

Role of Parliamentarians in Localising SDGs in Malaysia

*Denison Jayasooria**

Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) focuses on seventeen universal goals pertaining to economic, social and environmental concerns. It requires greater innovation in localising the agenda in order to impact the most vulnerable sections of our society and ensure no one is left behind. One new initiative in Malaysia, which is the focus of this article, is the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia (APPGM) All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia (APPGM) role SDGs. This is a bipartisan, multi-stakeholder group that is identifying local development issues and finding local solutions. This is undertaken in a decentralised way with the participation of the local communities. This APPGM on SDG and the localising agenda reached out to ten parliamentary constituencies in 2020 and was funded by a special grant (RM1.6 million) from the Ministry of Finance. A total of 34 SDG solution-based projects are addressing poverty, education, inequality, environmental and waste management concerns. While these are short-term solution projects, it illustrates the potential of a decentralised, multi-stakeholder intervention process which is locally defined and implemented. The pilot phase has also demonstrated the dual role of Members of Parliament who undertook constituency work as SDG champions at the grassroots. They have a major role in giving voice in parliamentary discussions and debates on SDG perspectives to the development agenda, balancing economic, social and environmental concerns.

Keywords: Localising SDGs, Multi-stakeholder Engagement, MPs as SDG Local Champions, Local Solutions, Local Agenda

* Professor Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria is the Head of Secretariat, APPGM SDG and Honorary Professor & Fellow at the Institute of Ethnic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Email: denisonappgmsdg@gmail.com

Introduction

The United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in September 2015 with the theme of ‘leaving no one behind’ and 17 universal goals impacting economic, social and environmental aspects of development as the 2030 agenda. Malaysia adopted these goals in development planning and made specific references to SDGs in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016 to 2020) and the Mid-Term Review of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2018). The localising of SDGs at the delivery and implementation level is the next major thrust for policymakers. Malaysia presented its Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report on SDGs in July 2017 at the High-Level Political Forum, United Nations in New York and is due to present its second VNR report in July 2021. There is, therefore, a clear federal government commitment on this matter, but there are challenges at the localisation of SDGs at the State and district levels. The global agenda, which is endorsed by Putrajaya, is not being adequately popularised at the district and local authority levels. The 17 SDG goals are not new to policymakers or agencies at the delivery level. However, what is unique are the interconnected nature of the SDGs, which requires not a silo intervention but a cross-cutting approach in delivery. This is where a multidimensional approach to development that encompasses a variety of development concerns is essential and holds them in balance.

One of the key agendas of the SDGs at the implementation stage is multi-stakeholder engagement. This is the major partnership thrust of SDG 17.17, where the call is for the promotion of effective public, private and civil society partnerships are made. While it is the role of the national government for the implementation of SDGs, nevertheless the partnership among all the major stakeholders, namely government agencies at Federal, State and local levels, with the private sector, with civil society organisations and the voluntary sector, including the academic institutions is envisioned.

The Malaysian CSO SDG Alliance has been active since October 2015 on SDG matters as a network of organisations involved in economic, social and environmental development concerns. From the beginning, the Alliance has engaged with the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), which is the focal point for the SDGs. The Alliance is a member of the National SDG Steering Committee established by EPU in 2016 and have actively participated at all national seminars in 2016 and 2019, including providing input to the Malaysian VNR (2017) and the National SDG Roadmap.

In this context of localising of SDGs and enhancing multi-stakeholder engagement, a great opportunity arose with the reform agenda of Parliament since 2018 when the Speaker of the *Dewan Rakyat* began an agenda to 'demystify Parliament'¹ by undertaking a series of public engagement events such as public forums, workshops, parliamentary visits and Speaker's Lecture series. Between September 2018 and October 2019, Parliament hosted 37 public events, which provided space for public engagement, and this was intensified with electronic communications.² Of the 37 public events, four had direct relevance to SDGs, and the author participated in three of these. On 8 December 2018, in the Seminar on Malaysian Parliamentary Reform when one of the speakers, Mr Stefan Priesner, the UN Resident Coordinator, through his talk on the 17 SDG goals, mooted the idea of a greater parliamentary role in SDGs.

The Malaysian CSO SDG Alliance hosted a series of conversations with the Speaker, and on 1 July 2019, a dinner was hosted as an interaction between Members of Parliament and CSOs. This was followed by a National Forum on SDGs held on 19 July 2019 hosted by Kingsley Strategy Institute, Parliament and the CSO SDG Alliance. The CSOs called for greater parliamentary involvement at two levels, namely at the policy-making and monitoring the delivery at the local level. CSOs saw Members of Parliament as enablers for the localising of SDGs at the ground level. These conversations with the Speaker and a number of Members of Parliament (MPs) resulted in establishing the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysian (APPGM) on SDGs in October 2019.

