

**SDG Challenge  
Development Perspectives, Ireland**

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**Independent Evaluation Report**

**Final Version**

**December 2018**

**Dörte Pommerening**

## Purpose of this Evaluation

The request and funding for this external, independent evaluation came from Irish Aid, the main funder of the SDG Challenge, a development education project that aims to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and motivation to take informed action to contribute towards the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The evaluation was carried out by DP Evaluation. Methodologies included semi-structured in depth stakeholder interviews, focus group work, structured observation, a written survey as well as drawing on internal monitoring data.

The scoping phase in conjunction with Development Perspectives (DP) identified that, within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, three questions deserved special attention. While all the evaluation criteria are discussed in turn to provide as full a picture as possible, recommendations will focus on these specific questions:

- a) **Effectiveness:** How can DP create an even more positive trend on the number of sign-ups to the SDG Challenge?
- b) **Impact:** What would "growing the deeper engagement aspect" of the project's advocate programme involve?
- c) **Sustainability:** How can DP build more sustainability into the project?

This evaluation is based on the current cycle from November 2017 to March 2019, focussing in particular on the current funding year, from April 2018 onwards.

## What is the SDG Challenge?

### Project Goal

The overall project goal of the SDG Challenge is described in the Results Framework: "Contribute to a national network of community leaders and adult and community education (ACE) practitioners who are aware of and knowledgeable about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and who are taking action to contribute to their successful implementation in Ireland."<sup>1</sup>

### Project Description<sup>2</sup>

The SDG Challenge is a 17-month development education programme designed by Development Perspectives. The programme aims to equip community leaders and ACE practitioners with the knowledge, skills and motivation to take informed action in contributing to the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Each month an information pack is sent via email to participants. The pack outlines one goal each month and five challenges; increased knowledge, political lobbying and advocacy, active citizenship and individual attainable challenges. Additionally, a free monthly workshop is held in varied locations throughout the country to increase participants' awareness of the SDGs.

The SDG advocate programme is an intensive eight-month programme within the overarching SDG Challenge, for adults in Ireland's non-formal education sector. Advocates from all over Ireland sign up to the three-phased programme consisting of a pre-departure phase, overseas phase, debriefing and action component.

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<sup>1</sup> Annex A: Development Education Results Framework, produced by Development Perspectives, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> This is a slightly adapted version of a draft provided by Development Perspectives.

The first phase involves two full weekends, including an overnight residential. The emphasis is on learning about different development theories, discussion and understanding the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as team building, problem-solving, expectations, organisational policy and participant safeguarding.

The overseas phase (phase two) takes place in Tanzania and Vietnam during June/July. The SDG advocates spend two weeks working and studying alongside volunteers from local partner organisations, sharing ideas, perspectives and design of sustainable models of community-based projects through experiential learning.

The third phase comprises two weekends, including a residential with an emphasis on reflection, evaluation and next steps to implementing the advocates' SDG action projects. Individual and group mentoring support is provided, as is an opportunity to showcase each project during an "Exhibition of Experience", hosted in Drogheda Art Centre in October. In the third phase, the Irish team are joined by eight advocates from Vietnam and Tanzania as part of an arrangement with two partner NGOs to organise a reciprocal visit to Ireland to share a range of perspectives immersed in a global context.

## Criterion: Relevance

The question of relevance explores and demonstrates the extent to which the project is suited to current priorities and policies dominant in the Irish and international contexts.

**Finding: The SDG Challenge is highly relevant in the Irish context and internationally.**

The Irish Government, as a signatory to the SDG agenda agreed on by 193 countries in 2015, has made an excellent choice in funding Development Perspectives to run the SDG Challenge. The SDG Challenge is highly relevant as it helps the Irish Government directly deliver on its promise made by signing the 2030 Agenda to raise awareness of the SDGs in Ireland. To the extent that development education programmes result, ideally, in responsible global citizens and individual choices and actions aligned with the SDGs, funding this programme has helped Irish Aid to also implement the SDGs in Ireland. This project provides evidence that development education can and does change people's understanding and result in them taking action, and is one of the main ways that the SDG agenda will be met.

