

# How do we Engage Communities in Climate Action? Practical Learnings from the Coal Face

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Environmental Protection Agency  
*An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil*

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**MaREI** is the SFI Research Centre for energy, climate and marine research coordinated by the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) at University College Cork. We have over 200 researchers around the country working with 50 industry partners, focusing on the energy transition, climate action and the blue economy. MaREI delivers excellent research with societal impact by empowering business, informing policy, and supporting society.

**The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA)** is a Government initiative led by the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA) with Secretariat assistance being provided by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The vision of the Dialogue is to create a long-term process by which the national objective of transitioning to a low carbon, climate resilient society and economy by 2050 is communicated in a manner that creates awareness and understanding towards enabling climate actions across all of society and the economy.

The central aims of the Dialogue are to:

- Create awareness and engagement by generating a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities posed by the transition objectives
- Inspire and motivate society, businesses and communities to collaboratively unlock the opportunities for climate action
- Enable, co-create and empower the Dialogue process through the engagement and mobilisation of all sectors of society on structures, information flows and events.

The main activities of the Dialogue to date have centred around awareness raising and engagement at the regional level. As Dialogue activities now move to the local level the insights and experiences of practitioners, working at the coal face, are required to aid and support this process. The Dialogue is interested in understanding what it means to collaborate with and empower people to act with a view to bringing about behavioral change.



## Key Messages from the Workshop

**People are at different stages of the climate action spectrum** - Some participants felt that there is a groundswell, that people are aware of climate change and many are already acting or ready to act, while others spoke about their frustrations around how so many people are still unconcerned and hard to motivate.

**We need to begin each engagement from 'where people are at'** - This will allow us to support the 'converted' to continue acting, while also encouraging those who show little interest to get involved.

**Move from awareness raising to action** - Participate in active honest engagement. When people say what they want, focus on what they can do about it. Don't just organise public meetings.

**Get the messaging right** - Messages need to be tailored to the particular audience. How they are communicated, and by whom, is critical.

**Target key community leaders and tap into existing groups** - Work with leaders who are respected by the community. Go to people rather than expecting them to come to you.

**Engage young people** - Involve and enable young people in decision-making. Ask them what they think are the solutions, and how they can be implemented. It is their future.

**Communities need support, capacity building and resources** - People are time poor, so there needs to be a shift beyond volunteerism. Realistic resources need to be provided by state agencies to support local people in taking action. Existing barriers to local climate action need to be identified and removed.

# Introduction

The outputs of this 'How do we Engage Communities in Climate Action? – Practical Learnings from the Coal Face' workshop have been co-developed by the climate action practitioner community, and MaREI researchers. The proceedings draw from the knowledge and experiences of these practitioners, and they offer a set of recommendations and insights into leveraging different community engagement approaches and methodologies in the area of climate action. The workshop was funded by the National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA). This report is complementary to the report of a later workshop, involving academics and researchers, entitled Innovative Methods of Community Engagement: Toward a Low Carbon, Climate Resilient Future which was developed by the Imagining2050 team in UCC and the Secretariat to the NDCA.

## The Workshop

The day-long workshop was hosted by MaREI and the National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) in the MaREI Centre, UCC ERI Beaufort Building on Wednesday 28th November 2018.

### **Workshop Rationale**

The purpose of the workshop was to capture the knowledge and experience gained by those working on engaging communities in action, in order to develop recommendations on how this can be done most successfully in relation to climate action. The proposed outputs will directly support the development of Dialogue approaches and should be of general use to communities and individuals planning to work on climate action at the local level, and also to agencies supporting such efforts.

### **Background**

Recent MaREI research carried out under the EPA Research Programme (in publication) has recommended that strategies for climate action should learn from, and incorporate, community development principles and methods. According to a Combat Poverty definition (Craig, 1995, pp. 2-3), community development is 'about enabling people to enhance their capacity to play a role in shaping the society of which they are a part. It works towards helping groups and communities articulate needs and viewpoints and influence the processes that structure their everyday lives', while recognizing that 'the ability to participate fully in society is more open to some groups and individuals than others'. Community development is a 'process where local people can not only create more jobs, income and infrastructure, but also help their community become fundamentally better able to manage change'. The 'concrete' benefits of community development 'come through local people changing attitudes, mobilising existing skills, improving networks, thinking differently about problems, and using community assets in new ways' (Cavaye, 2006, p. 1).