This article describes the partnership among the various stakeholders, especially with parliamentarians playing a very active role in localising SDGs in their parliamentary constituency. The MPs played a major role in identifying unresolved local issues and finding an SDG-based solution to address them. Enhancing the monitoring of SDG delivery, especially at the grassroots in ensuring 'no one is left behind' is a major role for parliamentarians. In addition to the local action, another parliamentarian role is the SDG policy formulation: the formulation of development policies and plans, annual budget allocations, and parliamentary question time to Cabinet members on SDG delivery impacting economic, social and environmental concerns.

1 S.F. Salahuddin and others, 'Parliament and the Public' in M.A.M. Yusof and others (eds), *Law, Principles and Practice in the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) of Malaysia* (Subang Jaya, Sweet & Maxwell, 2020) 476.

2 *ibid.* 476-80.

We will focus on three key aspects in this article. Firstly, explore the role of parliamentarians. Second, about the SDG agenda and the formation of the APPGM SDG and thirdly, the pilot project of localising SDGs in ten parliamentary constituencies in 2020. We can recognise the potential of MPs as SDG champions.

Role of parliamentarians

In reviewing the role of parliamentarians, we will explore the various duties of MPs as practised in Malaysia, drawing from the constitutional provisions and practical outworking. In Malaysia, the Parliament is constituted by the Federal Constitution, which is the supreme law of the Nation. Malaysia adopted a Westminster style of parliamentary democracy, where Parliament is the highest legislative body and its functions are clearly stated in the Federal Constitution.

MP's Oath

Article 59 of the Federal Constitution specifically refers to an Oath that every Member of Parliament must take, as stated in the Sixth Schedule. This is a loyalty pledge to Malaysia and takes the Oath of preserving, protecting and defending the Constitution. What is significant is that every MP takes this Oath after being elected to be truly Malaysian and not based on party affiliations. Therefore all MPs must take a national and not sectorial outlook once elected.

Five key roles of parliamentarians have been identified³, namely role on the floor of the house, committee role, check and balance the role of executives, private members' bill and the constituency function. These could be classified as a dual role (Legislative Role and Constituency Role), which will be discussed here.

Legislative role

There are seven different legislative roles as stated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union⁴, which have relevance for Malaysia too, such as lawmaking, approval of the national budget, oversight of executive

3 M.A.M. Yusof and S.S. Faruqi, 'The Constitutional Position of Parliament' in Yusof and others (n 1) 36-7.

4 I.H. Kamilan and M.S. Hassan @ Yahya, 'The Functions of Parliament' in Yusof and others (n 1) 128.

action, treaties ratification and monitoring, debating issues (national and international), hearing and redressing grievances and approval of constitutional changes. MPs have the role, especially among those who are backbenchers and Opposition, to review the matters before the house placed by Cabinet members. This will include the King's speech, the Budget, legislations for approval and all policy matters. In many ways, it is holding the executive in check and accountable through the question and answer session.

The Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) sets the development agenda for the nation over the next five years. This provides a good opportunity in Parliament for debate and discussion. This development document would contain the policy directions and financial commitments on the social, economic and environmental commitments being made by the Federal Government. There will be a clear pathway for the Shared Prosperity Vision Agenda, too, including more details on the multidimensional poverty indicators as well as directions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). MPs will have an opportunity to review the development agenda and provide their analysis and input, including drawing relevance and application to their constituencies, which may be rural, urban or semi-urban locations in Malaysia.

MPs could better prepare themselves for these parliamentary discussions through participation in academic and professional discussion pertaining to economic, social and environmental development concerns. Many academics and civil society organisations, including think tank groups, are working on many development issues and concerns. Since 2018, there have been many discussions and seminars in Parliament on a wide range of national issues and concerns, including the Federal Constitution and the Sustainable Development Goals. Since 2020, many of these conversations have been online with active participation by MPs.

Constituency role

The Constituency role is an important function of MPs. 'Many MPs set up Service Centres and perform the commendable role of a one-person "Public Complaints Bureau". A special allocation is given to each MP to run his/her Service Centre'.⁵ However, there are differing views on this matter due to voter expectation on MPs to solve local government

5 Yusof and Faruqi (n 3) 37.

matters, which distracts them from their primary role in fulfilling a legislative function⁶ and about 54% of voters 'did not understand the different jurisdictions between the federal and state governments over public services'.⁷ An additional concern highlighted is with reference to the unequal allocation of constituency funding allocated. This is because MPs who are part of the Federal government party receive far more allocations as compared to opposition MPs.⁸ This practice has been upheld by all the political parties which have held the Federal government.⁹

Although the MP faces challenges in fulfilling this role at the constituency level, MPs are on the ground almost every week addressing local issues at the constituency level. It is noted that constituency services are important. This conclusion was drawn after a study on the role of legislators by examining the experiences of three MPs from rural, urban and semi-urban constituency in the mid-1970.¹⁰ This constituency role provides MPs an opportunity to play a part in localising SDGs as the ultimate SDG goal is to address local issues especially impacting vulnerable communities at the grassroots. This avenue enabled CSOs to convince a number of MPs to adopt an SDG framework to identify local issues and find local solutions that are cross-cutting (economic, social and environmental) through a multi-stakeholder engagement process through the establishment of the APPGM SDG.

