



The Impact of Localising Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in Selected Sabah Parliamentary Constituencies Through Service-Learning Concept

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Abstract: This article presents the impact evaluation of the Solution Providers Project, a flagship program of The All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia – Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG) on Civil Society Organization (CSO) Alliance, aimed at reducing inequalities in selected constituencies in Sabah, Malaysia. Focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the lens of impact evaluator, this study adopts a service-learning conceptual framework and a mix-method research design, combining qualitative approaches (evaluator observation, focus group discussions) with numerical assessments on 15 selected constituencies. Findings reveal that while solution providers express over-optimism about reported projects, beneficiaries encounter diverse challenges in experiencing the intended impact. Data from focus group discussions highlights both success stories and obstacles, showcasing skill acquisition through hands-on experiences. However, beneficiaries' understanding on SDGs is still at a mediocre level, despite emphasis during planning and execution. Overall, the findings from this impact evaluation can be instrumental in informing decision-making, improving program design, and shedding light on specific policy areas, particularly in reducing multidimensional inequality such as income, consumption inequality and the quality of digital education in the Sabah region.

Keywords: APPGM-SDG, CSO alliance, solution providers, service learning, SDG, TVET

1. Introduction

Service learning is an effective mode to bind community wisdom with an expert from the university. The combination of tacit knowledge, technical and vocational skills either through service learning to enhance social development, community empowerment, and social cohesion, uplift socioeconomic and awareness (Salleh & Sulaiman 2016; Sulaiman & Salleh 2016; Salleh *et al.* 2017; Puteh 2018; Strong *et al.* 2023). Therefore, APPGM-SDG has initiated a program since 2019 that embraces the gist of the service-learning conceptual framework in order to reduce inequalities thoroughly through knowledge, technical and vocational skills among communities in Malaysian constituencies. Sabah is one of the states mainly focused by APPGM-SDG in selected constituencies to achieve the underline objectives through this program. The structure of this program is Solution Provider (SP) in Sabah selected by APPGM-SDG Committee through the proposal submitted. SP in Sabah from selected constituencies that successfully fulfil the criterion will be granted with appropriate funds. The SP then will be trained and monitored by academia and expert from different universities to ensure the project achieves its objectives. Historically, the formation of Malaysia promised independence not only to Sabah and Sarawak but also to the economic balance of its people, who were far behind compared to those in the peninsula. The social facts related to the economic gap can be traced through the debate discourse collected by Jeffrey Kitingan and Maximus Ongkili (1989) and developed by social scientists from the Sabah branch of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, led by H.M Dahlan, in the early 1990s. The idea presented is in line with Hashim's (1998) view that the ethnic and economic divides in Sabah are deeply entrenched and cause significant difficulties for the population, pointing out that the state's economic development has been hampered by the lack of investment in education, health, and other social services for those from marginalized backgrounds. As a result, the majority of *Sabahans* have missed out on the benefits of economic growth and have been trapped in a cycle of poverty. This inequality has had a significant impact on the social fabric of Sabah, contributing to the rise of ethnic tensions and political instability. It necessitates the implementation of inclusive policies that promote equitable development and ensures access to basic services and opportunities for that all *Sabahans* (Hashim 1998). Teh, Teh, and Sumaila (2011) found that inequality in Sabah has contributed to land degradation, poverty, and poor health conditions for many of its citizens. Furthermore, according to Teh, Teh, and Sumaila (2011), inequality in Sabah has caused a lack of access to resources, education, and other basic services for many of its citizens, significantly impacting economic growth and development in the region. Additionally, inequality has led to increased political instability in Sabah, as those who are not able to access resources and services are more likely to participate in social movements and protests.

After Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 and the separation of Singapore from the Federation of Malaya, the government of Malaysia initiated several policies to alleviate poverty and encourage economic growth, while simultaneously promoting national unity—the most prominent policy was the New Economic Policy (NEP) initiated in 1971 (Awang *et al.* 2016). Zawawi (2013) states that the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 has been a major factor in this transformation. The NEP was designed to reduce poverty, restructure economic and social inequalities, and modernize the Malaysian economy. This policy has had a significant impact on Sabah's rural communities, with increased access to education, health care, and other modern amenities being provided. Moreover, the NEP has resulted in the creation of various rural development projects and initiatives, leading to increased economic opportunities and improved living standards in rural areas. Additionally, it has allowed for greater economic integration between rural and urban areas through the establishment of better infrastructure and transportation links. These developments have resulted in a significant improvement in Sabah's rural socioeconomic landscape since Malaysia's formation in 1963, providing rural communities with improved access to education, health care, and other modern amenities (Abdul Halim Ali *et al.* 2000).

Rooney (1981) discussed that the formation of Malaysia saw a period of rapid socioeconomic development in Sabah, led by the expansion of the agricultural sector, resulting in increased production of rubber, palm oil, and cocoa. In addition, there was an increase in the number of small-scale industries that provided employment opportunities, leading to increased incomes and improved living standards in rural areas. The formation of Malaysia also saw the establishment of infrastructure and public services in Sabah, such as health, education, and transport, which further contributed to the socioeconomic development of rural areas. As a result, the formation of Malaysia has had a significant impact on the socioeconomic development of rural areas in Sabah over the past 63 years.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Service Learning and Its Need in Contemporary Perspectives of Sabah Inequality

Service learning engages students in real-world experiences that address the community in needs. Eyler & Giles (1999) mentioned that service learning promotes experiential learning, personal growth, and a sense of civic responsibility. Kendall (1990) also argued that service learning enhances community empowerment by fostering

relationships, building trust and co-creating solutions. Therefore, Mitchell (2008) proposed collaborative partnerships, sustained engagement, culturally sensitive approaches, and reflection are factors that enhance the empowerment of service-learning initiatives. However, there are challenges in conducting service learning such as power dynamics, cultural differences, understanding of certain concepts and sustainability of the projects for community empowerment (Eyler & Giles 1999; Blau 2005; Strong et al. 2023). On top of that, this article articulates the collaboration between APPGM-SDG with Solution Providers (considered as students, trained, and funded) and beneficiaries that represent the community in selected Sabah parliamentary constituencies using the global framework which is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to address global challenges and diverse context that has yet to be discussed.

According to Mohamad and Ali (2017), the gap in educational access between the rich and the poor is also “wider than in Peninsular Malaysia”. This is because the educational opportunities in Sabah are limited, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage due to a lack of resources. This often means that those from poorer families are unable to pursue higher education or even basic education, due to financial constraints. The consequences of such inequality can be seen in the disparities between those from higher and lower classes in terms of educational attainment. Those from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to attend universities and have better job prospects than those from poorer backgrounds (Mohamad & Ali 2017). This highlights the importance of addressing social inequality in Sabah and ensuring that all members of society have access to quality education. To achieve this, it is essential to create equitable policies and programs that support students from all socio-economic backgrounds. Only by doing so can Sabah ensure that all of its citizens have the same opportunities to succeed.

Consequently, Abram et al. (2022) stated that Sabah has seen steady growth in population, with a marked increase in the total population of the state in the last two decades. With population growth has come increased urbanization; Sabah’s urbanization rate grew from 11.7% in 1963 to 28.3% by 2022. This has had a notable impact on the rural population, who have seen a decrease in their relative share of the population. In particular, the rural population has gone from representing about 85% of the state’s population in 1963 to just 50.7% in 2022. In addition to this, the rural population has seen a decrease in per capita income and an increase in poverty, with 36.1% of the rural population living below the poverty line in 2022. This has led to a decrease in access to basic amenities and services, with the rural population being particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to quality health care and education. These changes have had a negative effect on the social and economic well-being of the rural population of Sabah, with many rural communities being left behind in terms of economic development.

