projectUS

Conversations and Perspectives on the Sustainable Development Goals

Contents

Cover: Jen Harris and Sarah Keane
from the Waterford Sustainable Living
Initiative (SLi) at the Project Us Café
in Waterford, March, 2018

Left: Project Us café with Concern
staff, November, 2018

We need strong and inclusive communities where greater interaction between people is the norm, not the exception.

Alongside knowledge of food production and nutrition and a central component of individual responsibility, greater knowledge and action about how we waste food is essential.

Project Us participants challenged all of us to 'examine our own conscience'.

Adjusting mindsets is a slow process so more immediate, hardwired measures are also needed. Positive change in the world of politics can be brought about using quotas and by more conscious inclusion of women in leadership roles.

Whereas the Millennium Development Goals were seen as addressing problems 'over there' in Africa and Asia, the SDGs are universal, they apply everywhere.

Equal education opportunities means that discrimination based on race/gender/religion/sexualities will be eliminated from education and the workplace.

All of us need to change to embrace a 'more efficient and sustainable way of life', including reducing our energy consumption, eliminating single use plastic bottles and taking more responsibility to educate the younger generation.

project Us

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Participants at Project Us 'intergenerational' café with Age Action Ireland, September, 2019

Foreword

From the outset, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had an ambition, energy and urgency that their predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, lacked. In launching the SDGs in 2015 the then Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said that "We can be the first generation that can end poverty, the last that can end climate change." To further emphasise their ambition the SDGs even came with a pair of taglines; 'Leaving No one Behind" and 'Reaching the furthest behind first'.

Every country, rich or poor, has its 'left behind'

Whereas the Millennium Development Goals were seen as addressing problems *'over there'* in Africa and Asia, the SDGs are universal, they apply everywhere. And while achieving the targets is always going to be more difficult in countries in the Global South, that is, those beset by conflict, experiencing the severe impacts of climate change, poor governance, extreme poverty and hunger, the SDGs also cast a spotlight on so called 'developed' countries as well. Every country, rich or poor, has its 'left behind'.

The responsibility for achieving the 2030 targets falls largely, but not solely, on governments, world bodies and multilateral institutions. The role however of the individual citizen and grassroots civil society organisations is also vital and this is where Concern's **Project Us** took its start.

With funding from Irish Aid we set out to engage the public in conversations about the SDGs. We wanted to know how much the public knew or cared about them, what did the goals mean for people living in Ireland, and what can we do as 'global citizens' to ensure that we reach the furthest behind first, not only here at home but in the Global South as well.

The thoughts, opinions, experiences and 'solutions' of the hundreds of people who have taken part in conversations all around the country are reflected in this report. It also captures the commitment, passion and innovation that participants brought to the conversations and perhaps most importantly a sense that not only are the SDGs the 'right' thing to do, but our very survival may depend on our achieving them.

The Covid-19 pandemic represents the latest threat to achieving the SDGs. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has warned that Covid-19, with its triple threat to education, health and living standards will reverse global gains in each of these areas. However, for the first time in a hundred years the world is focussed on a common goal: beating the coronavirus. The hope of all those who participated in Project Us, is that the world will apply this same focus to achieving the SDGs.

Michael Doorly
Head of Active Citizenship, Concern Worldwide

About
Irish Aid

Irish Aid is the Irish Government's overseas development programme, funded by the Irish people. The Irish Aid programme works to reduce poverty and hunger, and prevent and respond to humanitarian crises. It supports education, health, agriculture, social protection and climate programmes, as well as support for good governance, gender equality and human rights. The aid programme makes a difference in over 80 countries around the world, changing people's lives for the better. The Irish Aid programme is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, and delivered in partnership with national governments, civil society, other donors and international organisations.

Ireland's Policy for International Development, A Better World, highlights a commitment to communicating Ireland's development cooperation more effectively. Irish Aid builds on existing partnerships, and Irish research, to strengthen public engagement and foster global citizenship. The level of support among Irish people for development cooperation gives a strong foundation. The SDGs, and the whole of Government action to respond to them, are the overarching framework for all of Irish Aid's public engagement work with a focus on refreshing Irish Aid's narrative and reach in line with the changing context and policy priorities. Irish Aid aims are to mobilise support for Ireland's development cooperation; to raise awareness of sustainable development issues; and to support development education.

The Irish Aid programme works to reduce poverty and hunger, and prevent and respond to humanitarian crises.

What is Project Us?

> "Strategic and effective public engagement moves beyond the realms of accountability and mere awareness towards deliberation, dialogue and action at individual, community or state level."
>
> According to Irish Aid

Project Us is a movement for change in Ireland, facilitated by Concern Worldwide.

It is a space (online and off) for communities to gather to discuss the global and local issues that matter to them, that distress them, that enrage them. More especially, the project explores how issues at local level connect to the Sustainable Development Goals, designed as the global blueprint towards creating a more equal world by 2030.

Support for Project Us has been received under Irish Aid's Programme Grant II (2017 to end 2021).

Concern Worldwide defines public engagement as follows:

A dialogue with the public that informs, educates and enables Irish citizens to shape and positively influence decisions on wide global issues.

