards the SDGs in the Malaysian context, offering a foundation for informed strategies by parliamentarians, civil societies, and youth groups to foster sustainable development both nationally and globally. Moving forward, a holistic approach that combines quantitative analyses with qualitative insights and addresses identified limitations can further enrich the contextual understanding of youth engagement in achieving the 2030 agenda.

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