Ramzah Dambul et. al (2010) debated that Indigenous People in Sabah face various social, cultural, economic, and political issues due to their marginalization within the country. They are often prevented from accessing basic resources, such as education and healthcare, which prevent them from achieving an equal level of well-being as the non-Indigenous population. Moreover, Indigenous People in Sabah are often excluded from political and social participation and decision-making processes which further contributes to their inequality. According to Muhammad Rahimi, Fatimah and Muhamad Azwan (2022), the inequality phenomenon has created a revolution of frustration in the local community which led to the growing social transformation narrative from below. The Community-Based Organization (CBO) has spurred and attracted many researchers and funders to facilitate these group goals, such as Borneo Komrad - consistent in striving for equal access for stateless children in Teluk Layang, Sabah, Pangrok Sulap - the champion of the art of local wisdom from Ranau that exploits art for welfare and societal benefit, and Pertubuhan Wanita Kampung Song-Song (WANIS) - which endeavours to widen awareness of women's abilities and align with local, national, and global demands (Muhammad Rahimi Hasan, Fatimah & Muhamad Azwan, 2022). Work-life balance and cultural issues have also put women in conflicts, and these affect their quality of life (Syahirah, Norfarhanis & Arif 2015). Therefore, Sabah has undergone significant socioeconomic development since Malaysia was formed in 1963. Over the decades, along with advances in urban development, rural development has been a focus for the state, addressing issues such as food insecurity, limited access to resources, and marginalization. However, poverty, cultural traditions, exclusion based on ethnicity and gender identity, and unequal access to education have been the major causes of inequality in Sabah.

It is clear that Sabah’s social and economic structures have facilitated the existing inequality and these issues need to be addressed in order to improve the quality of life for all citizens of Sabah. It appears that the most effective way to reduce inequality in Sabah is to focus on providing more equal access to education, developing economic opportunities, and increasing social inclusion. In addition, initiatives should be taken to empower marginalized groups by tackling discrimination in terms of ethnicity and gender. All of these steps will create a more equitable and just society for all in Sabah. Therefore, through ongoing initiatives particularly as developed by All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia (APPGM) with solution providers project programme since 2019, then Sabah will continue to see improvements to rural socioeconomic development in the coming years to ensure there is no one left behind.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

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

Qualitative research is useful for exploring the relationships between individuals and their environment, which can help to shed light on how social systems and structures have an impact on individuals’ lives (Babbie & Benaquisto 2001). Additionally, qualitative research can provide insights into the motivations, attitudes, and beliefs of participants, which can help to inform policy decisions and organizational strategies (Babbie & Benaquisto 2001). For instance, qualitative data collection can be beneficial in its ability to provide a more detailed and contextual understanding of the situation. It allows for a deeper exploration of opinions, attitudes, and motivations. Additionally, qualitative data collection can provide a better understanding of the impact of the solution provider by enabling the researcher to gain insights into the user’s experience (Choy 2014). This report consists of primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained from the selected six (6) focus group discussions, conducted by an impact evaluator at UiTM Tawau and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The FGDs involved different projects of solution providers and beneficiaries in each constituency such as Kota Belud, Papar, Tawau, Libaran, and Pensiangan. Other than FGDs, three (3) observations and site visits were selected by the impact evaluator. Two (2) projects included different solution providers in Tawau and one (1) in Papar. Meanwhile, another six (6) projects of solution providers that were not selected due to cost factors, underwent this impact evaluation process through the resources provided by the APPGM-SDG secretariat such as initial proposals, signed consensus agreements between APPGM and solution providers, monthly progress reports for every three months, final reports, and financial statements of allocated funds and photographs of conducted activities. Secondary sources were supported by desktop research that entailed journals, books, government reports and official data from APPGM-SDG CSO Alliance, authoritative websites, bulletins, and relevant newspapers. Other than FGD, observation, and site visit, this report also takes a position to do a quasi-experiment. Quasi-experiments have the ability to provide useful insight into social and psychological phenomena without the need for a traditional, randomized experiment (Burnham & Kurzban, 2005). Quasi-experiments are advantageous in comparison to traditional experiments because they can be conducted more quickly and with fewer resources, and they can provide results that are applicable to real-world situations (Burnham & Kurzban, 2005). Therefore, a quasi-experiment is a particular type of research method which seeks to establish cause-and-effect relationships between specific events. Even though it is not a true experiment, a quasi-experiment still involves manipulating independent variables while attempting to control any potential extraneous variables. However, it differs from an experiment in that it does not involve the random assignment of participants to different conditions. Instead, participants are assigned to conditions based on pre-existing characteristics or other factors. For example, the framework develops for this evaluation is deep, clear, wide, and high, and targeted SDG and gender dimensions. This element is a condition or factor to evaluate the effect of six (6) projects of solution providers and the beneficiaries that do not involve in FGD and site visits due to certain obstacles through existing resources.