Development Perspectives is excellently placed to run the SDG Challenge and received, soon after setting the project up, formal and informal recognition from other actors in Ireland, for example the 2017 Dóchas SDG Champion Award. On the international level, the project was shortlisted for a global award by the United Nations where only one other Irish project was shortlisted. Staff of other civil society organisations have said that they *"value DP's expertise in making the SDGs accessible, amongst other things by making the global-to-local link."*

The ease with which Development Perspectives was able to form 17 partnerships and the positive feedback received for this evaluation from Irish partner organisations demonstrates a high level of relevance also to the partners' own areas of work. Several said that partnering with DP on this project had helped them to align their work to the SDGs.

## Criterion: Effectiveness

Under the heading of effectiveness, we aimed to ascertain achievement of objectives and explore the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives.

Finding: The SDG Challenge scores very highly on effectiveness. It is one of the smallest development education projects with the widest reach and deepest engagement that I have come across in the European context.

The following tables provide an overview of how many people were involved and were affected by which strand of the project, and the paragraphs below each table attempt to put what was achieved or not achieved in context.

**Strand 1: The SDG advocate programme achieved a 90% completion rate.**

This table details attendance at each stage.

	April 18	May 18	June 18	July 18	Aug 18	Sept 18	Oct 18
No. of ACE participating (target: 22)	n/a (selection)	20 in training 1	19 in training 2	20 in overseas trip	n/a	17 in training 3	17 in training 4 + 8 partner

The advocate programme is the centrepiece of the SDG Challenge, where deep engagement with individuals takes place during four training weekends, two of them residential, as well as during the two-week overseas trip as an experiential learning opportunity. While 21 Irish advocates were recruited instead of the target of 22, Development Perspectives is to be commended for a thorough selection process during April which led to 20 of the initial 21 selected participants carrying on after the first training and going on the experiential learning trip to Vietnam or Tanzania in July, and finally 18 completing the entire programme in October. There are many individual benefits to participants in terms of their personal development and this is certainly an incentive, but it is equally true that completing the advocate programme requires a lot of personal investment, willingness to move outside their comfort zones as well as time commitment. For DP to reach 90% (18 out of 20) completion rate should be seen as an achievement. Beyond the formal programme, several Irish advocates also hosted “homestays” for the eight advocates from Vietnam and Tanzania during their reciprocal visit to Ireland in October, which were funded by Development Perspectives as well as supported by the NGOs Trocaire and Concern.

The evaluation examines improved SDG awareness levels and propensity to act in the section about impact.

**Strand 2: The monthly SDG workshops varied greatly in attendance, most falling short of their target. There are reasons for this, but it would be wise to adjust this part of the project.**

	April 18	May 18	June 18	July 18	Aug 18	Sept 18	Oct 18	Nov 18
No. of 2-hour workshops	2 ( 1 DP & 1 PPN)	1	1	1	-	1	1(DP)	2 (DP)
Attendance at workshop	3 (DP) & 17 (PPN)	14 (DP)	7 (DP)	7 (DP)	-	7 (DP)	12 (DP)	13 (DP) 14 (DP)

Each two-hour workshop runs in conjunction with one of 17 Irish partner organisations and each one focuses on a different SDG. Whilst Eventbrite data show that workshops are generally oversubscribed at the point of registering (which demonstrates the intention of potential participants to attend) actual attendance was limited. The target was for each workshop to have 20 participants, but this was only achieved in a few cases. I believe there are two main factors for not achieving the participation targets. Firstly, the workshops cover different geographical areas of Ireland, including some more remote areas with sparser populations where it is harder to attract attendees. Secondly, the workshops attempted to reach out to audiences not yet involved in the SDGs (“new audiences”), which is notoriously difficult.

Nevertheless, the 17 partnerships with other organisations were built and strengthened through this strand. The feedback on the partnerships was wholly positive. All the partners who responded expressed a desire for more workshops and said they would “back the SDG Challenge again”. When asked about improvements needed in such areas as logistics, costs and communication, the response was that there had been no difficulties and therefore no adjustments were necessary.