In line with Ireland's Global Ireland policy and Concern's organisational strategic plan, *Leaving No one Behind*, Project Us forms part of Concern's public engagement programme aimed at raising awareness of and motivating action around the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Through this programme Concern Worldwide wishes to connect with, drive awareness of and ideally inspire action on the SDGs with three key audiences:

Community	Private Sector	Decision makers and influencers

To date, 2032 individuals have taken part in Project Us café conversations. This draft report presents the conclusions of a series of public world café conversations run during 2018 and 2019 at locations around the island of Ireland to increase awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Project Us World Café Methodology

Project Us uses the World Café methodology, which is a simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue. World Cafés can be altered to meet a wide variety of needs. Specifics of context, numbers, purpose, location, and other circumstances are factored into each event's unique invitation, design, and question choice, with the following five components comprising the basic model:

1
Setting

Create a "special" environment, modelled after a café, i.e. small round tables covered with a paper tablecloth, coloured markers, a vase of flowers, refreshments and Global Goals materials. There should be four or five chairs at each table.

2
Welcome and Introduction

The facilitator begins with a warm welcome and an introduction to the Global Goals, the World Café process, setting the context, sharing the Cafe Etiquette, and putting participants at ease.

3
Small-Group Rounds

The process begins with the first of three twenty-minute rounds of conversation for small groups of four or five people seated around a table. Each participant is encouraged to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths. At the end of the twenty minutes, each member of the group moves to a different new table. They may or may not choose to leave one person as the "table host" for the next round, who welcomes the next group and briefly fills them in on what happened in the previous round.

4
Questions

Each round is prefaced with a question specially crafted for the specific context and desired purpose of the World Café. The same questions can be used for more than one round, or they may build upon each other to focus the conversation or guide its direction. After the small groups (and/or in between rounds, as needed), individuals are invited to share insights or other results from their conversations with the rest of the large group.

5
Harvest

Each paper tablecloth is numbered and collected at the end of each round. All content – ideas, quotes, doodles and art work is documented, transcribed and collated. Participants are asked to compare their lists with the Global Goals, displayed at the front of the room. Each group is welcome to highlight those they matched up with. This is broadened into a discussion about why certain problems were or were not included as well as comparisons made with countries in the Global South.

Setting

Welcome and Introduction

Small-Group Rounds

Questions

Harvest
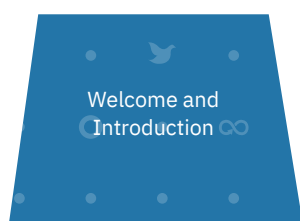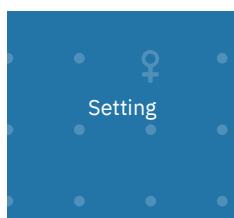
As part of the introduction at each Project Us Café we use a ranking activity to introduce the SDGs to the Café participants as well as providing an ice breaker. Participants are asked to collectively select the three SDGs they think are most important. The Goals begin with Goal 1 – No Poverty, to mark the continuation of the MDGs ambition to eliminate extreme poverty and end with Goal 17 – Partnerships for the Goals - to emphasise a continued commitment to work together in order to achieve progress for all. The order of the other goals does not signify any priority as all are critical and interdependent.

For groups who may be somewhat familiar with the Global Goals, the Project Us facilitator will use another variation of this activity - 'What are some of the biggest problems faced by people in your community today?' Individually and in pairs, participants try and identify some of the biggest problems facing their community. Participants are asked to compare their lists with the Global Goals, displayed at the front of the room. Each group is welcome to highlight those they matched up with. This is broadened into a discussion about why certain problems were or were not included as well as comparisons made with countries in the Global South.

A simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting large group dialogue.

2,032

To date, 2032 individuals have taken part in Project Us café conversations

Left: Participants at Project Us Café Cork, January, 2018
Right: Participants at Project Us Café with Age Action, October 2019

Report Overview

The purpose of this report is to share what people all around the country have discussed. While the individual community meetings focused on a single SDG or SDG related theme, inevitably discussions reflected the interconnectedness between the different themes. As such, the report presents the feedback according to the SDG goal, not by individual meeting.

In each section, for each SDG reviewed, the main goal and sub goals are presented to enable potential linkages between the goals/sub goals and the views of participants to be identified.

This report, which is based on a more detailed report of the community-based discussions, summarises the main considerations, concerns and conclusions of over 1000 participants in the first year of the project. In each of the following sections, understandings of what a selection of the SDGs mean to an audience in Ireland are presented followed by the participants' construction of an agenda.

1,000
**participants
in the first year**

Project Us Café Cork, with Lord Mayor Tony Fitzgerald, January 2018
Project Us at The Global Green at Electric Picnic, 2019

Project Us Café with Waterford One World Centre, March 2018
Project Us Café with Age Action Ireland, October 2019

1 NO POVERTY

No Poverty

Q.

WHAT IS SDG 1 – NO POVERTY?

A.

How poverty is experienced in different countries is inevitably going to vary widely. For this reason, SDG 1 – No Poverty is quite specific in describing its objectives in a way that is relevant to each, specific country context. For example, it speaks of reducing the proportion of people in poverty, 'according to national definitions' and of implementing 'nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures'. However, as will be shown, many of the experiences of poverty for people all over the world share common routes and produce similar impacts.

The root causes of poverty

Taking contextual caveats into account Project Us participants described what they considered to be the root causes of poverty. What is most significant from their analysis is the emphasis of structural and societal factors. In particular, they spoke of the '**vicious cycle' of poverty** and of inequality and widening gaps in wealth, not least as a result of recession related debt, the increasingly precarious nature of work and the added poverty burden that falls on women.

They also pointed to the **link between homelessness and poverty** and to the consequences of not having access to quality services. Beyond this, the **role of 'class prejudice and stereotypes'** were also noted, leading to a situation where the poor end up being blamed for their own poverty. [Add something about the Moral Underclass Discourse].