3.2 Sample

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

the projects were in achieving meaningful elements. In total, 15 solution providers from each constituency under the APPGM-SDG fund were involved in this impact evaluation, as shown in **Table 1** below:

Table 1 - List of solution providers and projects

| Project Group Code & Location | District | Project Name |
|-------------------------------|------------|--|
| SP001 | Kota Belud | Establish Kampung Community Water Pipe Management Committee for Filtration Gravity Water Pipe. |
| SP002 | Kota Belud | Empowering the Association / Society for Hawkers and Small Business in Tamu Luadi. |
| SP003 (FGD) | Kota Belud | Community Learning Centre (CLC) Managed by the Women's Association of Kg. Song Song. |
| SP004 (FGD) | Libaran | Empowering Libaran's Women Entrepreneurs: Single Mothers and Housewives. |
| SP005 | Libaran | Empowering Pulau Nunuyan Youth Socio-Economy. |
| SP006 | Libaran | Small Economic Centre at Taman Fajar, Libaran. |
| SP034 (FGD) | Papar | Youth Skill Development in Agriculture Machinery Operation. |
| SP035 (Site Visit) | Papar | Siakap Hatchery Skill Enhancement for Youth. |
| SP036 | Pensiangan | Community Herbs Garden Social Business for Rural Women Entrepreneurs. |
| SP037 (FGD) | Pensiangan | Health and Wellness Phase 2 |
| SP072 (FGD and Site Visit) | Tawau | PAU Community Training Centre: Collaboration with Nadzri Enterprise |
| SP073 (FGD) | Tawau | <i>Pusat Pembelajaran Komuniti: Usahawanita Saddani</i> |
| SP074 | Tawau | Community Task Force on Community Safety and Well-Being. |
| SP075 (Site Visit) | Tawau | <i>Program Komuniti Bersih dan Sihat</i> |
| SP076 | Tawau | Breast Cancer Awareness Month "I Wear Pink" |

Sources: APPGM 2022 Cohort 2 Fieldwork

3.3 Data Collection

For observation and site visits, an impact evaluator went to the *Program Komuniti Bersih dan Sihat* (Clean and Healthy Community Programme) (SP075) on the 20th of November 2022 and the Siakap Hatchery Skill Enhancement for Youth in Papar, Sabah (SP035) on 24th November 2022. Meanwhile, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with a single focus group that involved all participants and a team of facilitators discussing a topic together in one place (Nyumba et al. 2018). On the 21st of November 2022, a total of three (3) solution providers and six (6) beneficiaries from the projects were present at UiTM Tawau.

- i. Empowering Libaran's Women Entrepreneurs: Single Mothers and Housewives (**SP004**)
- ii. *Pusat Pembelajaran Komuniti: Usahawanita Saddani* (**SP073**)
- iii. PAU Community Training Centre: Collaboration with Nadzri Enterprise (**SP072**)

A similar process was also adopted for the FGD that was conducted at UMS on 23rd November 2022, as follows:

- i. Community Learning Centre (CLC) Managed by the Women's Association of Kg. Song Song (**SP003**)
- ii. Youth Skill Development in Agriculture Machinery Operation (**SP034**).
- iii. Health and Wellness Phase 2 (**SP037**).