SDGs and the Malaysian development agenda

SDGs as a development thrust

The theme of SDGs centre on the thrust of 'leaving no one behind'. Therefore there is a key focus on disadvantaged and marginalised

6 I. Kwek, 'Yang Berhormat at Your Service' *The Rocket* (2 March 2011) <<https://www.therocket.com.my/en/yang-berhormat-at-your-service-by-ivy-kwek/>>.

7 M. Kaur, 'Most Back Elections for Local Councils' (17 June 2010) <<https://merdeka.org/v2/most-back-elections-for-local-councils-by-minderjeet-kaur/>>.

8 KiniGuide, 'A closer look inside the 'MP allocations' cookie jar', (2 November 2020) <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/549075>>.

9 I. Lim, 'Wong Chen says opposition MPs now getting RM100k from PM for community, intends to use during COVID-19 period' *Malay Mail* (Petaling Jaya, 30 March 2020) <<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/30/wong-chen-says-opposition-mps-now-getting-rm100k-from-pm-for-community-inte/1851627>>.

10 M. Ong, 'The Member of Parliament and his constituency: The Malaysian case' (1976) 1(3) *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 405 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/439505?seq=1>>.

individuals, families and communities. This could be addressing the concerns of the poor, women, indigenous people, disabled people, migrants and refugees, youths and the elderly. The approach is a holistic and balanced development approach with an emphasis on a human rights basis with a focus on economic, social and environmental concerns. This is best illustrated by the five Ps, namely people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

There are 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators. This is a comprehensive set of development agenda which is to be realised by 2030. These are to be incorporated in the national and local development plans with a clear focus to enhance the quality of life as well as to ensure this is realised through a sustainable approach where there is a balance between economic, social and environmental aspects. While this is a major shift at the policy level in the development agenda but at the delivery and implementation level, there are still many challenges as monetary considerations tend to supersede social and environmental priorities. Therefore the partnership approach among all stakeholders (SDG 17.17) and the emphasis on justice and good governance (SDG 16.b) is to ensure a non-discriminatory approach that is inclusive of all irrespective of gender, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status. This is reflected in need for reliable disaggregated data (SDG 17.18).

SDGs and legislators

The call in the SDGs is for multi-stakeholder engagement as reflected in SDG 17.17, where there is a partnership approach among different actors. While the government plays the leading role, it must facilitate the participation of other sectors such as the business, academic, voluntary and local community. With specific reference to legislators, both national and local, are found in SDG 16.7.1. However, the good governance, transparent and accountable structure provides for the involvement of all stakeholders at all levels are found in SDG 16.6. In addition, there is a focus to ensure that the decision-making process must be responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative, as reflected in SDG 16.7. An indicator to determine this are disaggregated indicators providing a breakdown by sex, age, disabilities and population group (SDG 16.7.2).

The SDG agenda 'acknowledges the role of parliament to hold the government to account for their commitments to eradicate poverty and

achieve sustainable development'.¹¹ As the people's representative, Parliament has the role to 'monitor and evaluate progress and setback and queries and deliberates on the government efforts to ensure delivery of the goals'.

The direct involvement of MPs is an aspect that is envisioned in the SDGs, and the policy documents released by the United Nations highlights this emphasis. 'Parliamentarians have an opportunity and constitutional responsibility, to play a significant role in supporting and monitoring SDG implementation'.¹² The Agenda 2030 Declaration acknowledges 'the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments'.¹³ The parliamentary oversight¹⁴ role in monitoring delivery and implementation, including budget and expenditure,¹⁵ are areas that parliamentarians could be working on. In addition, they could also be working with other oversight institutions such as the Human Rights Commission and the Anti-Corruption Agency. This is reviewing the work of the agencies in the delivery and implementation of SDGs. In this context, public engagement¹⁶ on SDGs and greater visibility is essential in grassroots providing feedback.

There is the area of working with the national statistic body¹⁷, which is responsible for collecting key statistics. They are the central collector of data, and this data is essential for the national review as well as in the preparation of global reports like the VNR. Parliamentary role in the localisation of SDGs¹⁸ as a specific action including working with local government, community-based, and civil society organisations is highlighted. In addition, there could be a parliamentary level public hearing. There is a need to build the capacity of parliamentarians and staff members on SDGs.¹⁹ This is an education focus on integrating the

11 A.T.L. Choon, 'Caucuses and Parliamentary Friendship Groups', in Yusof and others (n 1) 406-7.

12 UNDP and GOPAC, *Parliament's role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. A Parliamentary Handbook* <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/parliamentary_development/parliament-s-role-in-implementing-the-sustainable-development-go.html>.

13 See <<https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>>.

14 UNDP and GOPAC (n 12) 23-4.

15 *ibid.* 36.

16 *ibid.* 46.