While described in an Irish context, many of these understandings can be seen to be of no small relevance in many other parts of the world.

The impacts of poverty

Just as the SDGs themselves are universal, so too, according to the Project Us participants, are many of the impacts of poverty! Apart from the lack of material resources, poverty causes a '**lack of opportunities'** and results in people 'being unable to access the basic elements necessary to sustain life'. People also spoke of the experience of 'being trapped in poverty' and the 'lack of respect' that it produces. It generates a culture of its own, one where those trapped in it may feel like they 'do not belong'. Ultimately, at the core of the experience of poverty is 'powerlessness', 'no access to decision making' and 'invisibility'.

The fact that **poverty is not static** was also highlighted, it is intergenerational, emphasising how difficult it can be for those born in poverty to escape from it. The impact of poverty can also be experienced in different ways in different places. For example, poverty in rural areas was seen as different from that encountered in urban areas.

Of course, the Project Us participants did recognise there were **differences between the poverty in Ireland and in the Global South**. The presence of greater wealth in Irish society, the existence of a social protection system, the presence of basic amenities, less conflict, less corruption and a more effective justice system were all noted. Looking to the future, the likely greater impact of climate change on those in the Global South, and especially on those who are poor, was named across many different discussions.

Q. How can we achieve SDG 1 – No poverty

A. **Project Us** participants produced a comprehensive and ambitious set of responses when asked how poverty could be addressed. Their framework for action included:

Income / economic aspects,
To address income poverty, it was suggested that a form of 'minimum income to remove poverty traps' or a 'basic income' scheme was needed. Alongside these elements means to 'incentivise people to work their way out of poverty' were proposed, though not specified in detail. For those in the workforce, the gendered aspects of poverty were recognised in a call for equality in pay and allowances as well as in an end to precarious work, including 'no zero hours contracts'.

Providing permanent shelter for all
Not surprisingly, the issue of shelter was high on the list of priorities. Greater investment in social and affordable housing, including the removal of loopholes for developers was a recurring theme. For others rent control and an end to segregated housing and eliminating 'ghettoization' were priorities. Crucially though, the provision of shelter was not just seen as only about providing a roof over people's heads, but also requires 'facilities to empower health, growth and development'.

Community Development
Building on the theme of empowering health, growth and development, participants highlighted the need to pay greater attention to building communities and not just individualised resilience. They also emphasised the need for strong and inclusive communities where greater interaction between people is the norm, not the exception.

Adjusting attitudes and choices
A less tangible but no less important need to change attitudes and dispositions emerged in a number of the discussions, including a society wide need for more sustainable and ethical consumption, on the basis that excess consumption by some means that others will inevitably have too little. **Project Us** participants challenged all of us to 'examine our own conscience'.

Self-sufficiency and energy
Emphasising that addressing poverty has to be seen as a long term and sustainable process, participants proposed that greater attention has to be given to developing capacity for self-sufficiency, for example, by enabling access to allotments; teaching skills in crafts and food cultivation; and increasing readiness to deal with setbacks. Here again, many people stressed the importance of putting 'climate change and development at the heart of all we do' as a key component of efforts to address poverty in a sustainable way.

Institutional Development
Finally, a number of suggestions about how state institutions could respond to the challenge of poverty elimination were offered, including a need for greater co-ordination across government departments. A more challenging proposal to allocate greater power to address poverty at the regional and local level was also made.

SDG 2
Zero Hunger

Q.

WHAT IS SDG 2 – ZERO HUNGER?

A.

SDG 2 aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. In particular it aims to 'end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round'. As with the No Poverty goal, this too is inevitably very context specific. However, as ongoing discussions on the role of agriculture in Ireland continue to show, is more than a little relevant.

What are the causes of hunger?

There are clearly multiple answers to the question of what causes hunger. For **Project Us** participants the causes identified spanned a spectrum of how and what food is produced, factors that impact on the ability to produce food, the cost to consumers of food, how we use food and how it is marketed.

How we produce food and what food is produced emerged as significant concerns. Here, what the Global North consumes is seen as having potentially negative impacts on people in the Global South. The carbon footprint of trendy, healthy foods is causing global problems according to a number of participants, allied with the use of land to grow produce for export, and in the process reducing the land available for production of food for local consumption.

Taking account of the fact that SDG 2 is not just concerned with how food is produced but also its nutritional value, the **question of what is produced** also exercised the minds of participants. 'Unrealistic expectation of food standards' and the pressure to produce food that conforms to narrow expectations of the perfect product, and the rejection of the imperfect - 'bendy bananas and ugly carrots' - were considered needless and contributing to food waste. There was much criticism of the production of foods with a high sugar content, of the 'chips with everything' society, of excess 'reliance on meat in a developed nation' and on the production of more cheaply produced food that is 'not nutrient dense'.

The continued reliance on food that is less nutritionally valuable, it was suggested, cannot be separated from **how food is marketed** and from the 'misrepresentation of health foods', especially in wealthier countries like Ireland. For one participant much food advertising, especially directed towards young people, was seen as 'brain washing young children' especially towards the consumption of fast food. Of course, life style pressures decorate the flipside of this coin where busy families and tired parents often 'do not have the time to make nutritious meals' and instead resort to less healthy, convenient options.

