

Development Perspectives submission to the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands is currently considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction

Development Perspectives (DP) welcomes the opportunity to submit this document. DP has been addressing the SDGs across Ireland since 2016 when we initiated the “SDG Challenge”. In 2017, DP won the Dóchas “SDG Champion” award for our efforts. Since then we have ensured that the SDGs are prominent within programmes and projects across the full spectrum of the Educational landscape in Ireland and with partners in Vietnam, Tanzania and Liberia. DP is also an active member of Coalition of 2030 since its inception.

DP is happy to see the efforts of Saolta in the shape of the SDG Roadshow (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpyR3tjyJ8g>) explicitly mentioned in the 2nd SDG National Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024.

Saolta is a strategic partnership between Irish Aid and a consortium, which is led by DP. The other consortia partners are AONTAS, Concern Worldwide, Irish Rural Link and the Dept. of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University. The goal of the consortia is to embed high quality Global Citizenship Education within the Adult and Community Education sector.

<https://developmentperspectives.ie/saolta>

Since its establishment in 2019, Saolta has been focusing in part on the SDGs as part of its programming and will continue to do so over the period 2024 – 2028 as we enter a 2nd programme period, which will be supported by Irish Aid.

Comments

1. The awareness rate of the SDGs in Ireland as outlined in the 2nd SDG National Implementation plan is relatively low. Ireland finds itself 8 years into the plan and references are still being made to very basic elements such as building capacity at National and Local Government level. This situation needs to change very quickly if Ireland is to achieve the ambition it chaired in the lead up to the development of the goals. DP acknowledges that the previously held ambition can be achieved with a clear commitment to and investment in achieving the Goals between 2023 and 2024. If that opportunity is missed, then the targets set out to be achieved by 2030 will clearly be missed. The Joint Committee can help ensure that the Department better aligns its efforts across Community Development / Rural Development and Local authorities with the SDGs.
2. The role of Adult and Community Education can and should be more explicitly and clearly identified as a beneficial lever for the Department. The potential that this sector offers is substantial given the size and spread of the cohort that is currently engaged in this part of

the demographic. Allied to this is that the market research, which informed the 2nd SDG National implementation plan indicates that those from lower socio- economics profiles are less likely to have an awareness or understanding of the goals. The Adult and Community Education sector is very well placed to address this issue whilst also raising the overall awareness and understanding of the goals across the country.

3. The Saolta consortium has been contributing to SDGs in a number of significant ways aside from the SDG roadshow. Saolta offers a high quality training programme each year called the “SDG Advocate Training” and has been doing this since 2016 (DP ran this training independently from 2016 – 2019). Over 170 people from across the country have completed this programme with a further 26 due to complete it this year. The work and the efforts of these advocates needs to be recognised and should be supported through the implementation plan. Stories of action from the 2020 - 2022 advocates can be seen here - <https://developmentperspectives.ie/SDGChallenge/InformationPacks/Stories%20of%20Action%202019-2022.pdf>

Saolta also distributes (to over 5,000 people) a monthly information pack on one of the goals and has developed educational resources for those working in the Adult and Community Education sector. <https://www.developmentperspectives.ie/saolta-resources>

DP has been working with Local Authorities and Public Participation Networks across Ireland since 2016 with a view to embedding the SDGs into County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Development Plans. More recently, Saolta has been working with AILG to provide SDG inputs on regional and CPD opportunities. Since 2019, Saolta has engaged over 50% of the local authorities / PPNs in relation to the SDGs. One piece of specific research, which we have conducted is “How can Saolta best embed Global Citizenship Education within local authorities and associated county development plans”? -

<https://www.developmentperspectives.ie/ResearchPDFS/How%20can%20Saolta%20Best%20Embed%20GCE%20within%20Local%20Authorities%20and%20Associated%20County%20Plans.pdf>

This is an area that the Department could significantly help with by encouraging the staff of National and local Government to have access to high quality continuous professional development opportunities and related materials and resources. Given the educational and training experience of Development Perspectives, we would be happy to work with relevant stakeholders to ensure local authorities can better embed the SDGs in their policies and practices. We would also be happy to work with relevant community and rural development stakeholders to align their work with the SDGs and vica versa.

There is no doubting the relevance of the goals to community and rural development stakeholders across the country. From tackling poverty and inequality, the need for increased rural infrastructure, the role of land and water to the need for more affordable energy are all relevant examples of why the SDGs should be a central plank of the department’s efforts.

Conclusion

DP welcomes the focus of the Joint Committee on the SDGs and is open to working with the Department and relevant stakeholders to progress ideas and activities that are mutually beneficial. Policy and practice coherence is very much needed and could be a positive lever of change nationally given the scope and remit of this Department.

However, opportunities to align and embed the SDGs are being missed. With some more focus and effort, the Department can play a key role in contributing to the 2nd National Implementation plan.

DP is still passionately committed to Agenda 2030 but believes that a National call to action is required across Government Departments to ensure the Goals are met. Given the scale of the issues and challenges addressed by the SDGs, the time for incrementalism and marginal gains are over. Leadership and Action across all National and Local Government Departments and authorities is now necessary to ensure that those that are already taking informed action are supported and that those left behind, which sadly are too many are not further isolated.

Recommendations

The view of DP is that the adult population in particular needs to have opportunities to engage with and learn about the goals. The adult and community education sector is in an ideal location to contribute positively to these efforts. The goals need to be made relevant to the population and the best way of doing that is to connect the goals to the lived lives of people.

1. **This is best done through high quality Adult and Community Education that has at its core participation and inclusion.** Investing in high cost communications is not the way to go as its often tokenistic and contributes fractionally to changes in behaviour. High quality Adult and Community education has been proven to be transformative.
2. **Align the community development, rural development and local authority efforts under the auspices of the Department with the SDGs.**