*“To date we have not experienced any difficulties that I can think of - the project coordinator has been extremely organised, helpful and clear about the scope and expectations of the partnership.”*

*“I haven’t experienced any difficulties with the SDG Challenge. I have been very impressed with the whole programme and the support offered throughout.”*

### **Recommendations**

Acknowledging that the target numbers for workshop attendance stated in the Results Framework for the period in question were not always reached—e.g. in June, July and September 2018, only seven participants attended (against a target of 20)—the following options can be considered:

- a) Leave the targets as a goal. Keep aiming high, running workshops around Ireland, including in geographically more remote areas. Accept that response may be lower in some locations.
- b) Review targets based on experience and vary them according to location.
- c) Increase the number of workshops.
- d) Run fewer or no workshops in remote locations, increase workshops in urban areas.

**Strand 3: Online public engagement - people taking part in the monthly online challenges**

This table shows the number of participants that signed up for the online component of the programme. Individuals receive an email each month with the updated information packs and the details of that month’s workshop and the challenge associated with that particular month’s goal e.g. #PovertyBox Challenge (Linked with SDG 1: Live on €2 a day for a week).

	April 18	May 18	June 18	July 18	Aug 18	Sept 18	Oct 18	Nov 18
No. of people signed up	2,020	2,210	2,433	2,500	2,300	2,510	2,590	2,800

These are very strong numbers and there is a steady upward progression over time. As one partner assessed the SDG Challenge: *“It is very well-promoted and the monthly updates are very informative and engaging.”*

### Recommendation

Question (a) identified during the scoping was: ‘How can Development Perspectives create an even more positive trend on the number of sign-ups to the SDG Challenge?’

Development Perspectives staff reported that all available avenues to try to increase the number of sign-ups that the team were able to pursue under the current resourcing had been tried, but had not produced the desired results. The evaluation supports the emerging consensus that, as a new strategy, DP should invest in producing video content and, for instance, produce a short video monthly focused on the specific SDG of that month. Trocaire’s experimentation with short comedic films on social media has had a positive effect and Trocaire has found it helpful for increasing social media exposure.

The recommendation therefore is that additional resources are dedicated to online promotion - in particular, video production for an online audience and public relations through media outlets to secure more national and regional coverage.

In addition, the evaluation supports the idea of a rolling weekly or fortnightly social media plan so that there is a consistent, incremental effect of increased visibility.

### Summary

	Advocates	Partners	Workshops (over cycle, Nov ’17 - Mar ’19)	Workshop participants (over cycle, Nov ’17 - Mar ’19)	Online challenge participants
Target (for 12 months April ’18 to Mar ’19)	22	17	18	360	2,000 (new)

Actual (April '18 to Nov '18 only )	19	17	9 (from April '18 to Nov '18 only)	94 (from April '18 to Nov '18 only)	2,800 new to date
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It is clear from the above table that the project has so far—part way through the current cycle—done well in terms of actual numbers against targets. The qualitative evaluation work done with all stakeholders supports this, showing that it has been effective. There are a number of factors that explain this success.

## Overview of Main Success Factors

- The 17 Goals that form the SDG framework are used to structure the project; this breaks the framework up and makes it accessible to stakeholders.
- There is simplicity in communicating the structure of a 17-month cycle (one goal per month), 17 partners, 17 workshops throughout Ireland, as well as 17 online information packs.
- Expertise and the template for the centrepiece of the project, the advocate programme, were adapted from a previous program called “Insight,” which DP had run since 2006. The Insight programme provided a strong foundation for the advocate activity in terms of structure, content and learning.
- Making accessible and facilitating deep and critical engagement with complex issues by focusing on one goal at a time, by keeping up the offer of engagement through various online channels and especially by running the 8-month “high contact, high exposure” advocate programme is true to the development education approach and highly valued as such.
- Possibly the single biggest success factor was that the SDG Challenge was developed independently, without a funder’s parameters, time-frames or requirements in mind (in fact, for the first nine months, the project was not funded). The idea for the SDG Challenge originated from the personal concern and frustration of two passionate activists who observed that, although the SDGs are complex, they were able to make sense of them because they were immersed in the development education approach; they asked how the SDGs could be related to a new, much wider constituency, especially since SDG awareness levels as monitored by the Eurobarometer, public opinion surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the European Commission, were comparatively low in Ireland.

## Criterion: Efficiency

Under this criterion we are looking at cost-efficiency. However, as the outcomes are highly qualitative there is a large element of professional judgement involved in the assessment.

**Finding:** The SDG Challenge is among the most cost-effective development education projects I have evaluated. Every strand is organised in the most cost-effective manner, but also in a very thoughtful way that serves the purpose of the project. The value for money per advocate, given the consistently high impact, is excellent. Likewise, value for money per workshop participant and other people who are taking the monthly online SDG Challenge is very good.