As mentioned in the methodology section, three observations and site visits were conducted by impact evaluators. On 20th November 2022, an impact evaluator conducted the evaluation process while doing a site visit to SP075 under the *Program Komuniti Bersih dan Sihat*. On the same day, the impact evaluator decided to do a site visit and observation at the PAU Community Training Centre: Collaboration with Nadzri Enterprise project, SP072 project. The next site visits as planned is on 24th November 2022 at Papar under the Siakap Hatchery Skill Enhancement for Youth, SP035 project.

3.4 Data Analysis

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

the data down into “smaller units of information” and assigning labels to the various topics. This will enable the researcher to group the information into categories and draw conclusions from the data. Finally, it is important to review the data and ensure that it is accurate and complete (Escalada & Heong 2009). This is the best way to ensure that the analysis is both meaningful and reliable.

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

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

4. Findings

The evaluation process of solution providers in Sabah is a critical tool to help assess the impact of local projects. It can work to identify what successes or areas of improvement are needed, as well as to understand if the projects are meeting their goals and objectives. Essentially, the evaluation should be conducted to determine whether the changes are sustained and beneficial to both the participants and the provider after the program has been carried out (Maurish Sofie, Agus Wedi & Sulthoni 2023). A model of six elements – deep, clear, wide, high, targeted SDGs and gender consideration – forms the anchor of the evaluation process. Furthermore, to strengthen the FGD data, numerical assessment is used by the impact evaluator based on the salient rubric to indicate the project’s success in achieving meaningful elements within Sabah. The numerical assessment allows for a more accurate representation of the impact of the solution provider. Additionally, the simple numerical assessment model allows organizations to effectively identify areas of improvement and create more targeted training programs for their solution providers. The evaluator scores each element on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest mark. The results of the evaluation, as shown in **Table 2**, indicate the effectiveness of the projects and provide recommendations for improvement. Regarding that evaluation, the elements of deep, clear, wide, high, targeted SDGs and gender dimension were analysed through the FGD, observation, site visit, and quasi-experiment scoring to lead into another imperative discussion, focusing on policy areas. The most important findings from this data are almost all solution providers offer experiential learning and co-creating solutions based on the interest and needs in Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET). TVET nowadays play a crucial role in equipping individuals or groups with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in various industries.

Therefore, this solution provider program by using service-learning concepts under APPGM-SDG is not a charity but a two-way street. There are multiple benefits from this program exposure. Firstly, the program is reconfigured and opens the community mindset about the importance of the TVET domain that also offer direct or indirect by Solution Providers. Secondly, benefits from the program that has TVET flavour can serve as a cornerstone for skill development and economic growth among beneficiaries.

Table 2 - Overall dimension evaluation by impact evaluator

| No . | Project Group Code | District | Project Name | D | C | W | H | S | G | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | SP00 | Kota Belud | Establish Kampung Community Water Pipe Management Committee for Filtration Gravity Water Pipe. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 29 |
| 2 | SP002 | Kota Belud | Empowering the Association / Society for Hawkers and Small Business in Tamu Luadi | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 29 |
| 3 | SP003 (FGD) | Kota Belud | Community Learning. Centre (CLC) Managed by the Women's Association of Kg. Song Song. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 29 |
| 4 | SP004 (FGD) | Libaran | Empowering Libaran's Women Entrepreneurs: Single Mothers and Housewives. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 29 |
| 5 | SP005 (Site Visit) | Libaran | Empowering Pulau Nunuyan Youth Socio-Economy. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 23 |
| 6 | SP006 | Libaran | Small Economic Centre at Taman Fajar, Libaran. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 28 |
| 7 | SP034 (FGD) | Papar | Youth Skill Development in Agriculture Machinery Operation. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 25 |
| 8 | SP035 | Papar | Siakap Hatchery Skill Enhancement for Youth. | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 25 |
| 9 | SP036 | Pensiangan | Community Herbs Garden Social Business for Rural Women Entrepreneurs. | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 29 |
| 10 | SP037 (FGD) | Pensiangan | Health and Wellness Phase 2. | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 23 |
| 11 | SP072 (FGD) | Tawau | PAU Community Training Centre: Collaboration with Nadzri Enterprise. | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 23 |
| 12 | SP073 (FGD) | Tawau | <i>Pusat Pembelajaran Komuniti: Usahawanita Saddani.</i> | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 24 |
| 13 | SP074 | Tawau | Community Task Force on Community Safety and Well-Being. | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 21 |
| 14 | SP075 (Site Visit) | Tawau | <i>Program Komuniti Bersih dan Sihat.</i> | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 24 |
| 15 | SP076 | Tawau | Breast Cancer Awareness Month "I Wear Pink" | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 28 |
| Overall Impact | | | | 70 | 71 | 67 | 64 | 59 | 61 | 392 |

