

The APPGM-SDG (All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia for Sustainable Development Goals): Towards Mainstreaming SDG in Issues and Solutions of Parliamentary Constituencies

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Abstract

This paper looks into the creation of the APPGM (All Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia) in various fields as one of the 14th Malaysian Parliament Reform Agenda. It will explain the origins and rationale of APPG in relation to the need for multilevel and multi-stakeholder engagement over themes and issues with parliament for interaction, documentation, transparency, education and reference. It will then describe the guidelines and rules for the creation of APPGM, and more specifically, the proposal, formation and set up for the APPGM for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) from the meeting minutes of the House Committee of the Dewan Rakyat. This also includes a discussion of the pioneering parliamentary constituencies involved in 2020 and the outcome of research on identified themes and issues mapping, proposed and ongoing project solutions and dynamic partnerships taking place in implementing the program. It will also highlight the favourable decision to continue with the APPGM-SDG and the proposal for the involvement of additional parliamentary constituencies in 2021. The paper will conclude by stating the importance of the APPGM-SDG in advocating and incorporating sustainable development as a practical model for parliamentary constituency issues and solutions.

Keywords: Parliamentary Reform, APPGM-SDG, Constituency Issues and Solutions, ESD (Education for Sustainable Development), Multi-stakeholder Engagement

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Introduction: APPGM as part of the 14th Parliament reform agenda

In the 14th Parliamentary Reform Agenda, the study for the creation of APPGM in various fields is one of thirteen items that are included. The others being the creation and institutionalisation of various Parliamentary Select Committees; empowering procedural initiatives for more effective use of parliamentary sessions; appointment of an opposition MP (Member of Parliament) as Chairperson of the PAC (Public Accounts Committee); defining time limit for oral question and answers; efforts in reintroducing the Parliamentary Services Act; studying the creation of Parliamentary Services Commission; organising Parliamentary Speaker's Lecture Series; actively engaging the public in relation to courses, workshops and seminars in parliament; upgrading web portal and launching of mobile application of the Malaysian Parliament; creating a caucus of Parliamentary Reform and Governance; publishing an Erskine May version of Parliamentary Practices, and encouraging the changing mindset for a better Parliamentary Culture.¹ The proposal paper of the guidelines and rules for the creation of APPGM defines the function of the APPG as a forum or platform for MPs of the Dewan Rakyat and Senators of the Dewan Negara, and also includes external partners such as academics, NGOs (Non-Government Organisations), professionals and specialists to discuss, research and present a report of recommendations on various themes and issues to parliament and its committees. The APPGM-SDG was originally formally approved and registered with the Secretary of Parliament on 17 October 2019. Following Malaysia's political crisis and change of Government in March 2020, the continuation of the APPGM in general, and specifically the APPGM-SDG and APPGM-Refugee, were also later agreed to in the House Committee Meeting minutes number 1 and 2 on the 6th and 13th of August, 2020.²

This paper will look into the origins and rationale of APPG in relation to the need for multilevel and multi-stakeholder engagement over themes and issues of public importance with parliament. It will briefly describe the guidelines and rules for creating an APPGM, and in more detail, the proposal, formation and set up for the APPGM-SDG. This includes a discussion of the pioneering parliamentary constituencies involved and the outcome of research on themes and issues mapping, project solutions

1 See <<https://www.parlimen.gov.my/ypdr/agendareformasiparlimen.html>> accessed 1 January 2021.

2 See <<https://www.parlimen.gov.my/ipms/eps/2019-10-16/DR.6.2019%20-%20DR%206.2019.pdf>> accessed 29 December 2020.

and partnerships in them in 2020 and subsequent constituency additions in 2021 due to its performance and continuation. The significance of this group can perhaps be gauged from the international acknowledgement it received from United National University through the Global RCE (Regional Centres of Expertise) Network based on one of the APPGM-SDG project solutions – capacity building for localising SDG in Tanjung Piai and Bentong, carried out by Sejahtera Centre, IIUM. In this context, the true value and merit of the APPGM-SDG is its incorporation of ESD (education for sustainable development) as a practical model for constituency responsibility and work involving multiple stakeholders. This model can be regarded as a pioneering initiative that provides truly multilevel and multi-stakeholder players on one single engagement platform, i.e., politicians, government agencies, business players and most importantly, local community (quadruple helix approach) to identify issues and solutions for the parliamentary constituencies.