### Strand 1: The SDG Advocate Programme

Advocates had to fundraise about €1,000 as a contribution to the overall cost of the programme. This included all aspects of the programme. Some opted to self-fund their trip instead of fundraising. For most who fundraised this was a challenge. Organising their own fundraising events encouraged advocates to put in their own words the purpose of the programme and specifically of the trip, and to talk about the SDGs. This will have helped to strengthen their problem-solving skills, self-confidence and knowledge.

The final weekend of the current cohort of advocates, which I attended, took place in the self-catering Castle Saunderson International Scouting Centre in County Cavan, where the group was exclusively hosted and facilitated by DP staff (working on a voluntary basis, giving of their own time). Five of six DP staff were present throughout the weekend and each had taken on specialist roles such as facilitation, logistics, catering (including shopping, cooking, clearing up). The team was obviously used to working together in such a way and did an admirable job of looking after the group of 25 advocates over two and a half days. To further keep the costs down and simultaneously



raise awareness of the issue of sustainability, the catering was entirely vegetarian, and one evening, vegan. The weekend I witnessed could not have been organised in a more cost-effective, professional and thoughtful way.

#### *Irish and visiting advocates in the workshop in Castle Saunderson International Scouting Centre*

It is understood that the overseas trips were also organised in a low-cost way, with advocates staying in simple accommodation embedded within local communities. Some of the Irish advocates encountered challenges because of this, such as showering with a bucket and not having any privacy due to shared accommodation. Another challenge mentioned was that, due to the trip being conceived of as experiential learning, participants had no time to themselves between group activities and the practical work camps that, in addition, were physically demanding (tree planting in Tanzania, and tree planting and constructing a playground in Vietnam). DP facilitators enabled individuals to reflect on these experiences in a positive light by helping them to process them so that they contributed to building advocates' resilience, problem-solving skills and understanding about life in different parts of the world. In the focus group discussions held with all advocates, they agreed that they had had life-changing experiences and that those were due to being completely immersed in another country and culture. Had they stayed in hotels and been treated as tourists, this would not have necessarily been the case.

#### **Strand 2: Monthly SDG Workshops**

Planning and delivering the workshops around the country in conjunction with partner organisations has kept the overall costs low: Occasional venue hire, some materials and DP staff travel costs were the only costs arising. Participants covered their own local travel costs.

#### **Strand 3: Online Public Engagement**

To sign up 2,800 participants in the online challenges with only a minimal investment of staff time can be considered to be delivering very good value for money.

## Criterion: Impact

Here, the lasting difference the project has made to participants and a wider constituency is explored.

**Finding:** From focus groups and their self-assessments, it is clear that all advocates had life-changing experiences. As a result of the SDG Challenge, they developed a greater understanding of the SDGs, more skills, and a greater capacity for critical thinking regarding how SDGs affect people’s lives in different contexts. Their propensity to take action has been raised. Workshop participants reported an increase in their skills and knowledge around the SDGs, and the Irish partner organisations stated that being involved in the project had enhanced their understanding, influenced the inclusion of the SDGs into their work and helped them reach new audiences.

### Strand 1: SDG Advocate Programme

The following table shows the changes in knowledge, skills, empowerment and engagement as reported by individuals taking part in the eight-month programme.

Pre-programme questionnaire April 2018 versus post-programme questionnaire October 2018

		April 18	Oct 18
% reporting change in SDG knowledge and skills	Have you heard of the SDGs?	Yes: 90%	Yes: 100%
	Are you aware of Ireland’s role in implementing the SDGs?	Yes: 50%	Yes: 100%
	Are you aware of any development theories?	Yes: 35%	Yes: 79%
	Are you a “critical thinker”?	Yes: 70%	Yes: 100%
	Do you have any experience of designing and delivering development education activities focused on the SDGs?	Yes: 45%	Yes: 57%
	Do you feel you are good at problem-solving?	Yes: 95%	Yes: 95%
	Do you regularly engage in “reflective practice”?	Yes: 65%	Yes: 86%
Empowerment	Are you a confident public speaker?	Yes: 45%	Yes: 71%