Unquestionably, in some countries, the existence of hunger is **inextricably linked to climate and/or natural disasters**. 'Natural tragedies such as flooding', the weather, pests and, by contrast, increased use of pesticides due to the homogenisation of seed types are seemingly recurring factors, likely to be exacerbated by the unfolding influences of climate change.

Finally, **the cost of food** was identified as amongst the most significant causes of hunger, with healthier foods frequently costing more and the prices of everyday foods being needlessly inflated by profit seeking companies.

Q. How can we achieve SDG 2 – Zero Hunger?

A. While the analysis of the causes of hunger was more global in nature, discussions on how to eliminate hunger generated responses that primarily focused on how to address the issue in Ireland.

A variety of proposals to **change public policy on food and the ability to access it** were made. Many of these involved stronger controls and regulation of the food industry, including an 'increase in taxation on wealthier companies' a percentage of which should be given to charity. For some, greater regulation of food prices was the answer while, for others, adjustments in the nature of welfare provision and the introduction of a fair living wage were necessary. In particular, increasing the sugar tax and reducing the cost of health food were options to be considered. At a more global level, renegotiation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and a greater effort by 'big countries to help developing countries' and associated fair trade policies were all important elements in achieving 'Zero Hunger'.

Also containing a public policy component were **proposals to address the distinct needs of vulnerable groups**. 'Improving mental health services' and the provision of 'more homeless shelters' offer the potential to address hunger that can arise as a by-product of other life experiences. In the same way, the needs of drug addicts were highlighted, leading one participant to reiterate, 'they are people and, in many cases, have families to feed'.

Beyond public policy responses, there was a visible emphasis on **individual responsibility and individual action**. According to **Project Us** participants, more people should not just 'talk it' but should 'walk it', by improving the quality of the food they eat; sourcing more local food; adopt 'sustainable practices' and crucially, make personal decisions about the 'ethical consumption of foods', recognising both the financial and environmental implication of the food related decisions that we make.

In order to inform such individual responsibility, the need for **increased knowledge about food** was underlined, 'Ensuring that children, students, adults are knowledgeable on nourishment and how to sustain health and food'. In particular, it was suggested that low income families should be targeted to address the false convenience of low nutrition food.

Here, chefs were identified as a group that can play a particular role, one suggestion being that chefs can 'champion their allotments/growing efforts/ kitchen gardens and present them as the core of a dish to encourage people knowing where food comes from and have a better expectation for real food'.

Alongside knowledge of food production and nutrition and a central component of individual responsibility, **greater knowledge and action about how we waste food** is essential. Here solutions ranging from people cooking 'what you know you are going to eat' to 'businesses donating food at the end of each day' to stopping disposing of good 'in date' foods were advocated by **Project Us** participants.

Chefs, again, were also identified as champions in the battle to reduce food waste, by showing people how to use parts of plants that might otherwise be discarded and by highlighting sustainable, seasonably based cooking practices.

Last, but most certainly not least, **the fundamental role of environmental action** to address hunger was highlighted, in Ireland and globally. Efforts to reduce the impact of climate change were seen as essential to slow or stop the 'destruction of fertile lands'. Taking steps to 'save the bees' and to 'protect pollination' were equally vital as were broader efforts toward conservation and 'reducing over consumption of living resources'. In the words of one participant, we need to 'Embrace biodiversity in crops, soil saving, seed heritage, diversity, and focusing on greener varieties that can withstand different local growing conditions, thus don't require as much energy to grow.'

SDG 4
Quality Education

What gets in the way of a quality education?

Project Us participants identified several issues that may inhibit the achievement of a good quality education. These fall into three main categories: the broader social, economic and political environment; lack of resources and the internal, more education specific, environment.

The External environment

In the external environment the presence of persistent or sporadic **conflict** inevitably intervenes to obstruct access to education. However, even where outright conflict is not present, the absence of a safe environment for learning can inhibit children's ability to attend school. This very often will have a distinct gender dimension.

Participants also identified the fact that in some countries children being involved in **family based or non family based paid labour** means that they cannot attend school.

Poor transport in rural areas also means that getting to and from school can be a huge challenge, either necessitating extended journey times or not being able to attend at all. Participants however recognised that there was an 'easier commute in Ireland'.

Extending the discussions in SDG 1 and 2, the presence of Hunger and Poverty were hugely significant inhibitors of access to education as was the existence of broader inequality in society.

Resources

Inadequate resources or the non-availability of resources was a recurring issue in the discussion on education, though it was recognised that while this is an issue in Ireland it is of a different scale to countries in the Global South. The key infrastructure constraints identified included resources for school buildings and equipment, facilities for physical education and, in some cases, basic sanitation facilities. Alongside these, the lack of resources for learning materials, including books and technology were considered to impede the provision of quality education.

Internal environment

Finally, a number of issues within the education sphere were also identified. Prominent amongst these was the issue of **poorly qualified teachers**, most especially in the Global South. Along with this a shared concern was the persistence of poor student-teacher ratios and its inevitable impact on the quality of teaching.

Approaches to teaching and to education more broadly were also seen as potentially problematic. Rote learning, narrow assessment approaches, a narrow subject focus, an absence of focus on critical thinking and an excess of focus on academic as opposed to practical subjects were all seen as diminishing the quality of education offerings.

Q.

WHAT IS SDG 4 – QUALITY EDUCATION?

A.

SDG 4 aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life long learning'. The goal not only seeks to ensure access to education but also that all girls and boys 'complete' their primary and second level schooling. It also has a clear focus on gender equality and on the rights of people with a disability within education.