Note: D= Deep, W= Wide, C=Clear, H=High, S=SDG, G=Gender

Source: Synthesized by Sabah Regional Impact Evaluator 2023

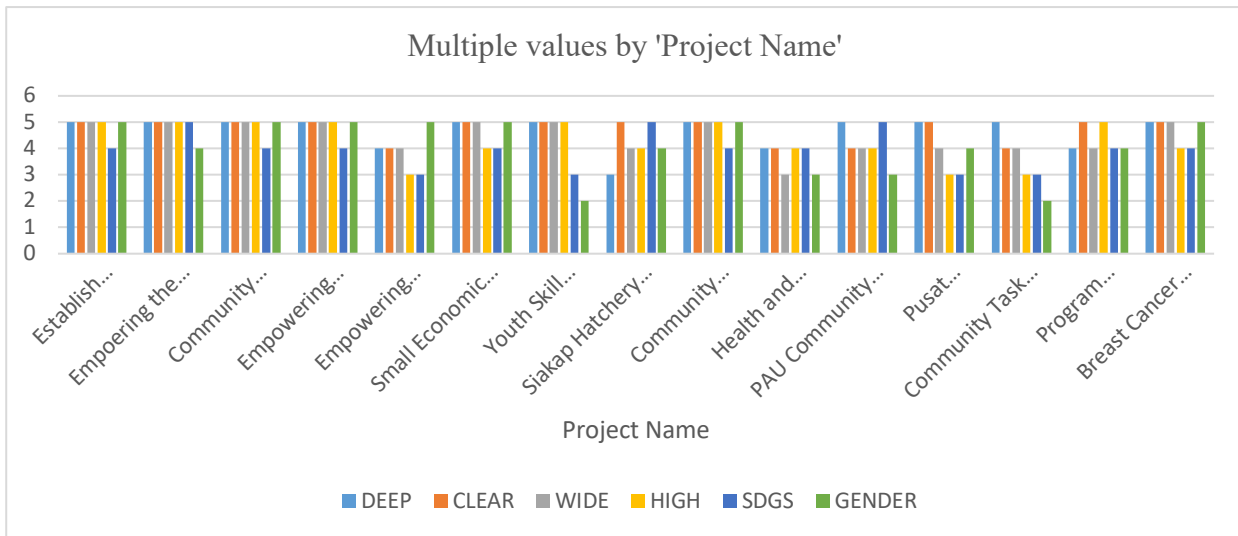


Fig. 1 - Overall dimension evaluation by impact evaluator

Source: Synthesized by Sabah Regional Impact Evaluator 2023

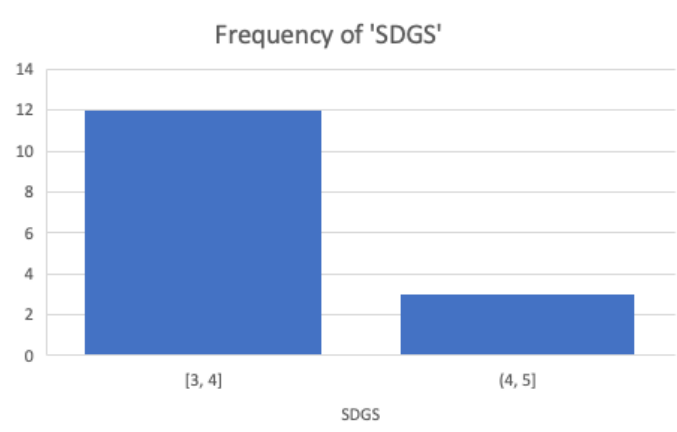


Fig. 2 - Frequency of SDGs in solution provider projects in Sabah

Source: Synthesized by Sabah Regional Impact Evaluator 2023

Based on **Figures 1** and **2**, the understanding of the beneficiaries towards the targeted SDGs is still at a mediocre level, which is concerning as it means that they are not fully aware of the importance of the SDGs and the solutions available to help them achieve it. To address this issue, the APPGM-SDG Secretariat needs to focus on educating both solution providers and beneficiaries about the importance of the SDGs and the solutions available to achieve them. This can be done through a variety of methods, such as providing educational materials, organizing workshops and seminars, and engaging with the beneficiaries through social media. Additionally, the APPGM-SDG should also provide creative incentives for the beneficiaries that participate in solution provider projects to take action and implement the solutions available. Furthermore, the APPGM-SDG should also focus on engaging with solution providers to ensure that the beneficiaries are aware of the solutions available to them. This could include working with local businesses, NGOs, and other organizations to provide the beneficiaries with access to the solutions available.

Regarding the analysis of impact evaluation, there are three solution provider projects that can be considered and recommended to go for the next phase due to their viability to upgrade the comprehension of SDG. The initial project is identified as SP004, falling within the scope of the Libaran constituency. This project focuses on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the Libaran community, particularly single mothers and housewives. The second project is SP075, under the *Program Komuniti Bersih dan Sihat*. Finally, there's the SP072 project, which falls under the PAU Community Training Centre and involves collaboration with Nadzri Enterprise. Furthermore, two projects of solution providers have unlocked its potential and all stakeholder actualization to move as an independent. The first project is

SP003 on Community Learning Centre (CLC) managed by the Women's Association of Kg. Song-Song (WANIS). The second project hails from SP037, with its primary focus being on Health and Wellness (Phase 2). Even though the score of impact evaluation is very low due to certain surrounding and environmental obstacles, the gist of the projects can be executed independently by them due to their strong experience to manage it.