17 *ibid.* 25.

18 *ibid.* 54-5.

19 *ibid.* 60-1.

goals in everyday work. There is the dimension of working on public policies and relevant legislation²⁰ at the parliamentary level, enhancing the implementation of SDGs.

Establishing the APPGM SDG

The APPGM on SDG was established on 17 October 2019 by the Malaysian Parliament. This is the first of the APPGMs established. Two other APPGMs have been established, namely the APPGM on Refugees²¹ and the APPGM for the Reform of All Places of Detention²². This is a bi-partisan group of parliamentarians from both the Government and opposition parties with a specific focus on SDGs. The Malaysian CSO SDG Alliance²³ played a major role in this establishment through its many discussions with the Speaker of Parliament in late 2018 and early 2019. The Alliance was appointed as the secretariat.

The APPG as a concept was taken from the United Kingdom's Parliamentary model, which is a 'cross-party caucus'.²⁴ The APPG brings together parliamentarians from different political parties for a common agenda. In the Indian parliamentary example, these cross-party caucuses are known as parliamentary forums. However, in Malaysia, it was decided to use the APPGM terminology with its set of guidelines.²⁵ It can further be noted that:

the guidelines in establishing an APPGM is rather administrative concern without being bounded by the Standing Orders and other rigid rules. It is meant to be a less procedural body as it aims to encourage Members of Parliament to pursue their subject of interest and liberally engage with the larger civil society. Subsequently, the underlying objective of the APPGM is to better equip Members of Parliament with the necessary expert views and concrete on-the-ground experiences of any given subject of interest.²⁶

20 *ibid.* 51.

21 See <<https://www.facebook.com/RefugeeCoalitionMY/>>.

22 See <<https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2021/01/11/covid-19-a-death-sentence-in-jail-parliament-group/>>.

23 D. Jayasooria, 'Role of Civil Society Organisations in Localising SDGs in Malaysia' in A. Mahadi and N. Zhafri (eds), *Making SDGs Matter: Leaving No One Behind* (Kuala Lumpur, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and ISIS Malaysia, 2021) <<https://www.isis.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SDG-Book.pdf>>.

24 Choon (n 11) 402.

25 *ibid.* 410-1.

26 Salahuddin and others (n 1) 481.

At the establishment in October 2019, YB Maria Chin Abdullah from PH-PKR was elected as the Chair, and YB Dato Seri Nancy Hj Shukri from GPS-PBB was elected as the Deputy. However, with the change of the Federal Government in early 2020, YB Dato Seri Hajjah Rohani Abdul Karim of GPS-PBB was elected as Chair and YB Maria Chin Abdullah as the Deputy. This change was made to comply with the APPGM rules, which indicate that the Chair of the APPGM must be from the government party. Since the formation of the APPGM SDG, 13 members of Parliament are involved in the SDG pilot phase. Eight²⁷ parliamentarians are members of the APPGM SDG committee. (Six are from the House of Representatives and two from the Senate). Another five members of Parliament²⁸ who are part of the Malaysian Cabinet as Ministers and Deputy Ministers are involved only at the constituency level.

Table 1. Breakdown of the allocation, 2020

PURPOSE	PERCENTAGE (%)	ALLOCATION
Awareness and capacity building	8.19	131,000
Mapping, Research, documentation & publication	11.81	189,000
Community projects- SDG solutions & innovations at the Parliamentary constituency level	70.62	1,130,000
Administration & coordination of APPGM- SDG	9.38	150,000
Total		2,000,000

Source: APPGM-SDG (2020).

27 APPGM-SDG Committee. The following MPs were elected to APPGM-SDG Committee:-

Chair: YB Dato' Sri Hajjah Rohani Abdul Karim (GPS-PBB, Batang Lupar, P201); Deputy Chair: YB Puan Maria Chin Abdullah (PKR, Petaling Jaya, P105); Secretary: YB William Leong Jee Keen (PKR, P097 Selayang); Treasurer: YB Kelvin Yii Lee Wuen (DAP, P195 Bandar Kuching); APPGM Members (DR): YB Tuan Wong Tack (DAP, Bentong, P089); YB Tuan Hj. Ahmad Bin Hassan (WARISAN, Papar, P175). APPGM Members (DN): YB Senator Adrian Banie Lasimbang (DAP Sabah) & YB Senator Datuk Paul Igai (Progressive Democratic Party, Sarawak).

28 YB Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed (BERSATU, Jeli, P030); YB Dato' Sri Hajjah Nancy Hj. Shukri (GPS-PBB, Batang Sadong, P200); YB Tuan Arthur Joseph Kurup (PBRS, Pensiangan, P182); YB Tuan Hj. Awang Hashim (PAS, Pendang, P011) & YB Datuk Seri Dr Wee Jeck Seng (BN-MCA, Tg. Piai, P165).