	Are you a confident facilitator?	Yes: 60%	Yes: 50%
	Would you like to improve your competency levels in both these areas?	Yes: 100%	Yes: 100%
	Do you think the SDG advocate programme will help / has helped to increase your confidence?	Yes: 100%	Yes: 100%
	Do you consider yourself to be an “active citizen”?	Yes: 80%	Yes: 100%
Engagement	Have you recently engaged members of the public in development issues?	Yes: 50%	Yes: 100%
	Are you an active member of DP’s Facebook, Twitter or Instagram account?	Yes: 45%	Yes: 100%
	Have you ever written a blog or story on development issues?	Yes: 20%	Yes: 57%
	Have you visited DP’s website?	Yes: 70%	Yes: 100%
	Have you signed up to the #SDG Challenge?	Yes: 65%	Yes: 100%

Only Irish advocates are monitored according to the criteria shown in the table. The percentage in the pre- programme questionnaire is based on 20 individuals filling in the forms. At the time of writing, only the 14 of the 20 Irish advocates that took part in phase 2 had returned the questionnaire. More may be returned in January, when the group meets again for mentoring and coaching. The percentage figures are based on those who returned the forms. This was not ideal, but is the best data we have.

Overall, the trend is definitely an improvement in the different areas as a result of the programme. What is not reflected numerically is that, as part of phase three, the advocates are each creating an action plan to raise more awareness of the SDGs. The implementation of these plans is outside of the reporting period for this evaluation, but interesting action projects have been emerging and are likely to continue into early 2019. Below are some more details about the action plans, and some examples and discussion of the enabling elements and findings from the focus group work with participants.

### Recommendation

It is disappointing not to have reached a 100 percent return rate for the evaluation questionnaires yet. It is recommended that they are sent out by post to those who do not attend follow-up events, around the same time as the event (so data are collected at the same time approximately). Both pre- and post-programme questionnaires to Irish advocates should be issued without asking for names on the form in order to maximise the return rate and encourage people to be frank. In such an intense, high-contact programme, it is reasonable to aim for 100 percent return rate.

During the qualitative evaluation through focus group discussions with the Irish, Vietnamese and Tanzanian participants, they cited the positive differences the advocate programme had made as well as what the challenges were:

Tanzanian / Vietnamese:

Positive aspects	Challenges / recommendations
Visiting each others' countries and sharing learning about each others' challenges somehow gives courage. "It's not just us..." - even if the most urgent challenges differ, e.g. waste in Tanzania and climate change in Ireland, they still fit within the same SDG framework.	"We need to open up workshops for lots more people, e.g. create football or dancing competitions, involving more people, different people at different times, especially in Tanzania we should not just involve leaders / elders, but every level of society."
We learnt from each other how to tackle such challenges, e.g. awareness raising on environmental issues and waste-related issues.	"In Vietnam, we need to involve more local people in the design, the action and in the cultural exchange; have more preparation in advance."
"We take a different approach now to working with local communities. We don't teach them, we start by asking them how they do things and why they do them like that. Solutions should come from them."	The short duration of the project is a challenge, and in particular the lack of phase 1 and the fact that there is no follow-up.
"Once your mind is opened to one other country's challenges, you realise many other countries are facing their own."	The purpose of the visit by volunteers from Hanoi to an ethnic sustainable community in North Vietnam should be communicated better.

**All overseas advocates agreed on the following summary:  
"This project has changed my mind, my way of working. It's a way of life."**

Two focus group discussions with the Irish contingent produced the following feedback:

Highlights	Challenges
Meeting like-minded and inspirational people	Fundraising: Hard to articulate what we were fundraising for
New culture and experiences (food, dancing, music)	Shared accommodation, not much free time
Work camps, skills sharing, friendship	Showering with a bucket and insect bites
Experiential learning	Realising how much water we use
Inequality workshop at the World Bank	Realising our privileged background
Scenery, swimming in lake, games	Logistical commitment, bus journeys, hot climate
Networking going forward	Expenses, time, money, visas, vaccinations

Access to authentic community	Seeing poverty, pollution and power for action
Learning about cultural differences	Content and new information sometimes overwhelming
Awareness of SDGs	Intensity of the project, especially overseas phase and final weekend and homestays

**One Irish advocate summarised her experience:  
 “It should affect my life. I am hoping I will stay on this path. I know it takes commitment.”**

While it was clear from the focus groups that not all experiences were easy or pleasant, profound care was taken by Development Perspectives staff, through the design of the project and through their proactive facilitation, that difficult experiences were evaluated and integrated into the person’s “journey” in a beneficial way. The preparation and debriefing weekends, and accompanying the participants abroad, were key to this.

