European Commission Learning & Development Hub for DEAR projects, Athens 26th – 27th April 2017: DEAR projects and the Sustainable Development Goals

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This report …

… provides a summary of discussions and outcomes of a workshop held with Development Education & Awareness Raising (DEAR) projects. The focus of the workshop was on learning from project experiences of engaging the public in development issues that would be useful in creating interest and involvement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The starting point was the projects' attempts at creating such involvement through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Contents

1.   Participants, projects and the format of the Hub

20 participants involved in four different European Commission supported projects took part in the event which took place during an early evening and a full day. Participants represented 18 different organisations and authorities from across the EU.

The four projects were the following:

EC no.	Project title (and main approach[1])	Lead organisation/local authority association
339-207	Eat Responsibly (Global Learning)	Glopolis, CZ
338-136	Fish Forward (Campaigning-Advocacy)	WWF Austria
338-500	The Future We Want – Local Authorities for Sustainable Development (Campaigning- Advocacy)	Climate Alliance, BE
352-248	Social & Solidarity Economy as a Development Approach to Sustainability (SSEDAS) (Global Learning)	COSPE, IT

The projects were implemented following the 2013 DEAR Call for Proposals and since then they have given explicit attention to (aspects of) the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and latterly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Hub explored how project experiences of engaging members of the public in the MDGs could give pointers to raising awareness and involvement of Europeans in the issues of the SDGs. The Hub used presentations by participants, group work and plenary discussions to get a sense of:

- approaches and experiences of projects in engaging Europeans;
- challenges faced by projects in doing this – and the techniques to address these challenges;
- opportunities to use DEAR in engaging members of the public in (the issues of) the SDGs;
- suggestions from participants to others aiming to involve Europeans in the SDGs.

2.   Engaging the public: what worked?

After short presentations about the intentions and approaches of each project[2], participants exchanged information and discussed the key successful engagement approaches used by each. Further discussion then highlighted commonalities between the successful approaches that had been used in engaging Europeans in (aspects of) the MDGs:

Engaging the public – approaches and activities successfully used across different projects
• Stories or face-to-face meetings that illustrate how (named) people are affected by an issue: "Statistics alone don't do it"
• Multi-country seminar-workshops (including with participants from the South) that jointly develop e.g. campaigns or education materials for use or adaptation in different countries of the project
• Development and distribution of exemplar or pro-forma materials that can be adapted to suit specific circumstances – e.g. for use by local authorities in addressing issues of sustainable development and climate change
• Design and dissemination of information and other tools that help for example consumers in becoming aware of the impact of (fish) consumption

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[1] For information on what each of these approaches usually entails, see the report on the EC-DEAR Exchange Hub 'Approaches that meet the EC's DEAR Objectives' (March 2017), available on www.europa.eu/capacity4dev/dear

[2] For details about each of the projects follow the hyperlinks shown in paragraph 1

• Getting buy-in or support from key decision makers in various locations in aspects of a project's objectives (e.g. getting mayors or local councils adopting or signing up to a common covenant or similar statement on climate action)
• Obtaining involvement of respected institutions in the actions and promotions of the project (e.g. universities)
• Local community hub development: collaborative work with different interest groups active at local levels

3.   Towards successful public engagement with the SDGs

The SDGs cover a wide range of global development themes and issues. Unlike the MDGs they are intended to be applied to countries and societies across the globe. The SDGs are therefore relevant to policies and behaviours in the EU as much as in countries and societies elsewhere in the world.


That 'universality' of the SDGs gives additional and different opportunities and challenges to DEAR projects and programmes. For organisations, such as Non-Governmental Development Organisations and for (inter-)governmental Development Cooperation departments, whose focus is traditionally on 'what happens over there' (i.e. in 'developing'/'Southern' countries) this may be particularly challenging: it challenges them to look more closely at, take account of and respond to social, economic, environmental, and political development in their own backyard.