One major breakthrough for the APPGM SDG was the allocation of RM2 million in the 2020 Budget by the Ministry of Finance for the localising of SDGs, and of this, RM1.6 million was utilised for the pilot phase of implementation in 2020. Similarly, the 2021 Budget has allocated RM5 million to increase the outreach to another 20 Parliamentary constituencies in order to reach a total of 30 parliamentary constituencies with the localising of the SDG agenda. We received a very strong endorsement from Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department, in the review and submission process. Ministry of Finance's Budget section also reviewed us positively.

In terms of governance, the funds are managed by The Society for the Promotions of SDGs, which is the legal entity for the Malaysian CSO SDG Alliance. The approvals are based on the budget allocations approved by the Ministry of Finance and the Economic Planning Unit during the application process. Accountability and major decision making is by the APPGM SDG Committee. The secretariat submits monthly activity and financial reports to Parliament and the Ministry of Finance.

Localising SDGs in Malaysia

Methodology of the APPGM SDG

The pilot phase of the APPGM SDG will be undertaken in seven States and ten parliamentary constituencies, as indicated in Table 2. This reflects both rural and urban locations. Five of these locations are MPs with the current Federal Government and five from the opposition. In the APPGM SDG work, there are five key priorities as listed below:-

- i. Addressing poverty and inequality in Malaysian society;
- ii. Mainstreaming gender perspectives in SDG delivery;
- iii. Ensuring greater multi-stakeholder partnerships (among MPs, government agencies, CSOs, academics, private sector and local communities);
- iv. Strategically ensure that there is an effective cross-cutting of the 17 SDG goals to foster balanced development (economic, social & environmental); and
- v. Seeking to give greater visibility of SDG at the local level through the delivery of services as well as at the national level through policy discussions at Parliament and with decision-makers in Putrajaya.

Table 2. Project location and details

No.	State	Parliamentary Constituency	Name of MP	Date of Visit
1.	Kedah	Pendang	YB Tuan Hj Awang Hashim (PAS, Pendang, P011)	18 – 20 July 2020
2.	Kelantan	Jeli	YB Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed (BERSATU, Jeli, P030)	07 – 09 August 2020
3.	Selangor	Selayang	YB Tuan William Leong Jee Keen (PKR, Selayang, P097)	18 – 20 January 2020
4.	Selangor	Petaling Jaya	YB Puan Maria Chin Abdullah (PKR, Petaling Jaya, P105)	19, 23 February & 5 June 2020
5.	Pahang	Bentong	YB Tuan Wong Tack (DAP, Bentong, P089)	14 – 16 January 2020
6.	Johor	Tanjong Piai	YB Datuk Seri Dr Wee Jeck Seng (BN-MCA, Tg. Piai, P165)	18 – 20 January 2020
7.	Sabah	Papar	YB Tuan Hj Ahmad Bin Hassan (Warisan, Papar, P175)	21 – 23 February 2020
8.	Sabah	Pensiangan	YB Tuan Arthur Joseph Kurup (PBRS, Pensiangan, P182)	25 – 27 February 2020

No.	State	Parliamentary Constituency	Name of MP	Date of Visit
9.	Sarawak	Kuching	YB Tuan Kelvin Yii Lee Wuen (DAP, Bandar Kuching, P195)	2 – 4 February 2020
10.	Sarawak	Batang Sadong	YB Dato' Sri Hajjah Nancy Hj. Shukri (GPS-PBB, Batang Sadong, P200)	24 – 26 February 2020

Source: APPGM SDG (2020).

The methodology of the pilot phase is divided into four phases, as indicated in Table 3. In Phase One, the attempt is to map the local issues during the three-day visit to the parliamentary location. This is a very important phase where we meet the MP and staff to review local issues. We then meet CSO, NGO and community leaders in a focus group discussion on what they feel are the local issues. We then undertake three to four field visits. In Phase Two, the focus is on solutions to the issues identified based on the priority list. Here the intervention project or program will be designed. It will be presented for approval for financial allocation. Phase Three is the implementation and delivery stage. The final Fourth Phase is the review, evaluation and impact assessment.

Table 3. Project implementation phases

Months	Areas	Details
Phase 1 (2 months)	Mapping and Awareness Raising. Identification of issues and stakeholders.	Mapping of local issues; mapping of key state & non state actors; Awareness raising. Identifying local solutions. Documenting the findings by researchers. A three-day field visit.
Phase 2 (2 months)	Project/programme design phase. Solutions Focus.	Drawing up the SDG project proposals. Presentation to APPGM-SDG JK for approval for grants. At the parliamentary level conducting capability building workshops.

Months	Areas	Details
Phase 3 (5 months)	Project/programme execution.	Execution of community-based SDG solution projects at the Parliamentary level. Monitoring project implementation. Research synthesis – including identifying cross-cutting issues.
Phase 4 (1 month)	Project review and drawing conclusions.	Project completion. Impact assessment & review. Financial audit. Empirical Research – including undertaking impact assessments; and policy evaluations. & integrated APPG report.

Source: APPGM-SDG (2020).