The evaluation question (b) under impact ‘What would “growing the deeper engagement aspect” of the advocate element of the project involve?’ was carefully considered. In fact, as the following discussion shows, the project already engages very well with advocates and they are happy with a large majority of the elements involved. The evaluation analysed, in conjunction with the Irish advocates, what needs to be in place for participants of the project to put their experiences to use and carry on with their action projects, meaning reaching out to new audiences with the SDG messages and aiming to bring about more awareness. The evaluation used the analogy of a brick wall where the foundation has to be in place, as well as other important elements that build on that foundation so that action is taken. Thanks to DP’s long experience and professionalism in development education, I found that almost all facets are covered. Only two potential barriers were identified in the focus groups that held some advocates back in their endeavours to plan and carry out an action around the SDGs. Other building blocks that need to be in place for action to be taken are in place due to DP’s thoughtful and comprehensive approach to development education.

The two barriers are:

**Lack of courage:** Some participants felt that although they had significantly increased their knowledge and technical skills, they were still not confident to engage with friends, family, acquaintances and the public in terms of trying to influence their understanding and behaviour. After initially saying that the action plan had not yet been implemented due to laziness/lack of time, upon further prompting from me in a focus group, one advocate explained that the reason was actually more about a lack of courage to confront typical society attitudes, saying: *“It is so disheartening to always be faced with the response ‘oh, no, not the tree-hugger again’ when I raise the topic of recycling for example”*.

**Lack of resources:** Several participants said that some (relatively small) costs of things, such as local travel and materials (such as flipchart paper), constituted a barrier to them taking action.

### Recommendation

To tackle the lack of courage DP could flag to some advocates the option to develop and implement action plans in pairs or small groups, rather than individually, as this would give them greater

confidence to engage with the public and overcome any negative stereotypes. Also offering support to advocates from the alumni of previous SDG Challenge cohorts could be beneficial. A platform for this is being developed by a current advocate. The alumni network is part of the 2019 funding application and DP intends to combine it with the existing alumni network from the Insight programme - all of which make very good sense.

Amy McAuley (a 2017 SDG Challenge advocate - see example action project below) suggests the following: *“It’s about spreading the message on something you know about, something relevant to your own life. Don’t be overambitious, even small changes can encourage others and have a snowball effect.”*

To address the lack of resources, advocates should be encouraged as part of the programme to do some fundraising for “start-up” funds, which would be specifically available to cover items such as local travel, materials, etc.

Below is the wall representing all the elements of the advocate programme as identified by participants in the focus groups. DP should be congratulated on the fact that advocates named so many benefits that they had derived from taking part, such as motivation, awareness, experiences and legitimacy, and that only courage and resources were seen as needing to be enhanced.



## Examples of Action Projects

The project also has significant potential to have a wider impact through the various action projects that advocates develop. It is too early to report on or assess the implementation of action projects by the current cohort as they were not yet far enough along in the cycle at the time of writing. However, one of the action projects of the 2018 cohort is to build a platform for alumni of the SDG Challenge project, which will provide support to advocates in developing and implementing their own action plans, thus making these more effective, as well as generally networking, sharing and spreading the learning and awareness-raising around the SDGs.

An example from a previous cohort in 2017 demonstrates that the action projects can have a far-reaching impact. Amy McAuley's action project began at the Girl Guides International Camp on gender equality. She ran three workshops per day for seven days, reaching 600 girls under 16 years of age, as well as undertaking training with staff to explore how they could implement the SDGs. Some of the girls produced poems and raps for Amy's work on a Gaelic radio station. Amy now sits on the Girl Guides' Membership, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and on the media panel. She has been working to develop an SDG badge for the Irish Girl Guides for implementation in 2018, targeting Ladybirds, Brownies, Guides and Senior branch members. Amy's project attracted a lot of media attention and she has frequently given local and national interviews for radio and print media, and has written blog posts.