Q. How can we achieve SDG 4 – Quality Education

A. There should be **appropriate and balanced curricula and education content**, including basic literacy, numeracy and physical learning. It was suggested that all subjects e.g. STEM and typical arts subjects should be equally emphasised and 'taught at an equal standard' and that there should be a move away from 'rote' learning. Fostering creativity and mindfulness was also considered important as was the inclusion of good quality sex education in schools.

There needs to be a renewed approach to teaching and teaching quality. Here, the need for teachers to encourage creativity and critical thinking were highlighted. It was also felt that there should be capacity to develop both 'academic and practical' skills and that the testing of these skills should capture a variety of student attributes, including the ability to work in groups. Different forms of intelligence, both cognitive and emotional, should also be valued, as should the development of the 'character' of the student. In all instances, especially in the Global South, there is a basic requirement for 'qualified and quality teachers' and for the ongoing professional development of educators.

In order to produce good quality education outcomes **Project Us** participants felt that high quality inputs of resources and facilities were needed. Good school buildings, with access to electricity, furniture, books, learning materials and, where appropriate, technology, were all seen as fundamental building blocks. Where necessary, students should also receive food so that hunger doesn't act as an impediment to learning.

Equality and inclusion also featured prominently in discussions, with calls for the achievement of gender equality, the elimination of sexism and racism and a strong focus on ensuring that disability and poverty do not inhibit education access and education outcomes. In the words of one participant: 'Equal education opportunities means that discrimination based on race/gender/religion/sexualities will be eliminated from education and the workplace'. It was proposed that these core values should exist across all levels of education and should be supported with scholarships, recognition of prior student knowledge and measures to incentivise parents, where required.

The role of non formal education as a means of challenging educational inequality was discussed, especially the role of community based learning and youth work. Youth work in particular complements the formal education sector by acting as a 'source of advice and information for young people' and in challenging behaviours that enable inequality to persist. Youth work can also help, it was suggested, to strengthen the 'voice of a young person in their school' and should 'work together with local schools'.

Finally, the **creation of a more 'education friendly environment'** is required, emphasising yet again the highly integrated nature of the SDGs. In order for there to be better education, **Project Us** participants highlighted the need to ensure that there are 'safe and secure learning environments' and that conflict is reduced. To ensure that children are not kept out of school as a result of having to work, it was suggested that 'more laws and regulations need to be put in place' especially to encourage girls to attend. The provision of 'compensation for parents who rely on income from child labour' was also proposed. Better communications and transport infrastructure for people in rural areas was also necessary.

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Q.

Gender Equality

WHAT IS SDG 5 – GENDER EQUALITY?

What would gender equality look like

Project Us participants had a lot to say about what a gender equal world would look like.

In the first instance it was asserted that **gender equality must be seen as a right**, something that is deserved not something that is in some way a concession from those in powerful positions or something that has to be earned. It is a right that will allow all children to 'have equal choices to follow their dreams.
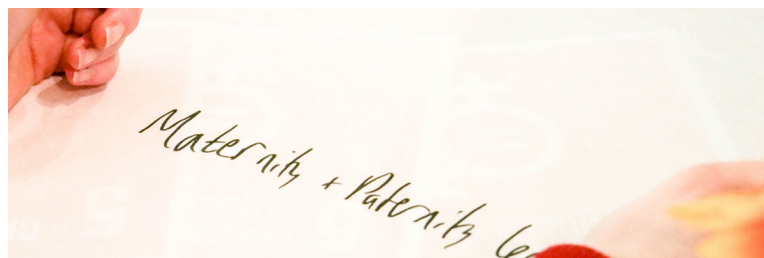
Achieving general equality **requires changing of mindsets**. Ending pre-determined expectations is one such mindset shift named by participants. Once achieved no one would be 'boxed into roles' associated with their gender, people would be allowed to be themselves and that women would be 'valued for more than how they look'. Young boys and girls could grow up 'believing and knowing that they can study and work in any profession'.

It would also mean a world where men are automatically seen as 'strong and passionate' and women are not seen as 'overemotional'.

A.

In more practical terms **gender equality means economic equality**. It requires *'equal recognition of and pay for both domestic and external labour'* and the presence of equal pay for the same job. No pay gaps based on gender inequality would be acceptable and both male and female roles would be seen as *'valuable to the economy'*.

SDG 5 aims to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In particular, it seeks to end 'all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere' and to ensure women's full participation and leadership in decision making in political, economic and public life.

Shared equality in leadership roles is named by SDG 5 and was also emphasised by **Project Us** participants. As described by one person, 'Gender equality is equal opportunities for roles of power'. It would see more women politicians and a smashing of glass ceilings. It would also mean that women are not denied a job 'because they want to start a family' and would instead see increased provision of 'men's paternity leave'. Once achieved, there would be 'no need for quotas'.

Ultimately, it was suggested, achieving the goal of gender equality would produce a state of **mutual well-being**, where all could be allowed to be individuals, where girls would be seen to be just as valuable as boys in 'developing countries'. Mutual well being would result from the ability to exercise choice, where options would not be 'closed off based on gender'.

Q. How can we achieve SDG 5 – Gender Equality?

A. Several routes and related actions to achieve gender equality were named by **Project Us** participants. Some of these involve 'soft' change through attitudinal adjustments and efforts in the education sphere. However, most require changes that are more 'hardwired' into political and economic systems through policy, legislation and judicial action.