As indicated, each Parliamentary constituency will go through the four phases of implication, starting with the field visits, prioritising local issues, designing capacity building programs and also solutions projects. Each parliamentary constituency is allocated RM120,000 for solutions projects and RM8,800.00 for capacity building.

Local research findings

Local researchers²⁹ from local universities were appointed to undertake the field study documentation. They have submitted the phase one study based on the three-day field visit, including drawing up the local priority list. The local researchers are preparing the next phase of their study, which will provide an analysis basis on secondary data sources on the local issues by seeking validation of the initial findings. Based on these initial findings, a comprehensive analysis of eight common issues³⁰ faced in the pilot phase of the study was formulated, which

29 Ten researchers from local universities were appointed:- Pendang: Dr Zاهرuddin Othman (UUM); Jeli: Dr Wan Amir Wan Zal (UMK); Selayang: Dr Lau Zhe Wei (UIA); Petaling Jaya: Calvin Cheng (ISIS Malaysia); Bentong: Dr Khairul Azmi Sidek; Tanjong Piai: Dr Irina Safiri Zen; Papar: Dr Murnizam Halik (UMS); Pensiangan: Dr Junaenah Solehan (UCSF); Kuching & Batang Sadong: Dr Zaimuariffudin Shukri Nordin (UNIMAS).

30 Source from the powerpoint presentations made by Head of the Research team, Mr Alizan Mahadi (ISIS Malaysia)- Issue Mapping: Common Issues across all/most Constituencies.

became the basic framework for drawing up solution projects. These eight issues are:³¹

- i. **Poverty** – pockets of poverty still exist and even declining in many areas, particularly among certain target groups, despite improvements at the national and aggregated level. Poverty is multidimensional as well as a multiplier resulting in the achievement of other areas (SDG 1 and interlinked with all SDGs).
- ii. **Education, skills and training** of youth and women, depriving them of opportunities to improve their livelihoods. This is particularly in areas that are geographically distant (i.e. rural and semi-rural areas) and mainly B40 (i.e. Petaling Jaya). This inhibits the opportunity to attain other higher-order goals of the SDGs and improve their socio-economic status (SDG 4, 5 and 8).
- iii. **Inequality** persists, where delivery of development does not necessarily reach many low-income (B40) economic status as a target group. Geographically, delivery is unbalanced on various issues, including waste management, healthcare and dissemination of social welfare benefits. (SDG 10 and interlinked with all SDGs).
- iv. **Infrastructure development** is required where many geographical areas do not have access to basic services such as waste management and resulting in difficulties in logistics for accessing markets (SDG 9 and interlinked with all SDGs).
- v. **Health and nutrition** is a major challenge across all constituencies, with access to healthcare facilities still a challenge in many isolated geographical areas and cases such as TB and polio still occurring. Access to healthcare for undocumented and stateless persons is also a pressing issue. (SDG 3, SDG 16 and interlinked with all SDGs).
- vi. **Environment** in some areas is deteriorating and affecting the income (i.e. fishermen, farmers), health and livelihoods of those that depend on it. The issues are often linked to unsustainable planning and development. However, little evidence linking environmental issues with other development concerns was found with mandates across various agencies. Additionally, natural resources is a state

31 *ibid.*

matter with federal-state relationship a challenge (SDG 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and linked with all SDGs).

- vii. **Floods** have been highlighted as a major issue in various areas though few links were made to issues such as climate change (SDG 13) and linked with all other areas.
- viii. **Waste management** was also highlighted as an issue across most areas with mandates and responsibilities fragmented (SDG 12 and linked with all SDGs).

In terms of the target group, especially noting the SDGs' theme of leaving no one behind, four categories of people could be identified. First, people in the rural areas, namely, farmers, fishermen, paddy farmers, rubber tappers and smallholders. Second, people in the urban areas, namely the B40, dwellers in low-cost housing and squatters. Third the youth and women. The final group are specific disadvantaged groups, the Orang Asli and indigenous people in Sabah and Sarawak and migrants.

Solution projects at the constituency level

Based on the research findings and local prioritisation, 34 solution projects were selected in the pilot phase of the localising SDGs in the ten constituencies in 2020. It must be noted that all these are short term projects undertaken within five to six months and with the allocated RM120,000. In a majority of cases, the projects are each allocated about RM50,000 each. The breakdown of the projects is provided in Table 4, which identifies the projects based on one key priority of the eight key research findings. In Table 5, the projects are identified based on cross-cutting aspects, which overlap within the eight categories, including a brief title of each of the 32 projects.

Table 4. Solutions projects by major categories

Categories	Numbers	Reference
Poverty	3	SP01; SP07; SP34
Education	9	SP02; SP05; SP06; SP15; SP19; SP21; SP22; SP23; SP24.
Inequality	12	SP04; SP08; SP12; SP14; SP16; SP17; SP18; SP20; SP25; SP26; SP30; SP31.