To address such challenges successfully the participants in the Hub suggested the following as particularly pertinent:

➢ Integrate the *principles* of the SDGs into your work and approach at organisational/ governmental level, i.e. the principles that
   o the SDGs are *universal*: they are intended to apply to all decision makers, societies, people across the globe
   o the SDGs are *interconnected*: work in respect of one SDG should not be seen in isolation but instead should be seen and assessed against work on all other SDGs too
➢ Visualise *what is needed now* in order to get to achievement of all SDGs by 2030

- ➢ Be *targeted*: who are the key movers and shakers that should be involved or targeted to get the 'general public' engaged in the issues?
- ➢ Identify *how individual projects contribute* to specific SDGs and to the SDGs as a whole
- ➢ Assess how different *approaches, tools, methods, activities* that have been used can be used in work on the SDGs
- ➢ Build up *multi-stakeholder networks* (at local, national and international levels) involving groups and actors interested and active in different aspects of the SDGs
- ➢ Use and develop *opportunities at EU for learning and reflection* on experiences of engaging the public.
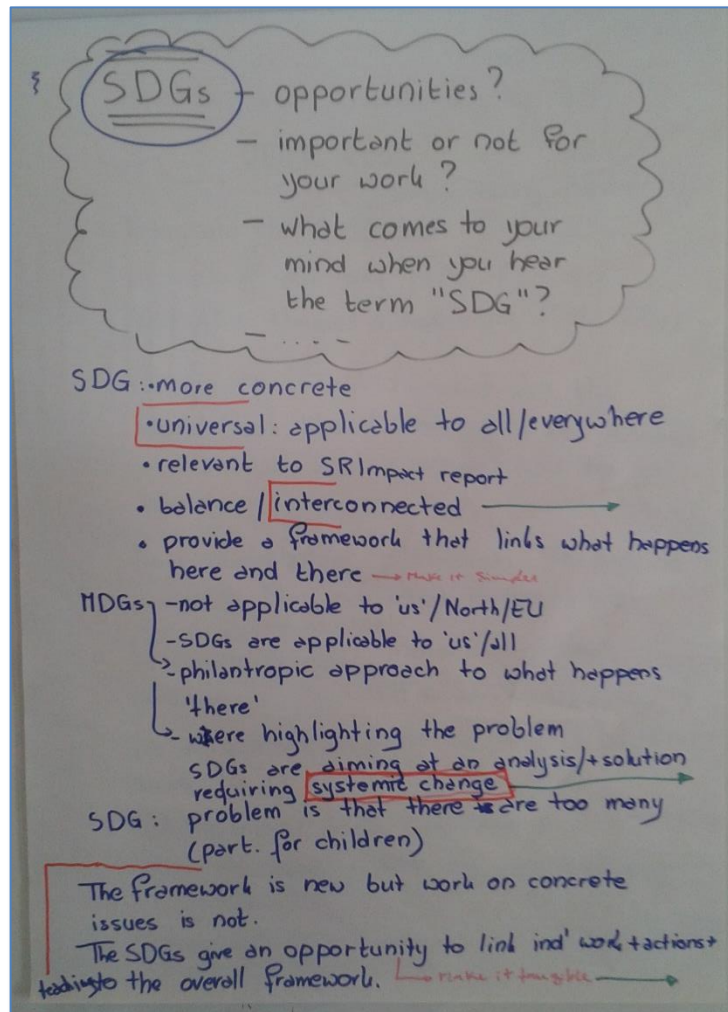
On the basis of their experiences participants suggested that the following approaches, tools and activities could assist in creating successful public engagement with the SDGs:

What makes success possible?
The approach:

o   Be aware and be upfront about why you are a credible organisation to raise this issue
   o   Research the interests and needs of your audience
   o   Understand the context(s) in which your project takes place: how will local, national or international issues and concerns affect the way in which your project is received and how can you adjust your approach to ensure it is received positively?
   o   Be adaptable to changing circumstances
   o   Be enthusiastic about making the change (in whatever issue you are addressing)