Participants identified a **whole series of mindset adjustments** that could be achieved through education and other means. In **education**, gender stereotypes should be more overtly challenged, possibly through dedicated modules on gender and global development. School curricula and reading lists should also be revised so as to address the way 'women have been airbrushed from history'. It was considered important that students should learn about inequalities so '*we can take action*' on the basis that '*education leads to choice which leads to freedom*'.

Beyond education, **broader attitudinal change** can be promoted by more frequent recognition of 'women's achievements in the media', by advocacy and civil society actions, through the media, including direct advertisement and gender equality information campaigns.
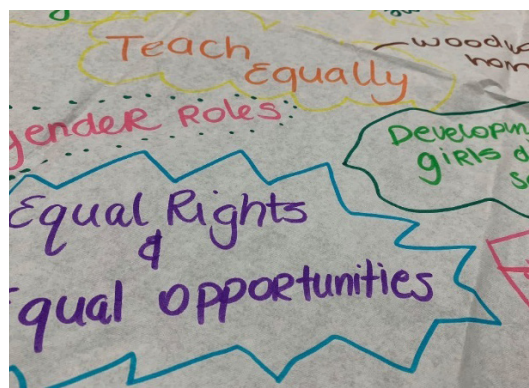
Gender equality can also be achieved **through economic actions**, according to the participants. Ways of encouraging women into Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) careers will be needed alongside ways to encourage '*both*' genders to participate across all fields, regardless of gender. In the workplace, incentives could also be offered to employers to increase female representation in leadership positions. All jobs and roles should be equally valued

The burden of caring that so often falls on women should also be eased by making 'women carers financially independent'. Finally, and more specifically, there should be 'no more luxury tax on sanitary products'.

It was of course recognised that adjusting mindsets is a slow process so **more immediate, hardwired measures** are also needed. **Positive change in the world of politics** can be brought about using quotas and by more conscious inclusion of women in leadership roles. All countries should also have legislative provision that would outlaw gender discrimination and, as in Ireland, where the constitution proposes a narrow and specific role for women, this should be challenged.

The courts too have a role to play in ensuring gender equality. It was proposed that there be '*harsh sentencing for sexual assault*' and that the overall system of justice and how it treats sexual assault / rape survivors should be overhauled. Support systems for victims of abuse should also be greatly improved.

Finally, **Project Us** participants suggested that equality could be promoted through a focus on the home and how it is supported and structured. A less gendered system of 'parental leave' could replace maternity or paternity leave and could be equally available to men and women. Denmark was also cited as a country where pensions are provided for 'people working at home caring for children'. This model could be replicated elsewhere.

13 CLIMATE ACTION

SDG 13
Climate Action

Q.

WHAT IS SDG 13 – CLIMATE ACTION?

A.

SDG 13 aims to combat climate change and its impacts, by strengthening 'resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards, by integrating climate change measures into national policies and by improving education and awareness raising on how the effects of climate change can be mitigated.'

How Project Us participants view and understand climate change

The participants that discussed the Climate Action goal named the impacts that were being experienced as a result of climate change, those that directly affected humans, the impacts on biodiversity and on changing weather patterns.

It was recognised that **climate change is not something that will be experienced in the future, it is being experienced by people now**, albeit with different levels of intensity. More immediate examples are the effects in the form of increased incidences of illnesses such as asthma, increased occurrences and severity of wildfires in California (and Australia), and the actual changes being felt by coastal communities and, in some cases, in entire low lying countries such as the Maldives and Pacific Island States. It was clearly stated that it is the younger generation that will have to deal with these effects whereas it was their '*ancestors and parents that did the most damage*'.

The **differing impacts experienced by different people** was also highlighted, especially the increased consequences for the poor and vulnerable. In this regard, the gendered nature of climate change impacts were also discussed. Given that women 'are more likely to experience poverty and have less socio economic power than men' their ability to recover from climate related shocks was going to be impaired. As a result, it was proposed that women were not sufficiently involved in decision making about climate change responses.

Of course, the impacts of climate change on **biodiversity** have been widely publicised and also proved to be of no small concern for **Project Us** participants. Habitat destruction, declining numbers of animal and plant species, changes in eco systems, desertification, the impacts on coral reefs were all issues that were widely discussed, leading one person to express a fear that, eventually, the 'planet will be too dangerous for people and wildlife', while another highlighted how our 'relationship with water' was changing.

Finally, the impact on weather was noted, especially an increase in 'extreme' and 'unpredictable' weather events, including drought, famine and floods.

Q. How can we address SDG 13 – Climate Action?

A. **Project Us** participants set out a comprehensive agenda of responses to the challenge of climate change, identifying a series of national policy changes, technology, collective and individual actions.

At a **national policy** level, while the current nature of 'short sighted political cycles' was criticised a number of specific proposals were offered:

— Introduce and implement regulations and legislation, including a higher carbon tax
— Invest in sustainable energy research
— Provide better grants for solar panels and electric cars
— Educate people about development goals and make climate action education compulsory
— Improve public transport
— Invest in more renewable energy
— 'Don't just put the responsibility on the individual, instead support political groups that will heavily regulate massive corporations that drastically drive climate change'.