A brief look at the rationale for APPGs in Malaysia's parliamentary system

As early as March 2019, parliament made public its efforts to create APPGs. The reference for Malaysia was the UK (United Kingdom) APPG register which is intended to make the institution more accessible to the public. In the UK, All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal cross-party groups with no official status within Parliament. These groups are administered by and for Members of the Commons and Lords and also involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their running and activities. APPGs are organised based on national and contemporary issues of interest, with the APPG register being updated every six weeks. They are numbered in the hundreds, e.g., 355 APPGs in February 2020:

An All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) consists of Members of both Houses who join together to pursue a particular topic or interest. In order to use the title All-Party Parliamentary Group, a Group must be wide open to all Members of both Houses, regardless of party affiliation, and must satisfy the rules agreed by the House for All-Party Parliamentary Groups. The Register of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, which is maintained by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, is a definitive list of such groups. It contains the financial and other information about Groups which the House has decided should be published. The Register is published on the parliamentary website

and updated approximately every six weeks. All-Party Parliamentary Groups cover a diverse range of subjects and are established for a rich variety of purposes. They provide a valuable opportunity for parliamentarians to engage with individuals and organisations outside Parliament who share an interest in the subject matter of their Group. They are not, however, official parliamentary bodies, and Groups must avoid presenting themselves in a way which leads to their being confused with select committees.³

As quoted above, the definition of the APPGM mentioned earlier is similar to the UK Parliament APPG. In fact, the APPGM as a concept refers to the Westminster, UK Guide to rules on APPG (May 2017) by a WFD (Westminster for Democracy) consultant. Then Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, Mohamad Ariff Md Yusof, emphasised the need for a platform to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement with parliament to discuss arising matters of public interest and the exchange of ideas as part of the 14th Parliamentary Reform Agenda. The APPG concept is intended to be interactive, including the involvement of the Speaker and parliamentary executives with the likes of civil society and academia, ensuring a channel of communication with documented content for reference and recommendation to lawmakers as contemporary policy input and feedback. Documented working papers, proceedings and resolutions can be beneficial to all stakeholders involved in the sessions, especially as they can be forwarded to parliamentary committees or MPs (Members of Parliament).⁴ The approved general guiding rules on APPGs are that:

APPGs covers a diverse range of subjects and provides valuable opportunities for parliamentarians to engage with individuals and organisations outside Parliament who share an interest in the subject matter of their group.

An APPG is registered by the Speaker of Parliament's office, but it is not an official parliamentary body like a Parliamentary Select Committee.

APPGs are essentially run by and for members of Parliament from both houses and are made up of backbenchers. It draws MPs from all political parties as this is a cross party and bipartisan effort.

3 See <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/mps-and-lords/members/apg/>> accessed 30 December 2020.

4 See <<https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2019/03/536592/parlimen-wujud-kumpulan-rentas-parti>> accessed 20 December 2020.

APPGs can also incorporate individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their administration of the APPG and activities.

An APPG must have a minimum of 2 meetings a year and the minutes must be submitted to the Speaker's office.

An APPG could set up a secretariat with the support of an outside parliament organisation, including staff and secretariat for APPGs.

All the funds raised for the APPG activities above RM10,000.00 must be registered with the Speaker's office.

APPG's annual report of activities and financial statement must be filed with the Speaker's office.

APPGs must be open to all members of both houses of Parliament. Only parliamentarians are formal members of the APPGs, and only MPs have voting rights.

An APPG Chair and Deputy need to be appointed from among MPs from the Dewan Rakyat.