Eventually, the evaluation of solution providers through FGD and site visits was a successful process in determining the impact of the projects on the beneficiaries. The resources provided by the APPGM-SDG Secretariat were essential in helping to identify successful and risky projects. Overall, the evaluation of the solution providers was successful in determining the impact of the projects on the beneficiaries, as 15 projects of solution providers at selected constituencies in Sabah have different patterns and risks which heavily depend on income and consumption distribution, and quality of digital education that will fit on specific and realistic policy areas.

5. Discussion: Policy Areas Through Impact Evaluation

These impact evaluations can finally be used to inform decision-making, improve program design, and enlighten specific policy areas, particularly in reducing multidimensional inequality at Sabah Regional. With the help of impact evaluation, the APPGM-SDG can identify what works and what does not and provide evidence to support or refute claims about the effectiveness of a program or intervention. Therefore, decision-making is a cognitive process of choosing between two or more alternatives, ranging from relatively clear-cut to complex (Nor Shafrin & Ahmad Amin 2022). Can the APPGM-SDG make a real difference in the lives of people in Malaysia through the promotion of the SDGs? This is the question that needs to be considered pragmatically for the next batch of solution providers and APPGM-SDG to keep affirmative in the policy areas of income, consumption inequality and quality of digital education for the Sabah local community. These three thrust policy areas were significantly impacted by the evaluation of 15 projects conducted by solution providers on different constituencies in Sabah, which influenced the overall social sustainability readiness of the beneficiaries. Based on this analysis in Sabah, the fact of income and consumption inequality and the quality of digital education do not care about the community's feelings. Therefore, in the next phase of this program, these three policy areas need to be critically deep dived. Therefore, the reform agenda must be realized from this programme through solution providers towards beneficiaries in emphasizing TVET and aligning them with industry demands. The coordination between APPGM-SDG and the Ministry of Economy, under Rafizi Ramli's agenda on Academic in Industry (AiI), can be moulded together properly by APPGM-SDG to Solution Providers and beneficiaries. It can be a springboard in order to shape a highly skilled workforce that can contribute back to the communities.