Categories	Numbers	Reference
Infrastructure	–	
Health	–	
Environment	8	SP10; SP11; SP13; SP27; SP28; SP29; SP32; SP33.
Flood	–	
Waste	2	SP03; SP09
Total	34	

Source: APPGM-SDG (2020).

In Table 4, the three main areas that the projects address are tackling inequality (35%), education (26%) and environment (23%). Many of the projects focus on economic empowerment with a particular emphasis on women (SP14, SP19) or rural poor communities (SP32, SP33). Likewise, education too has many good projects such as special education classes for the urban poor (SP14, SP05) and special language course for refugees (SP24). There are significant environmental and waste management projects (SP03, SP13) just to cite a few examples.

Table 5 is intriguing as it provides basic information based on constituencies on one end and the eight classifications based on research findings on the other. There is a brief mention of the type of project undertaken. One of the significant findings in this mapping and classification of the solution projects³² is the cross-cutting nature of the projects. The cross setting nature is an important dimension of nature's ground-level problems. This analysis of the cross-cutting nature as per Table 5 shows that 32 of 34 projects have a poverty focus, 26 out of the 34 have an education focus, and all the 34 projects address inequality. Therefore the concerns based on SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 4 on education and SDG 10 in addressing inequality are the major thrust of these 34 solution projects. Here the concerns of addressing the socio-economic concerns such as economic and income generation as well as education are still the major concerns at the grassroots.

³² Classification of Solution Projects done by Mr Anthony Tan (APPGM SDG Finance Executive).

Table 5. Classification of solutions projects

No.	State	Constituency	SP No.	Poverty	Education	Inequality	Infrastructure	Health	Environment	Floods	Waste	Project Type
1.1	Kedah	Pendang	SP31	1	1	1						SDG Action Plan
1.2	Kedah	Pendang	SP32	1		1			1		1	Eco-Tourism
2.1	Selangor	Petaling Jaya	SP14	1	1	1						Women Empowerment
2.2	Selangor	Petaling Jaya	SP15	1	1	1						Education
2.3	Selangor	Petaling Jaya	SP16	1	1	1						Inter-Agency
2.4	Selangor	Petaling Jaya	SP17	1	1	1	1	1				Crisis Management
3.1	Selangor	Selayang	SP18	1		1	1	1			1	Improvement of Flats
3.2	Selangor	Selayang	SP19	1	1	1					1	Skills Training - cafe & baking
3.3	Selangor	Selayang	SP20	1	1	1					1	Micro Entrepreneurship
3.4	Selangor	Selayang	SP21	1	1	1						Air-Con training
3.5	Selangor	Selayang	SP22	1	1	1						Skills Fair
3.6	Selangor	Selayang	SP23	1	1	1						Digital Marketing
3.7	Selangor	Selayang	SP24	1	1	1						Basic Malay for Refugees
3.8	Selangor	Selayang	SP25	1		1						Housing Census
4.1	Johor	Tanjung Piai	SP03	1		1	1	1	1		1	Waste Management & Buyback
4.2	Johor	Tanjung Piai	SP13	1		1			1			Eco-Tourism
5.1	Kelantan	Jeli	SP27	1	1	1			1			Fish Project
5.2	Kelantan	Jeli	SP28	1	1	1			1			Mushroom Project
5.3	Kelantan	Jeli	SP29	1		1			1			Eco-Tourism
5.4	Kelantan	Jeli	SP30	1	1	1						Social-Enterprise
6.1	Pahang	Bentong	SP01	1	1	1			1		1	Organic Farming
6.2	Pahang	Bentong	SP02		1	1						Unity Film
6.3	Pahang	Bentong	SP33	1	1	1			1		1	Organic Farming
7.1	Sabah	Papar	SP10	1	1	1			1			Fish Project
7.2	Sabah	Papar	SP11	1	1	1			1		1	Farming Project
8.1	Sabah	Pensiangan	SP08	1		1		1				Health & Wellbeing

No.	State	Constituency	SP No.	Poverty	Education	Inequality	Infrastructure	Health	Environment	Floods	Waste	Project Type
8.2	Sabah	Pensiangan	SP09	1		1			1		1	Waste Management
8.3	Sabah	Pensiangan	SP12	1	1	1		1				Women Empowerment
9.1	Sarawak	Bandar Kuching	SP06	1	1	1						TVET
9.2	Sarawak	Bandar Kuching	SP07	1	1	1			1		1	Socio-Economy
9.3	Sarawak	Bandar Kuching	SP34	1	1	1			1		1	Socio-Economy
10.1	Sarawak	Batang Sadong	SP04	1	1	1						Marketing for Small Farmers
10.2	Sarawak	Batang Sadong	SP05		1	1						English Language
10.3	Sarawak	Batang Sadong	SP26	1	1	1		1				Women Income & Health
		TOTAL		32	26	34	3	6	13	0	11	

Source: APPGM-SDG (2020).