APPGs may choose to involve outside organisations in their work as the secretariat, panel of consultants and subject resource persons. These outside members have no voting rights.⁵

The APPGM-SDG

Since 2015 when SDG was adopted, Malaysia has given its commitment to work together with other countries in achieving the goals by nationalising and localising the framework. While there are many ongoing initiatives being set up for this purpose, APPGM-SDG, in collaboration with CSO-SDG Alliance is now becoming one of the most active platforms for this purpose. The APPGM-SDG was proposed to monitor the implementation of SDG in participating parliamentary constituencies. The SDG refer to the economic, social and environmental concerns of the UN 2030 Agenda and its 17 goals. The objectives of the APPGM-SDG include:

1. Engaging with MPs across political parties on the UN 2030 Agenda and SDG in relation to development, planning and delivery;

⁵ See <<https://www.parlimen.gov.my/ipms/eps/2019-10-16/DR.6.2019%20-%20DR%206.2019.pdf>> accessed 1 January 2021.

2. Strengthening the oversight function of Parliament and MPs for the government of the day to be accountable to international conventions, in this case, the implementation of the SDG;
3. Developing policy and strategy papers as recommendations to MPs to benefit their parliamentary debates and work with select committees and agencies;
4. Assisting monitoring and implementation of SDG at parliamentary constituency level and extract issues and concerns from localising them for parliamentary debates and discussion;
5. Assisting MPs on local solutions, initiatives and interventions on SDG for their parliamentary constituencies; and
6. Preparing discourse materials for parliamentary debates and discussion on SDG and UN 2030 Agenda.

Initial activities include the pilot testing of localising SDG at a targeted number of five parliamentary constituencies, preparing case study reports of the five pilot constituencies partly as feedback to gaps of development planning for the 12th Malaysia Plan, and also organise SDG workshops to help with the Shared Prosperity Vision agenda, Mid-term Review of the 11th Malaysia Plan, and mainstreaming SDG into public policymaking in the future.⁶

The APPGM-SDG Committee comprises of 8 members:

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

6 *ibid.*

They are supported by a Secretariat from the Malaysian Civil Society Organisations (CSO)-SDG Alliance, which comprises of:

Head of Secretariat: Prof. Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria

Head of Finance: Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer

Head of Research: Mr Alizan Mahadi & Assoc. Prof. Dr Zainal Abidin Sanusi

Head of Solutions: Dr Lin Mui Kiang

Treasurer: Mr Kon Onn Sein

Program Officer: Ms Nur Rahmah Othman

Finance Officer: Mr Anthony Tan Kee Huat

and 7 Lead Coordinators.⁷

A pilot phase in 2020 was carried out in seven states, including 10 parliamentary constituencies mostly in January and February, except for Pendang and Jeli, which were visited in July and August, respectively. Other parliamentary constituencies included Selayang and Petaling Jaya in Selangor, Bentong in Pahang, Tanjung Piai in Johor, Papar and Pensiangan in Sabah, and Bandar Kuching and Batang Sadong in Sarawak. A timeline was decided in relation to this phase, and an extension was granted by Parliament and the Ministry of Finance till March 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is identified as having 4 phases, i.e.:

Phase 1. Mapping & Awareness Raising / Identification of Issues & Stakeholders (Jan – March 2020)

Phase 2. Project & Program Design Phase/Solutions Focus (April – June 2020)

Phase 3. Project/Program Execution (July 2020 – Jan 2021)

Phase 4. Project Review & Drawing Conclusions (Feb – March 2021)⁸

The following section will highlight critical aspects and findings of the project's implementation at the parliamentary constituencies,

7 APPGM-SDG, 'Presentation Slides: Review of 2020 and Prospects for 2021 in Localising SDGs - 9 December (APPGM-SDG 2020)'.

8 *ibid.*

including identified niche themes of the constituencies in relation to the SDG; contextual mapping of issues and themes in relation to SDG; stratification of the segment of society or those at risk from SDG perspective; and need for capacity building in terms of SDG within the respective constituency, project solutions based on the identified issues, and necessary partnerships for successful implementation of the project; as well as a brief financial overview of the project.

