

Engaging with the UN Sustainable Development Goals Workshop

Report of the workshop held on 26th March 2019 at Moray House, University of Edinburgh



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Introduction

In 2015 all United Nation member states signed up to 17 ambitious, universal Sustainable Development Goals. The aim of the SDGs is to encourage all countries to implement the necessary transformational environmental, economic and social change to achieve peace and prosperity for planet and people. Scottish Government was one of the first countries to sign up to the Goals and they now underpin the National Outcomes.

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.” UN 2015

How can the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) support us in our work?
How can we contribute to the delivery of the SDGs in Scotland and beyond?
In the context of the upcoming National Review of progress on the SDGs this workshop:

- offered a critical introduction to the emergence of the SDGs,
- captured case studies of relevant work underway and
- explored how Learning for Sustainability can help us appreciate the interconnectedness of the SDGs more widely.

Welcome

30 participants from diverse backgrounds including schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, NGOs and other contexts participated. The day began with networking introductions.

Emergence of the SDGs: the story so far – a reflection on challenges and opportunities

LfS Scotland Chair, Rehema White, described the emergence of the SDGs and then asked the participants what challenges they perceived. These and additional challenges were discussed and were also seen as opportunities: the large number of SDGs (illustrating the complexity of issues), the need to

integrate and demonstrate the interconnectedness of the SDGs, the need to engage private sector (which is leading on mapping tools and approaches), the difficulties of monitoring (which can support planning and evaluation and enable a learning cycle) and the importance of learning in underpinning all the SDGs.

Scotland's SDG Network

Paul Bradley was ill but Rehema spoke to his slides due to her participation in Scotland's SDG Network. The SDG Network emerged from the Rio then the Post-15 Group and is now an open, transparent and fluid network with a space on the internet – Basecamp. Anybody can join as an individual or on behalf of an organisation and membership has grown to over 200 members. The Network has been instrumental in galvanising discussion over policy and process in Scotland. A close partnership with Scottish Government has developed. Most recently the SDG Network responded to DfID consultations and collated engagement from Scotland over the UK's Voluntary National Review (VNR). A Working Group has led on this issue, planning to contribute to the UK report and to consider a shadow report. Contributions and comments are welcome.

<https://globalgoals.scot/sdg-national-review-2019/>

Learning for sustainability and the SDGs

Participants were invited to head for the SDG tile they felt most aligned with (apart from SDG 4 which all here consider). They were asked to discuss why this is important to them and look at the targets and indicators and discuss how LfS contributes to this area with the person next to them.. At tables with combinations of SDGs we asked: How are we currently addressing these SDGs with LfS? What could or should we be doing? How do we address individual indicators yet maintain a holistic view?

These group discussions over clusters of SDGs provoked interesting questions.

Group 1

- Discussed ongoing examples of projects in schools
- Explored how to engage parents from schools
- Talked about potential for the SDGs to stimulate community engagement
- Considered interconnectedness eg across inequalities and life on land – indigenous peoples facing greater inequalities because of loss of land; environmental refugees because of sea level rise; clean water supporting gender equality

Group 2

- Explored questions around goals of peace / zero hunger / no poverty / education
- Asking why the world is the way that it is critical for self reflection and active democracy
- We need curiosity to question values, not to always agree, but to share and discuss openly
- There are different qualities of institutions and access opportunities

Group 3

- Explored responsible consumption / industry and innovation / renewable energy / education
- Talked about oil and energy links
- Who is responsible for responsible consumption? Individuals, institutions, society?
- Some people have more choices than others

Group 4

- Explored partnership / climate change / wellbeing / sustainable communities and cities / education
- Talked about process – some goals are a way to achieve others eg partnership, possibly education
- As individuals can do small short term things but for longer term and bigger issues need partnerships

Case studies of ongoing work across sectors

- 1) Charlotte Dwyer of Scotdec described how they are producing resources to support school teachers in considering the SDGs. They have free resource packs for teachers at primary school and for scouts, and are developing kits for secondary schools. As a member of IDEAS they are working with LfS Scotland and the University of Edinburgh and Scotland Malawi partnership on the British Council Connecting Classrooms programme.
<http://www.scotdec.org.uk>
- 2) Scott Strachan of University of Strathclyde described the VIP (Vertical Integration Project) they have, in which students work across years and disciplines on projects addressing SDGs.
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/viprojects/>
- 3) Cait McCullagh from Herriot Watt University, discussed her PHD on co-curating heritage with community reminding us of the importance of culture, of long term changes over time and of dynamic responses, of the vulnerability and resilience of island communities.

Discussion and wrap up

Participants discussed in small groups what they wanted to action as a result of the workshop on personal, institutional and sectoral levels. In plenary, they asked from LfS Scotland in future:

- More workshops like this – good opportunities to share and consider
- More specific workshops as well
- Suggestions and support of partnerships to address the SDGs, especially across sectors eg universities and schools or communities

LfS Scotland has some examples of work online and links to additional events and activities in each monthly bulletin – see recent ones on this page and sign up

for the bulletin if you have not already done so!

<http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/bulletin-resources/>

Concluding remarks:

The SDGs are-

- *the latest contemporary framework;*
- *an impetus for action;*
- *an opportunity for critical thinking, discussion and active democracy.*

Whilst recognising the potential of the SDGs to leverage **practical action, measured changes and immediate responses**, we also need to remember the **aspirations** underpinning them, the fact that they are **value based** and that people will act more readily when they feel an **emotional connection** to them.