In the remaining six categories, the cross-cutting nature does not surface as much in numbers as compared to the highest three (poverty, education and inequality). We can note that environmental concerns were listed in 13 solution projects; 11 projects address waste, health in six but none address the issue of flooding. The solutions for flooding are more long term projects requiring more funds and not short term within the applications of APPGM SDG funds. The flooding concerns will be presented to Federal agencies for their intervention through other development funding. One concern expressed by members of the secretariat is the missing gender perspective. There are efforts among the CSOs to review the 34 solution projects from a gender perspective.³³ It can be stated in a majority of projects which have a socio-economy focus, the majority of participants are women. Therefore in undertaking

33 Professor Dato' Dr Rashila Ramli who is a member of the APPGM SDG Secretariat is undertaking an evaluation of the 2020 SDG solution projects from a gender perspective. This review study is sponsored by the Malaysian National UNESCO Commission (SKUM) in partnership with a number of stakeholders including IKMAS-UKM.

SDGs, the visibility of a gender perspective will be consolidated in year two of the SDG localising agenda.

Policy implications and conclusion

In this article, we have noted that SDGs provide a good opportunity for parliamentarians to be involved in localising SDGs at the grassroots level. In the context of the dual role of parliamentarians, one at the Parliament and the other at the constituency level, we can clearly recognise the role of Parliamentarians in localising SDGs. By reviewing the pilot phase of the SDGs in 10 parliamentary locations, we can learn a number of lessons. The MPs who are members of the APPGM SDG played a very active role in 2020 at the committee stage in finalising the work of the APPGM. In the implementation of the ten pilot programmes, it was noted that all the ten MPs had played an active part. During the three-day field visit, all the MPs provided a clear analysis of the local issues and concerns in a very comprehensive way. Likewise, they and their staff knew all the problematic neighbourhoods and locations. We were able, with the MP's support, to prioritise the local needs as well as finalise the short term solution projects. There is, therefore, a clear role for MPs as champions for the localising projects.

However, there are many challenges, especially for MPs who are not part of the government party, especially in the uneven allocation of the constituency funds as well as difficulty in addressing and resolving the many issues and needs identified at the parliamentary constituency level. Through the localising of SDGs, all MPs, whether in the Government party or opposition, can play an effective role if their position is viewed not from their political party but as elected representatives of the people. Respecting democracy and the people's will is essential, and all governments must view the role of elected representatives as people's choice. MPs who know their constituencies must also serve the people and not just those who voted for them. Once elected, they represent all the people within that parliamentary constituency.

The strength and potential of an APPGM is the bi-partisan nature of the APPGM, where the MPs could focus on common areas of policy concern and ground action. This is well illustrated in the localising of SDGs at the parliamentary level, where the MPs could serve as local champions and foster a multi-stakeholder partnership in addressing parliamentary level needs, concerns and issues. At the next level of the APPGM SDG work, we will need to further develop the policy implications of SDGs

in the development agenda not just for local relevance but also national, regional and global implications. The opportunity arises as there will be a presentation and debate in Parliament on the Twelfth Malaysia Plan. The APPGM SDG secretariat has already had dialogues with the EPU on our SDG findings from the pilot study³⁴ as well as our perspectives on the multidimensional poverty indicators³⁵.

Three specific policy recommendations:-

1. First, the Federal Government could enlarge funding made available at the local level for bi-partisan constituency local development projects. A decentralised action committee could be established at every parliamentary constituency which is based on a multi-stakeholder partnership model. All elected members of parliament, irrespective of whether they are part of the government or opposition, are part of this process. This local development committee will identify local needs and issues, prioritise them and identifies local solutions and providers to deliver them. A percentage of the Federal and State government development funds could be utilised. In this way, there might be a stronger local participation and ownership of the projects.
2. Second, at the Parliamentary level, there should be opportunities for MPs to be directly involved in policy discussion with the relevant agencies, especially the Federal government, in addressing policy and structural concerns, which has long term implications. MPs should approach relevant development agencies on cross-cutting SDG issues rather than view them as silo concerns, particularly regarding matters pertaining to their parliamentary constituencies.
3. Third and finally, there must be capacity building programmes that provide clear awareness and technical inputs on SDGs, development concerns (economic, social and environmental) to equip MPs with the knowledge to monitor the development planning agenda as it impacts the lives of grassroots communities, thereby improvising the quality of life of all Malaysians.

34 APPGM SDG Secretariat meeting with EPU on 9 July 2020 chaired by YB Arthur Joseph Kurup, Deputy Minister in Prime Minister's Department (Economy) and 22 July 2020 chaired by YB Datuk Seri Mustapha Mohamed, Minister in Prime Minister's Department (Economy).

35 APPGM SDG Secretariat meeting with EPU Team on 22 July 2020 and 18 August 2020.

This article illustrating the 2020 pilot project at ten parliamentary constituencies has shown the full potential of a decentralised approach for local planning and multi-stakeholder partnerships at the district and local levels. The coming years will further illustrate the role MPs and the local people can play in improving the quality of life and ensuring 'no one is left behind'.

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