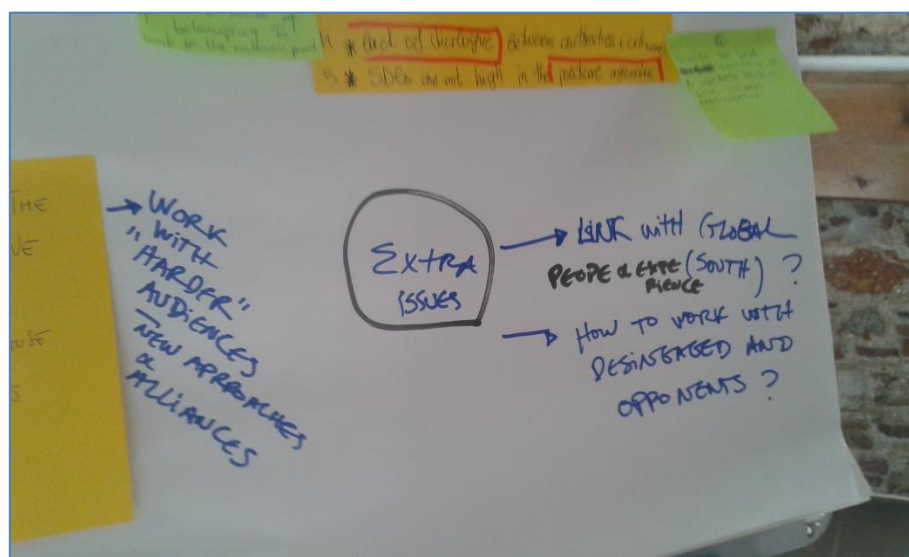| |
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| o Invest (a lot of) time to ensure that all project partners share and internalize project goals, objectives and approaches |
| **The message:** |
| o Find the 'hook' in the external context/environment that shows the relevance of your project and message |
| o Have a positive message: relevant to your (potential) supporters (no 'help these starving babies' messages) |
| o Have a positive message: don't say 'don't do this …' but say 'do this …' |
| o Use emotion but avoid moralizing |
| o Keep it simple |
| o Adjust your message to suit the interests/needs of your audience |
| o Be positive and personal: 'how will your solution/proposal make things better for person X (and Y)?' I.e. don't over-emphasize how badly person X or Y is affected by the issue – but show how things will improve for him/her as a result of success in your project. |
| o Focus on what can change today because of your supporters' help. Avoid over-emphasizing 'if we do this today than 20 years from now things will be better' |
| o Make the economic argument for advocating a change in behaviour |
| **The supporters/activists:** |
| o Facilitate meetings between your (potential) supporters and people affected by the issue |
| o Work with others: develop involvement in the project of different interest groups |
| o Be aware and make use of your supporters' interests, needs and expertise |
| o Develop your supporters' skills and understanding so they can take the message of your project further with their own contacts |
| **The medium:** |
| o Use channels of existing media and relate your project to the topics that are already in the (social, print, broadcast) media news |
| o Use social media to create a buzz |
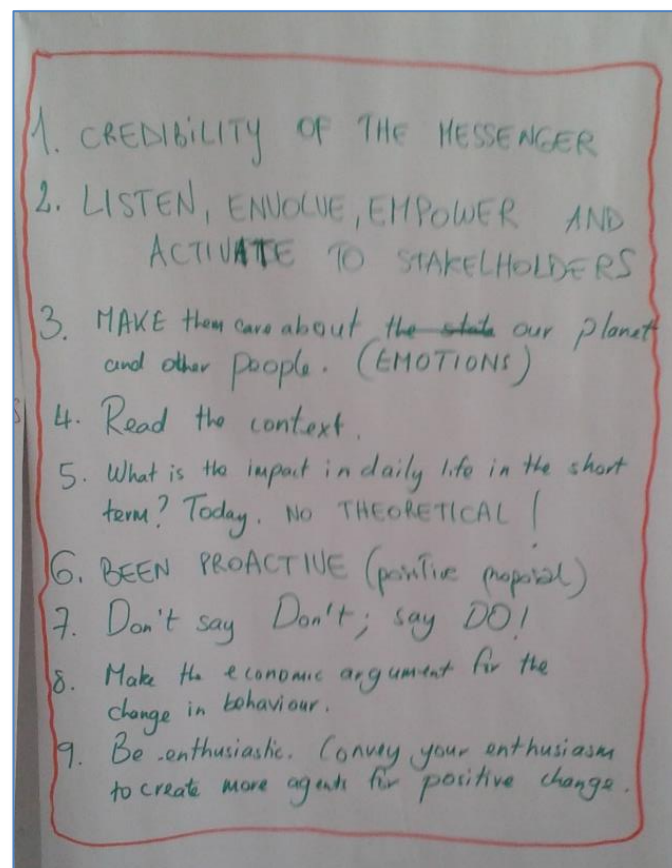
4.   Challenges - and overcoming them