## Recommendation

DP should consider maintaining a portfolio of all future action projects that are implemented, including materials produced, media coverage and a record of the audiences reached.

## Strand 2: SDG Workshops

This table shows the changes in knowledge, skills, empowerment and engagement as reported by individuals taking part in two-hour workshops.

### Workshop attendants' surveys 2018

	April 18	May 18	June 18	July 18	Aug 18	Sept 18	Oct 18	Nov 18
% reporting change in SDG knowledge and skills	90% (DP)	85%	70%	80%	66%	50%	70%	80%
Taking part in the SDG Challenge	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Impact on Irish partner organisations that help deliver the monthly workshops has been significant. Among those that responded to our questionnaire, all were positively influenced in their understanding and own application of the SDG framework in their work, and, recognising this, said that they would like to carry on with the partnership beyond the current 17-month cycle, which comes to an end in March 2019.

A sample of responses demonstrate the impact on the institutions, individuals within the institutions and external target audiences. The first question in our questionnaire was: ‘Have there been benefits to your organisation arising from your partnership in the SDG Challenge? If yes, what were they?’

*“Absolutely. Building a partnership with Development Perspectives has enabled us to share facilitation expertise, as well as sharing our networks both on social media and offline - thus enabling both organisations to reach new audiences we would not have reached if we hadn't worked together. It has also enabled us to learn new approaches in facilitation and group training which we would not have been exposed to otherwise.”*

*“Yes, we increased alignment with and profile of SDGs in our communications, and the partnership also made us consider how to further develop links with other SDG programmes. We also learned from the public workshop the priorities of individuals in communities [thus helping us with the] introduction to new audiences.”*

*“It made companies based at The Mill more aware of SDGs, and also highlighted the common goal of developing sustainable local economies that increase work/life balance, and help to reduce environmental impact (less commuting).”*

*“When we did the workshop with Development Perspectives it really opened our work to new audiences.”*

### **Strand 3: Online public engagement**

It is beyond the scope of the project and this evaluation to establish what impact the SDG Challenge has had online but there will be an organisational impact assessment in 2019 covering the online dimension.

### **Criterion: Sustainability**

This criterion aims to provide some indication of whether the benefits of a project are likely to continue after donor funding ceases. This can be looked at on the individual and institutional level. The other dimension to sustainability is whether the project can carry on with the current level of support and funding.

**Finding:** A good level of sustainability is already built into the project, through the potential long-term impact on advocates, the wider impact of their action projects, the chance for workshop participants to use their new knowledge in their ongoing education work and the significant benefits gained by the 17 Irish partner organisations. Sustainability would be significantly enhanced by increased funding given over a three-year cycle.

**Individual level:** To the extent that advocates said that they had life-changing experiences, the benefits of the project should be long-lasting. Whether this will translate into action and when is impossible to know as so many factors will influence this. It is likely with most people that their

way of thinking and some of their life choices will always be influenced by what they learnt through the project.

High percentages of the workshop participants reported a change in their SDG knowledge and skills and, given that they are ACE practitioners and community leaders, they not only have the opportunity to build awareness of the SDGs into their ongoing education work but are now also better equipped to do so. The online offer from DP made this as easy as possible, with 100% of workshop participants reporting that they took part in the online SDG Challenge. There are of course various pathways through the project for ongoing engagement, such as the information and resource packs and the option to take part in the advocate programme or take advantage of coaching or mentoring.

It is difficult to track and measure the sustainability of impact at the individual level, but there is a strong potential for both individual and wider sustained impact through increased knowledge, the action projects and the ongoing education work of many participants, acting as multipliers.

Institutional level: The collaborations with the Irish partners are likely to continue whatever happens to the funding. Those partners surveyed were very happy about the collaboration with DP in the 17-month project cycle and all said that they would like to carry on the partnership. No criticisms or areas for improvement were suggested, feedback was entirely positive (areas the survey asked about specifically were logistics, costs and communication - but respondents were invited to comment on anything they liked). All who responded stated that the collaboration with DP had helped them to align their own work to the SDG framework, this means that the project has had an influence on those organisations at a lasting, institutional level, helping to deliver the SDGs in the Irish context in future.