APPGM-SDG: implementation strategies for research, project solutions, and partnership developments

From a broader development perspective, the APPGM-SDG project can be regarded as a platform for performance measurement or barometer in looking at the delivery of Malaysia's national development. Within such context, the implementation of the four phases of the project at each of the constituency has adopted a 6-step situational analysis approach to ensure the connectivity between the local development issue as the direct and indirect implication from the national development agenda. The first strategy is to do profiling of the community based on issue mapping by identifying various concern raised by community members regardless of the scale and intensity of the problem. Secondly, the identified issues are then prioritised in relation to the SDG theme and those most at risk of being left behind. Thirdly, an analysis of the issues is carried out in relation to policy evaluation and impact assessment from the dimensions of three sustainable development components – economic, social, and environmental. The fourth step is the development of a solution project proposal by interested stakeholders. Fifth, the execution and monitoring of the accepted solution project. The last step is impact assessment and reporting back to the APPGM-SDG committee.⁹

The profiling and issue mapping strategy uses the identified SDG template that refers to integrated social, economic and environmental concerns across the 10 parliamentary constituencies. Based on the mapping exercise, here are the findings of the important issues faced by the constituencies:

1. *Poverty*, i.e. despite improvements at the national level, pockets of poverty still exist, and poverty (SDG 1 or No Poverty) has a multiplier effect affecting the achievement of other SDG goals.

9 *ibid.*

2. Being in rural or semi-rural places, and B40 urban poor, e.g. Petaling Jaya may compromise *education, skills and training of youth and women* for improved livelihoods, opportunities and socio-economic status in relation to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).
3. *Inequality* in access to development for the B40, whether in waste management, healthcare, or social welfare benefits. SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) is also seen as having a multiplier effect on the other SDG.
4. *Infrastructure* development is also seen as being needed in many constituencies to facilitate industry and innovation (SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).
5. *Health and nutrition* and access to their facilities are still a major challenge across constituencies that have isolated geographical areas with cases of Tuberculosis and Polio still occurring and also problematic for undocumented and stateless persons. In this context, SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are also interlinked to the other SDG.
6. *Environmental* degradation affects farmers and fishermen in Tanjung Piai due to unsustainable development and mandates across relevant agencies, including state and federal relations. Here, SDG 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life Below Water), 15 (Life on Land), 16 and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) are interrelated.
7. *Floods* are also identified as a significant issue in various areas (related to SDG 13), and finally,
8. *Waste Management* is also identified as having fragmented mandates (related to SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production).

While all constituencies may face these issues, it is thought that it will be interesting to have a comparative analysis of how different SDG give different challenges and potentially different solutions depending on the general socio-economic status of the constituency. For this purpose, the project has categorised the identified issues into different niche themes according to SDG references as stated below:

Figure 1. SDG: Niche Themes of Constituencies (Report of APPGM-SDG)