Various other EC-DEAR project workshops have given attention to the challenges faced by DEAR projects.[3] This Hub identified the following as especially problematic for projects working on and with the SDGs.

Challenges	… and ways to overcome or mitigate them
▢ **No media interest in the project because it does not relate to current news or "it has nothing to say against the government"** ▢ **Communication about the SDGs risks being too general and not sufficiently focussed on everyday affairs** ▢ **SDGs are complicated to communicate** ▢ **The SDGs are not on the local or national political agenda and/or a long-term vision is missing from political debates**	Start with where people/the media/politics 'are at', i.e. with their interests and concerns and relate that to one or more of the SDGs: providing a sustainable development perspective and input to ongoing, current debates and interests. Involve local communities: with your project providing global perspectives and experiences to address locally experienced issues
▢ **Lack or absence of dialogue between local authorities and their own citizens**	Use your project's themes and local relevance as a means to stimulate and facilitate such dialogue
▢ **Fact based/root learning/'chalk and talk' school curriculum**	Provide sample lessons on how facts (as well as opinions) can be learned through active learning. Develop work with small groups of teachers interested in exploring how other
▢ **Different EU member states are at different levels of civil society organisation**	Share challenges, opportunities and lessons across organisations and countries in the EU. Lobby e.g. networks such as CONCORD (NGOs) and PLATFORMA (Local Authorities) and EU institutions such as DG DevCo, provide such capacity development and learning opportunities. Make and reserve time in your project to learn from other experiences.
▢ **Pick and choose approach: focussing only on the SDGs with which you/your organisation/LA feels comfortable while disregarding the rest**	In planning and M&E relate your projects to the whole SDG agenda and how it does or does not address other SDG themes and issues
• **Working with or counteracting the opponents of the project**	Understand their perspectives and arguments: identify how much their arguments are based on

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[3] Reports on these Hubs and other Cluster Meetings are posted on www.europa.eu/capacity4dev/dear