However, the role of **individual action** was also acknowledged. One participant asked, 'What do we need to do for people to take this seriously'? It was suggested that all of us need to change to embrace a 'more efficient and sustainable way of life', including reducing our energy consumption, eliminating single use plastic bottles and taking more responsibility to educate the younger generation. As commented by another participant 'it's a long-term problem with no short term solutions, so people get impatient. They think others are solving the problem, so they don't have to'!
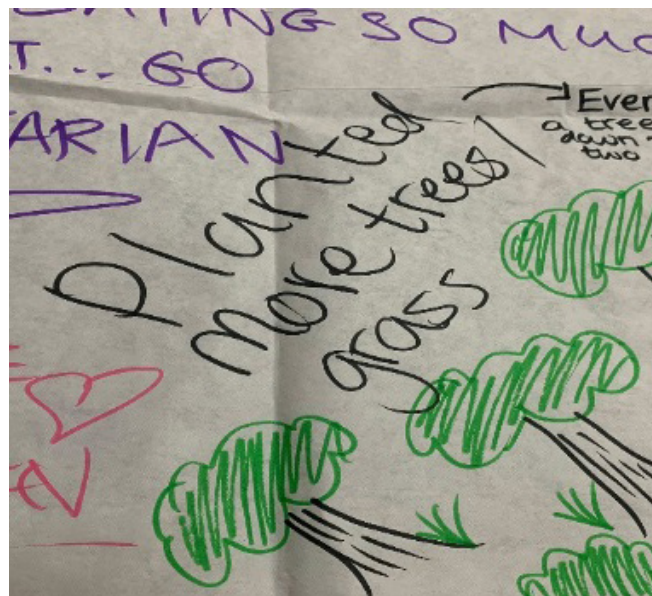
The importance of **collective action** was also stressed, in particular the need to reconnect with those around us and to develop and share common strategies. 'We don't know our neighbours, our community', one person commented. Related to this another suggested that we need to establish a 'conversation in society' and to take a 'definitive, active stance in solidarity', especially in the face of 'relatively inactive government regulation'. Ways to get more involved were offered, getting involved in tree planting; car pooling; 'establishing or joining a community owned renewable energy project'; 'becoming active in climate strikes'. Collective consumer pressure was also seen as a way of bringing about change, the suggestion from one person being that 'if it doesn't present a financial benefit, corporations won't be on board'!

Finally, the **role of technology** was repeatedly emphasised **alongside** but not instead of the policy, individual and collective responses. Amongst the technology responses were the provision of solar panels for all buildings, not just new builds, more renewable energy sources (wind, tide and sun), and greater use of electric cars.
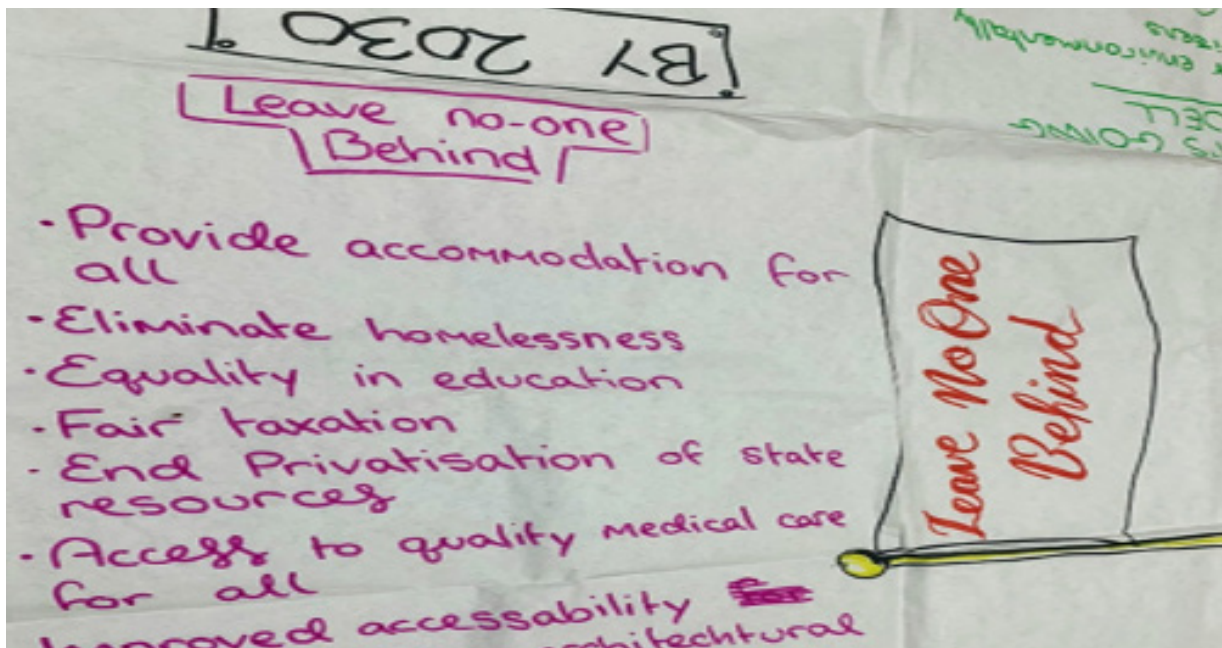
Left: Watching a VR Video at a Project Us Café

Right: Project Us Café with UCC International Development Society, February, 2020

Linking with other SDGs

During the different Project Us discussions, issues of relevance to some of the other SDGs were also discussed. These are briefly summarised below.