## Participants

In selecting participants for this workshop, the importance of learning from community development methods, skills and practice, was recognized. A range of people, some with direct experience of community development work, and others with direct experience of working with people on climate action, and some with both, were invited to participate. 19 people took part - the numbers were kept deliberately small in order to ensure an open and productive discussion, and to involve all participants fully in the research exercise.

A note was circulated to attendees in advance of the workshop, which included the following points arising from the aforementioned MaREI research:

- There are many recognized barriers to climate action, including lack of core funding and infrastructural supports, and a lack of leadership.
- Giving information and providing education does not necessarily result in people taking action.
- Negative messaging and apocalyptic visions of the future impacts of climate change can cause people to feel helpless, hopeless, or despairing, resulting in denial, apathy or 'switching off'.
- We need to feel that our actions will make a difference.
- We are more likely to act if the actions are easy.
- Most of us don't like being blamed, shamed or being made to feel guilty.
- Habitual behaviours are hard to break.
- Much of our climate unfriendly behaviour is determined by social norms, social practice, and our 'lifestyles'.

While acknowledging the many unacceptable institutional and infrastructural barriers to climate action, participants were asked to take them as given and, as far as possible, to avoid focusing the discussion on them. Instead they were asked to look specifically at actions, outcomes, and impact - essentially at what works and doesn't work - from their own experience.

## Programme

The workshop was supported by a professional facilitator, who also assisted with the formatting of the agenda and layout of the room. Following introductions and an overview of the day, the event was divided into the following three sessions:

- 1** Experience engaging communities in action – what works and what doesn't?
- 2** Distilling recommendations for approaches, actions and rationales in relation to climate action.
- 3** Refining recommendations for different audiences and contexts.

Participants were separated into small discussion groups, and their comments were listed on post-it notes by a group facilitator and fed back in the plenary sessions. The plenary discussions were recorded.

## Report

This report is a summary of the day's interactive discussions and the key messages, principles, and themes that emerged. It draws on the range of inputs from participants based on their individual experiences. The quotes, and bullet points in the themes section, have been taken directly from the audio transcript, flip chart sheets, and post-it notes.

# Key Principles of Community Engagement in

It was generally agreed at the workshop that the principles of engaged citizenship and participatory democracy are fundamental to community engagement in climate action

## Engaged Citizenship

Democratisation involves the increasing recognition and inclusion of diverse groups in the political affairs of society, and their involvement in decision-making and the formation of policy (Dryzek, 1996).

While democracy is concerned with the greater public good, for it to be effective, citizens need to be active and to be involved both politically and socially (Honohan, 2005, Harris, 2010). Citizenship is a 'relational concept'. It is 'a relationship between the individual and the collective, between the citizens and the political community to which they belong...citizenship is always and everywhere in a permanent process of construction and transformation' (Cao, 2015, p. 24). Active democratic citizenship emphasizes the interdependence of citizens, who may not share a cultural or ethnic identity, and the formation of a shared community who act together, share common goods and work towards a collective future (Harris, 2010). People who are more actively engaged are more likely to change their behaviour than those who are more peripherally involved (Middlemiss, 2011).

*'I really like the idea of engaged and ethical citizenship because I think it allows all of us to be involved.'*

*'One of the observations that we had...was around citizenship and the importance of understanding what it means to be a citizen, and the responsibility that that actually brings to the society which you live in, but also in asking and demanding national organisations to be answerable to the citizens... [the Aran Islands'] approach with national organisations in going out to them and inviting them into the community and giving them visibility in the community was really, really, important... the Minister came down to visit...the feedback [given] was then reflected in the White Paper...they are coming down and listening and taking it board...a feedback loop.'*

*'It is similar to...inviting the Oireachtas committee on climate change to see the work that Tipperary Energy Agency are doing, then it means they are in the real world.'*