	realities; identify where they and you agree – and use that as a basis for further discussion; present counter-arguments within a framework that highlights the need for sustainable development;
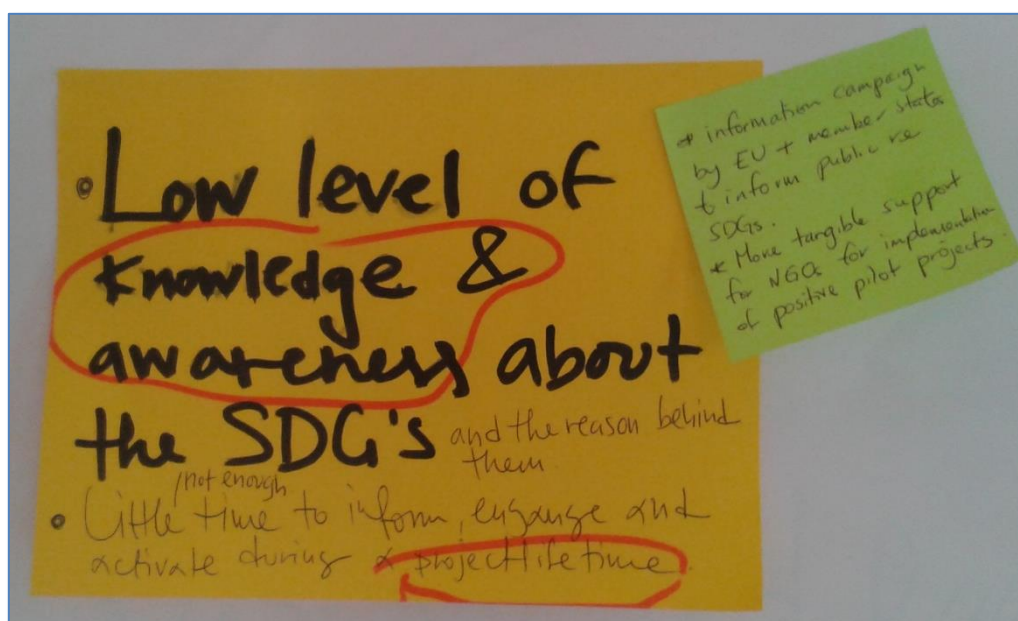
5.   Recommendations to DEAR projects and the Commission's DEAR programme

The final session of the Hub asked participants to reflect on the discussions that had taken place and to consider which recommendations they would make to other projects and to the European Commission in its dealings with the SDGs through DEAR. The following summarises these recommendations.

Recommendations to DEAR projects
• Take time to plan, involving all project partners: focus in the first year on planning

• In planning your project be specific on how you will relate to and introduce the SDGs:
   o partially, by focusing on one of the SDGs (but placing that one goal within the wider context of all the SDGs)
   o fully, by explicitly focusing on the universality and interconnectedness of all the SDGs
   o directly, by explicitly focusing on the SDGs and using that as your way into engagement with the public
   o indirectly, by using another theme or issue but then relating that to the SDGs

• Build your understanding of and perspectives on the SDGs and familiarise yourself with other perspectives on the SDGs: o based on your learning decide on how your project will address or contribute to the SDGs
• Explicitly build on and use successful activities and learning from previous work that is relevant to your new project
• Gather and use personal stories that communicate your project's interest in the SDGs
• Involve the public/your audience/participants in investigating and responding to the SDGs in their own way (don't only have predetermined actions which you have decided on and don't be primarily top-down in your approach to the public)
• Build contacts with other projects/organisations/LAs involved in (DEAR work on) the SDGs
• Take the long-term view but be explicit in how your current project contributes to the long-term vision
• Initiate your monitoring and evaluation system from the start