While in the partners' questionnaire some suggested that *"running more workshops"* would sustain the benefits of the SDG Challenge beyond the funding period, others said:

*"Our own awareness [will sustain the benefits of the SDG Challenge] and in turn, communications on SDGs will continue beyond this project. Our involvement in the project has definitely contributed to this."*

*"We will continue to work closely with Development Perspectives after having partnered with them through the SDG Challenge, and continue to share resources and ideas together."*

*"For the wider audiences which engage with the SDG Challenge, the monthly challenges which have been set through this programme are things which they can continue to do beyond this programme."*

Reflecting on a further dimension of sustainability that asks whether the project can carry on with the current level of resources and funding, I would say that in this respect it is not sustainable if the current high standard is to be maintained and the recommendations in this evaluation are to be tackled. DP staff regularly go out of their way to deliver the very best for the participants and for the achievement of the SDGs.

The current high quality of the project delivery is, in part, dependent on staff giving their time freely on a voluntary basis. I do not believe that this is sustainable in the longer term - staff time to implement the project needs to be fully funded. In addition, there are considerable transaction costs incurred by the annual cycle of reporting and applying for continued funding - a three-year funding cycle would be much more cost-effective and would also allow DP to be more strategic in developing and refining the project in planning for the future.

## **Recommendation**

Given the success of the project so far and that it is making a significant contribution to raising awareness and understanding of the SDGs and equipping Irish citizens to take action, a strong case can be made for increasing the level of funding and moving to a three-year funding cycle.

So, the answer to question (c) ‘How can DP build more sustainability into the project?’ is twofold. Firstly, the already high levels of sustainability within the project design could perhaps be further enhanced by addressing the issues of “courage” and “resources” raised by advocates as discussed above (since this would strengthen the impact of their action projects) and, secondly, by obtaining increased funding on a three-year cycle.

## Conclusion

The SDG Challenge is highly relevant, both in terms of the Irish and international policy contexts and also in terms of the content being relevant to advocates, workshop and online participants and to the Irish partner organisations. DP is delivering the project very effectively, with good numbers of advocates and online participants, and 17 partnerships with Irish partners all providing very positive feedback. Workshop participation levels have been more variable, but the feedback has also been very positive. In terms of cost-efficiency, the project is providing very good value for money, with considerable impact for relatively low levels of funding, although this does depend on staff giving freely of their time on a voluntary basis to make some elements possible.

Impact on participants is very considerable, particularly on the participants in the advocate programme who described life-changing experiences. Irish partner organisations have also said that the project had increased their understanding and influenced the inclusion of the SDGs in their ongoing work, while workshop participants reported significant increases in their knowledge and skills. The project also has good potential for sustainable impact, through the long-term effect on advocates and through their action projects as well as through the ongoing education work of workshop participants and through the positive influence on the Irish partner organisations. The sustainability of high-quality project delivery would be significantly improved through higher levels of funding on a three-year funding cycle.

There are a few areas where changes and improvements could be made but overall, I feel that the SDG Challenge is an excellent project, being delivered very effectively and efficiently and achieving very good levels of reach and impact.

**Dörte Pommerening**  
**December 2018**

## Methodology and Evaluation Process

- Desk research
- Initial staff interviews
- Scoping paper
- Feedback on scoping paper from key staff
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews with internal and external respondents
- Focus group with eight Tanzanian and Vietnamese advocates, Drogheda, Ireland
- Attendance at final residential training at Castle Saunderson, Co Cavan, Ireland
- Two parallel focus groups with all 18 Irish advocates who completed the programme
- Development of interim findings and presentation as Powerpoint at webinar with key DP staff
- Follow-up conversations
- Semi-structured external interviews
- Email survey of Irish partners
- Interpreting internal monitoring data
- Delivery of draft findings
- Delivery of draft report
- Feedback from DP
- Delivery of final report

## Documentation reviewed

- Video documentary produced by Development Perspectives that follows a group of Irish and Tanzanians drawing out their learning journey over 8 months in 2015 on the 'Insight programme' which was the precursor to the SDG Challenge.
- Development Perspectives' Irish Aid grant application 2017
- Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017-2023
- Development Perspectives, Insight 2015 Evaluation Report
- Most Significant Change, Insight, 2016 (report)
- SDG Advocate PRE questionnaire 2018 (summary)
- SDG Advocate POST questionnaire 2018 (summary)
- Monitoring & Evaluation.xlsx (overview of SDG Challenge monitoring data)