The impact of income and consumption inequality on the quality of education for the Sabah local community is a pressing issue. According to Dahlui et al. (2020), many families in Sabah are unable to afford necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, and they are less likely to be able to invest in their children's education, resulting in poorer educational outcomes. These problems are still ongoing aftermath of the pandemic crisis that started in 2019 and entered a prolonged state (endemic) that has widely opened the reality of income and consumption inequality and quality of education which led to multi-layered poverty.

This argument is also in line with Loganathan et al. (2021) regarding the impact of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on income and education inequality in local communities of Sabah, Malaysia. It was found that the pandemic had a significant effect on the socioeconomic landscape of the region. The pandemic exacerbated existing income and education disparities, leading to a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor and between the educated and the uneducated. Low-income households and those without a college degree were the most affected, with a significant number of households experiencing an income decrease due to the pandemic and a corresponding decrease in education attainment. On top of that, an impact evaluator urges to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the local communities of Sabah, there is a need for targeted interventions that focus on reducing income and education inequality. With the implementation of appropriate policies and programs in place, it is possible to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and create a more equitable and equal society.

As mentioned by Wong and Chua (2021), APPGM-SDG has the potential to reduce inequality of income and consumption and improve the quality of education for Sabah's local community. Therefore, the impact evaluator agreed that this kind of solution providers projects model needs to be continued. However, the communication plan, particularly the involvement of the impact evaluator from the project's commencement, is essential to ensure that the suggested policy areas are aligned. Eventually, policy interventions are important for federal and state 'to work together' to address the impact of income and consumption inequality, and the quality of digital education for the Sabah local community. The Sabah local community faces a unique set of challenges when it comes to income and consumption inequality, as well as the quality of education. In order to maintain an affirmative policy in these areas, the next batch of solution providers and APPGM-SDG must work together with the state pragmatically to provide the necessary resources and support. Only by ensuring that each individual has equitable access to the same standard of services and resources can the local community be empowered to open their doors to the possibilities of equitable development, fulfilment and growth.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

In conclusion, the rural socioeconomic of Sabah is a complex and multifaceted issue. Poverty is a major challenge in rural areas and is compounded by the lack of economic opportunities and basic services. Most of the population is dependent on subsistence farming and fishing for their livelihoods, and there is limited access to formal employment opportunities. In addition, the rural areas of Sabah are vulnerable to natural disasters, such as floods and landslides, which can have a devastating impact on the local economy. The rural socioeconomic situation of Sabah requires urgent attention and action to improve the lives of the people living in these areas. This can be achieved through increased investment in infrastructure and services, as well as the creation of more economic opportunities. Only then can the rural socioeconomic situation of Sabah be improved and the people living in these areas be given the chance to lead better lives, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals.

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

Several significant results were obtained from this impact evaluation. Firstly, most of the solution providers in Sabah Regional are overly optimistic about their reported projects, while certain challenges faced by beneficiaries exhibit different patterns in receiving an intended impact. Next, most of the beneficiaries involved in the focus group discussion shared various success stories and obstacles experienced with the project conducted by solution providers. Lastly, strengthening the communication plan among solution providers, APPGM representatives, and impact evaluators is necessary to facilitate future impact evaluations in the future.

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