Recommendations to the Commission's DEAR programme
• Improve the timeframe for the development of proposals: the current time available for it is too short to develop meaningful partnerships and mutual understanding about a project
• Provide seed-funding for the development of proposals
• Based on existing project experiences, develop, provide and disseminate a 'tool bank' of activities and approaches that can be used by any project involved in DEAR work on the SDGs
• Collect and disseminate to DEAR projects the national action plans in response to the SDGs of all EU member states
• Analyse and disseminate the results of EC-DEAR projects and successful ways of engaging the public in the SDG issues
• Improve the project planning and monitoring system for it to become more results instead of activity orientated (e.g. in proposal and reporting requirements increase the attention on the achievements of projects and how those achievements relate to the SDGs, instead of focussing on activity reporting)
• Develop Commission own (DEAR) staff's understanding of and (face-to-face) contacts with DEAR projects
• Create face-to-face platforms for exchanges and mutual learning * between projects and * between projects and Commission DEAR staff
• Include opportunities for partnerships that do not depend on financial transactions
• Improve exchanges between and coordination of Commission and EU member state DEAR programmes and activities
• Become a multiplier for successful DEAR projects: e.g. in developing global/development cooperation policies take into account the results of DEAR projects that have been concerned with achieving policy change
• Improve the reporting requirements and forms by making them simpler and introduce paperless reporting
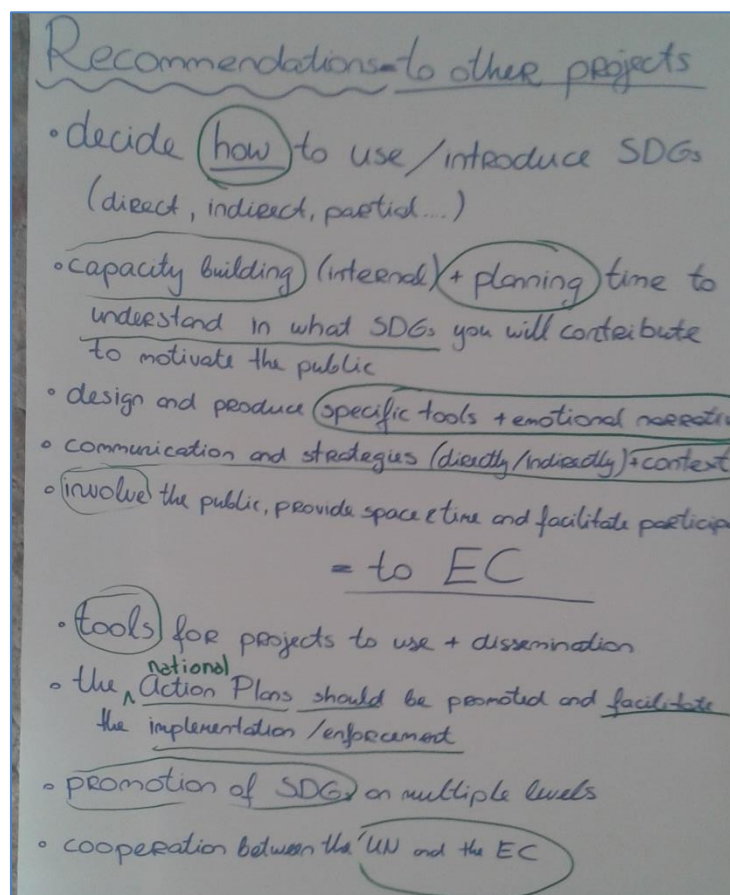
Feedback on the Hub

After the event participants were asked to comment on the organisation and processes of the Hub via a web based questionnaire. The Athens Learning and Development Hub was very positively evaluated by the participants of the 1.25 day workshop. The event, according to at least one respondent, "Led to more ideas about the continuation of our project, with a more direct emphasis to the SDGs and their relevance to our work", while another participant called the event "inspirational and enlightening! Keep up please!"

Amongst the suggestions received to improve future events were the following:
- "include information about other projects (in information before the event)";
- "focus on LA role" and invite more LA participation (only one LA was present at this Hub); and
- "a bit more focus on theory of engagement".

Participants would have preferred a two-day long Hub to allow for more "exchange and discussion with other projects staff" about "our concrete work and challenges", since "we didn't have the chance to elaborate, in more depth, on approaches that will enable us to overcome obstacles and plan / communicate better SDGs as essential part of the project." As has been mentioned in other workshops the absence of Commission staff from the Hub was a drawback. As one respondent mentioned "It would be nice to count with the participation of representatives of the Commission".

From the participants feedback scores, based on 12 responses from the 20 participants (a 60% response rate):
- Achievement of participants' expectations: 7.8 (out of a maximum score of 10)
- Achievement of Hub objectives: 8.8
- Relevance to participants' work: 8.3
- Facilitation by DEAR Support Team staff: 9.4
- Logistics support provided by the DEAR Support Team: 9