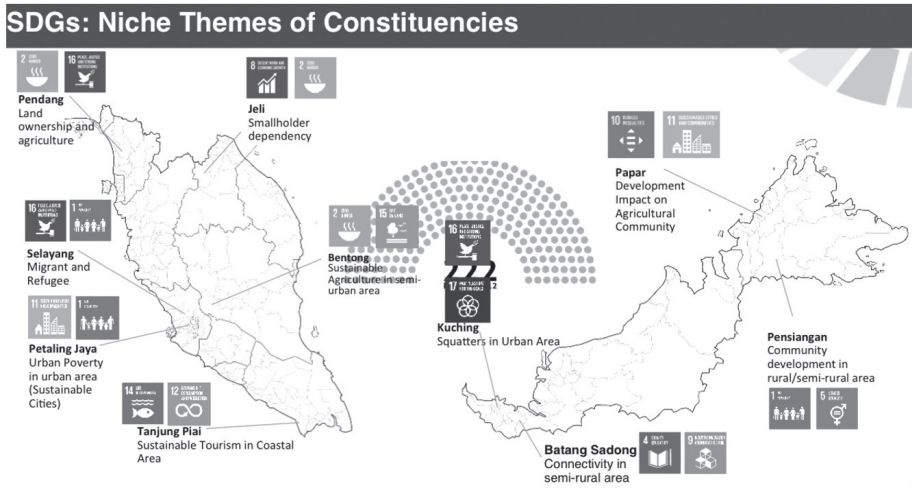


Table 1. Major Themes and Characteristics of Constituencies

No.	Parliamentary Constituency	Major Themes	Characteristics
1	Bentong (P089)	Sustainable Agriculture	Semi-urban
2	Selayang (P097)	Migrant	Semi-urban
3	Petaling Jaya (P105)	Urban Poverty	Urban
4	Tanjung Piai (P165)	Sustainable Tourism	Semi-rural
5	Papar (P175)	Development Impact on Agriculture	Semi-rural
6	Pensiangan (P182)	Youth & Women Empowerment	Rural and semi-rural
7	Kuching (P195)	Squatters	Urban
8	Batang Sadong (P200)	Connectivity and Accessibility	Semi-rural and rural

No.	Parliamentary Constituency	Major Themes	Characteristics
9	Pendang (P011)	Agriculture and Land Ownership	Rural
10	Jeli (P030)	Smallholder Schemes and Decent Work	Rural

Source: APPGM-SDG

Based on this issue mapping, a preliminary identification of communities at risk was analysed in relation to the parliamentary constituencies. In peninsular Malaysia, in the Bentong constituency, farmers, Orang Asli and B40 are identified as having the most risk to be left behind due to economic status and identity. In Selayang, migrants, Orang Asli and B40 are identified due to identity, economic and legal status. In Petaling Jaya, urban poverty of the B40 is associated with low-cost housing, i.e. people's housing project, or better known as PPR, due to economic status. In Tanjung Piai, the fishermen and paddy farmers are identified due to geography and economic status. In Pendang, farmers and rubber tappers are identified due to geography and economic status, and in Jeli, the B40, smallholders, women, youth and Orang Asli are identified due to identity, geography (in this case, connectivity), and economic status. As for East Malaysia, in Papar, paddy farmers and fishermen are identified due to economic status and geography, and in Pensiangan, youth and women are identified due to identity or gender, age and geography. In Kuching, squatters are identified due to identity, economic and legal status, and in Batang Sadong, youth and farmers are identified due to geography and economic status.¹⁰

A total of 22 capacity building projects and 34 solution projects were proposed and approved based on these issues and targeted communities. RM8,800.00 is allocated for each capacity building project, which was executed as workshops. They comprise of capacity building in relation to community development (9 projects), mainstreaming SDG for community leaders/NGOs and civil servants (7 projects), health and wellbeing (2 projects), women and youth empowerment (2 projects), and needs assessment (2 projects). Other solution projects can be categorised into immediate and medium-term action-based projects with a budget

¹⁰ *ibid.*

of RM120,000.00 per constituency and an implementation period of 4-6 months. They comprise of farming (organic and aquaculture) (six projects), women empowerment, entrepreneurship, and community development (four projects each), national unity, health and wellbeing, education and language development, and ecotourism (three projects each), technical skills development and waste management (two projects each). The solution projects are not to solve the issue in total, but they contribute to mitigating the issues identified and hopefully will showcase a way forward in solving the problems and ultimately contribute towards achieving identified SDG of the constituency.¹¹

The project has fostered a fascinating collaboration model involving project leaders who are supposed to be subject matter experts, direct engagement of community members, MPs, and relevant local authorities. From the whole solution projects, partnerships have been established among the project implementors circle, which include district councils (two in number), municipal councils (three) and city councils (five), research institutions and universities (eight), and CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) (32). Among the implementing partners for the solution projects include Sejahtera Centre of IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia), PPH (Persatuan Penggerak Hijau), PSSM (Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia), SAWO (Sabah Women's Action Resource Group), SADIA (Sarawak Dayak & Iban Association), Yayasan Salam, NCSM (National Cancer Society of Malaysia), Raleigh KL (Raleigh International KL), UMS (University Malaysia Sabah), MyPJ and many more. The involvement of these agencies is significant in many ways, especially from the SDG 16 and 17 perspectives that are considered as core towards achieving the SDG in its entirety.¹²