SDG 11
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Project Us participants identified five key components of a sustainable city / community. Not surprisingly providing housing for all, not just for those who can afford it, was a frequent call. Alongside this, improved public transport networks are needed so that people can reduce the number of journeys that they need to take in individual cars. Community buildings and facilities, including community gardens, are also required, to enable community identity to be built. Clear air was seen as especially important in an urban context where the potential for air pollution may be greater. Finally, clean energy is needed to build communities that are sustainable,

SDG 12
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

As described by one participant responsible consumption is 'a new movement which influences the behaviour of manufacturers, distributors and retailers and encourages decision makers to adopt policies that protect the environment and the rights of citizens'. It is based on all of us thinking about what we buy, how we use and reuse and ultimately, 'how we dispose of our purchases'. And while challenging, addressing this SDG, it was suggested, brings with it potential to save money, produce less waste, maintain natural habitats, create new and innovative job opportunities and reduce water pollution.

SDG 16
Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Many of the earlier sections have commented on the necessity to build more inclusive societies and communities. **Project Us** participants proposed that this could be done in a number of ways:

— enabling stronger engagement between people and between people and the state - 'more engagement, less prejudice'.
— Creating safe spaces for dialogue, especially for young people
— Enhance education on empathy, understanding, identity and not 'othering'
— Create and support a strong civil society
— Building in transparency and the protection of minorities into systems of law

Lizzy Noone visits Project Us at The Global Green at Electric Picnic, 2019
Concern Staff and Volunteers at the Project Us Tent, Africa Day, 2018

Recommendations and next steps

Participants in the Project Us world café conversations came up with numerous concrete suggestions for change as described under each Goal in this report. It is our hope that relevant Government departments, civic society, partners, individuals and the private sector take these concrete suggestions on board and look at ways to implement them.

In addition, there was resounding feedback from participants on the need for a whole of Government approach to achieving the Agenda 2030 goals and for Ireland to take leadership on this in the global arena. Based on this, our Project Us recommendations are:

1 Place the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of government by ensuring that all government departments include a specific SDG section when renewing their three-year departmental strategy statements and report directly on SDG outcomes and actions each year in their annual reports.

2 All government departments, local authorities and state agencies should be encouraged to select and highlight at least two of the goals, which they will champion and devote particular attention to. These should be prominently highlighted on their websites.

3 The Irish government should ensure that targeted interventions to reduce inequality, in all its forms, here at home and through our Aid programme overseas, are reaching those left furthest behind first.

4 All local authorities should have a specific section on how they will contribute to the SDGs in their three-year corporate plans and report directly on SDG outcomes and actions each year in their annual reports.

5 Ireland should be seen as a model of best practice globally in integrating and reporting on the SDGs and should more actively develop the SDG Geohive hub to ensure the easy availability of quality data and reports for all SDGs. The SDG hub should also be used to promote awareness amongst the public, business, politicians and public officials about the SDGs.

6 Ireland should become a global leader in our efforts to address the climate crises by going beyond 'short sighted political cycles' at local, national and international level through progressive legislation and policy measures.

The next steps for Project Us are as follows:

> **To present this report and the recommendations to our Government partners, Irish Aid, and discuss with them how Concern can continue to support Agenda 2030 and how Irish Aid will drive forward Agenda 2030 as part of Ireland's overseas aid programme**

> **To deliver this report to An Taoiseach and all Government Departments**

> **To share this report and its recommendations widely through digital and traditional media**

In tandem with this community work, Concern is also engaging with the private sector with our **Global Goals Business Conversations project**, also supported by Irish Aid. If you know a business that wants to support the United Nations Global Goals please ask them to **contact us**.

To keep up to date with Project Us developments please join our Facebook Group, follow us on Twitter or check out latest news on our website **www.concern.net**

We are still running Project Us world café conversations. If you would like us to facilitate a conversation for your community group please contact: **projectus@concern.net**

Our thanks to all of the Project Us participants for their time, energy and ideas, to Dr Chris McInerney in the University of Limerick and to Irish Aid without whose support Project Us would not be possible.

Appendix 1

What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 with the core aims of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring 'that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030'[1]. The 17 goals are not meant to be seen in isolation but are intended to be '**integrated**' so that the interconnections between them become more visible.

1 NO POVERTY	2 ZERO HUNGER	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION	14 LIFE BELOW WATER	15 LIFE ON LAND	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring 'that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030'

1.   https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html

Appendix 2

List of organisations that have participated in Project Us world café conversations

Age Action
Age International
Agents of Change, Concern Worldwide
Chefs Network Ireland
ChangeMakers Donegal
Cork Environmental Forum
Cork Life Centre
Development Perspectives
Dromahane Foroige Youth Club
Galway Comhairle na nÓg
Global Green at Electric Picnic
Greystones Tidy Towns
The Chefs' Manifesto, GROW HQ
Gurranabraher Community and Youth Centre
Imagine Belfast Festival
Irish Country Women's Association
Kantar Worldpanel
Kinvara Youth Council
Limerick Youth Service
Loreto Secondary School, Mullingar
Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy
Marian College
Men's Shed, Bridgefoot Street NALA
NUI Maynooth
Pavee Point
Pedal 8
One World Centre, Waterford
Sacred Heart Secondary School, Clonakilty
Scoil Mhuire, Corbally
SDG Youth Summit, NYCI
Sexual Violence Centre SOLAS
Theatre for Change Galway
Integration and Support Unit, Waterford SpunOut
St Colmcilles Primary School
Sustainable Moms Wicklow
Trinity College Dublin Environmental Society
TY Academy at Concern Worldwide
UCC International Development Society
UCC Politics Society
UCC Youth and Community
Woodbrook College, Bray
Youth Work Ireland Galway

Strategic and effective public engagement moves beyond the realms of accountability and mere awareness towards deliberation, dialogue and action at individual, community or state level.

project **us**