Apart from the core activity of solution projects, APPGM-SDG also organised and participated in various discourses with multi-stakeholders in 2020 on the COVID-19 pandemic and recurring themes. They included conversations, for example, on *Post COVID-19 Recovery: Development Plans, Policies and Programs, Post COVID-19 Recovery Agenda Based on SDG: Building the Local, Economy in Rural Areas, Post COVID-19 Recovery Agenda: Building Local Economy in Urban Areas (Where the B40 and Migrants Live), Build Back Better for Health, Resilience & Sustainability: Corporate Malaysia's & Global Proposals for Post COVID-19 Recovery, UN75 National*

11 Sekretariat APPGM-SDG, *Laporan Gerak-Kerja APPGM-SDG 2019/2020* (Malaysian CSO SDG Alliance, 2020) 17-20.

12 *ibid.*

*Conversation: The Future We Want and The UN We Need - Our Shared Global Visions & Collective Agreement to Multilateralism, Online Policy Forum: 2020 Census & Relevance, Online Conversation: Watered Down Development in Selangor, Global Community Builders Summit 2020 (GLOBS20), Malaysia Urban Forum 2020 and many more.*¹³

A total of RM2 million has been allocated for the APPGM-SDG, with approximately RM1,530,400.00 utilised for awareness, capacity building and solution projects for the 10 parliamentary constituencies. The remainder of the budget was allocated for research activities and publication, administration and coordination, and contingencies.¹⁴ It may not be excessive to claim that the impact that the APPGM-SDG project has made in mainstreaming SDG among the members of Parliament and the community is intangibly worth more than the funding allocated.

SDG performance in Malaysia and the continuation of the APPGM-SDG

Malaysian SDG commitment is getting more evidence since 2015, with stronger reference being made to SDG in national budgetary mechanism and development plan. In a statement during the launching of indicators for Malaysia, Minister in Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed, who is also the MP of Jeli, explains that from the 247 global indicators, Malaysia has prepared 52% or 128 indicators with a further 29% or 73 indicators to be done. From the global indicators, 19% or 46 indicators are either irrelevant or without existing data. The SDG five focus areas of social development, global stewardship, prosperity, peace and partnership will be incorporated into relevant policy documents such as the 12th Malaysia Plan and the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030. He also emphasised the importance of the APPGM-SDG, which he himself is a member of, in helping to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for Malaysia.¹⁵ With this progress made, it is imperative that each parliament constituency, as an important development platform, give more attention to integrating SDG in their communities.

Operating on a unique model of collaboration – quadruple helix – and having secretariat members and project leaders coming from diverse social and academic backgrounds has made APPGM-SDG an interesting

13 *ibid.*

14 APPGM-SDG (n 7).

15 Sekretariat APPGM-SDG (n 11) 21.

showcase that it has gained trust and reputation by the relevant agencies to be further continued with further additional budget. In relation to the expansion of the APPGM-SDG, Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance's Prof. Datuk Denison Jayasooria, who is also Head of the APPGM-SDG Secretariat, mentions that in 2021, they will be carrying out the project in 20 new parliamentary constituencies while the existing 10 parliamentary constituencies will undergo a new phase of SDG localisation, making it 30 in total.¹⁶ This will mean an additional budget of RM3 million for the 20 new parliamentary constituencies APPGM-SDG members in 2021.

Conclusion

The importance of the APPGM-SDG is in advocating and incorporating sustainable development as a practical model for MPs and their parliamentary constituencies. It is a bipartisan platform for localising SDG capacity building and solutions. Its model includes multiple stakeholders at the grassroots level, providing channels of communication and offers a decentralised approach in the policymaking environment through partnerships. The APPGM-SDG facilitates inter-agency collaboration for a multidimensional approach by incorporating local communities for solutions to issues while providing ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) through practice for lifelong community learning. By mainstreaming SDG, it provides a model of governance and leadership and a way of strategising the approach to issues and solutions for the participating MPs in their political constituencies. Ultimately, APPGM-SDG hopes to offer a new perspective to the development model in terms of the meaning of development itself and the delivery mechanisms.

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16 See <<https://focusmalaysia.my/mainstream/dosm-msia-needs-close-monitoring-to-achieve-2030-agenda/>> accessed 4 January 2021.

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UK Parliament, 'All-Party Parliamentary Groups' <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/mps-and-lords/members/apg/>> accessed 30 December 2020.