# Climate Action

## Participatory Democracy

Participation is a broad concept which can be defined in different ways depending on the circumstances or the ideological or political context. For some people, 'it is a matter of principle: for others, a practice: and for still others, an end in itself' (World Bank, 1996, p. xi). The measure of participation is whether or not citizens are able to gain decision-making power over issues which impact on their lives (Arnstein, 1969). There are two views on the benefits. One sees it as a way of increasing efficiency - if people are involved they will be less likely to rise up in opposition. The other sees participation as a basic right which leads to collective action, social inclusion, transparency and accountability (Pretty, 1995). People's perception of their efficacy and ability to influence decisions may determine whether or not they participate. Participation will only be transformative if the interest of all sides is to promote solidarity and empowerment (White, 1996). In Ireland, the Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, out of which has emerged The Public Participation Network (PPN), stated that 'it is important that open and participatory systems are developed through an open and participatory engagement with interested parties...It is important to ensure that local people and other stakeholders are genuinely engaged in shaping the decisions that affect them' (DECLG, 2014, p. 4).

*'It's important to realise the power people have themselves.'*

*'There is a difference between dialogue and manipulation.'*

*'Dignity in dialogue is essential.'*

*'Engagement is a connection, a meeting – a two-way thing.'*

# Complicating Factors

Participatory democracy and citizen engagement require time, resources and skills. Citizens should be listened to and to be heard. They need to be enabled to become actively involved and included in decision-making processes. But, as workshop participants agreed, in relation to climate change substantial change is urgently required. There is a danger that this urgency, and the level of response required, will determine the engagement methods used and override the principles of engaged citizenship and participatory democracy.

## The Need for Substantial Change

In line with transition theory, sustainability transitions are described as being 'processes of fundamental social change in response to societal challenges' which 'reflect a particular diagnosis of persistent social problems, in which persistence is attributed to the path dependency of dominant practices and structures...whose resolution requires structural and long-term change' (Avelino et al., 2016, p. 557). Sustainability transitions are all encompassing and multi-faceted. They are 'necessarily about interactions between technology, policy/power/politics, economics/business/markets, and culture/discourse/public opinion' (Geels, 2011, p. 25).

*'The change that is required is going to be huge. So tinkering at the edges that we are all stuck at, one way or another, is not going to cut it...this is something that has to be taken on board.'*

*'More than coffee cups...'*

## The Imperative of Acting Now

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that the coming years are critical if we are to stabilise temperatures below 1.5°C (IPCC, 2018a). When launching its Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, the IPCC stated that limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go 'hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society'. However, this would 'require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society'. According to Debra Roberts, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group II, 'the decisions we make today are critical in ensuring a safe and sustainable world for everyone, both now and in the future...The next few years are probably the most important in our history' (IPCC, 2018b). Analysis by MaREI researchers has demonstrated that to comply with the Paris Agreement, Ireland needs to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 5-10% per year, which contrasts starkly with the 4% growth that occurred in 2016 (Glynn et al., 2019). Fundamental shifts have to happen immediately across all the systems and, as set out in the Paris Agreement, these need to be intensified as we progress.

*'Time is tight...'*

'The change that is required is going to be huge. So tinkering at the edges that we are all stuck at, one way or another, is not going to cut it...this is something that has to be taken on board.'



# Themes arising from the Workshop

The following themes arose from the workshop deliberations and plenary sessions. Each theme includes quotes from the plenary feedback and bullet points written down during the small group discussions. They are grouped under four headings as follows:

2

## Engagement

- Don't preach to the converted
- Meet people where they are at (whatever their agenda)
- Go out there, build a bridge
- Listen and learn
- Encourage key leaders in the community to get involved
- Is tapping into existing groups the way to go?
- Engage honestly on what can be done
- Connect at an emotional level
- Focus on climate justice
- Women are much more central in engagement

1

## Awareness Raising

- There is a groundswell – the conversation is happening right now
- Most people are not that interested in climate action
- The message is important but how it's communicated is critical
- The idea of balanced debate needs to change



# Discussions

3

## Empowerment and Action

- People need to know the benefits
- Be creative and active – build while doing
- Co-ownership of solutions
- Show examples
- Focus on children and young people



## Governance and Resources

- Evaluation is important
- Communities need capacity building
- Resourcing issue needs to be addressed
- Once people are inspired make sure the barriers are removed
- Policy needs to be clear & fair/just
- A National Party (Cross Party consensus) is required - 'We have 11 years'

4

# 1 Awareness Raising

The first two themes in this section appear to contradict each other, and may reflect that some sections of the population are beginning to get more involved, while others are not, as yet. There is also the possibility that the methods used by some engagers are not working, or that the objectives for such engagement are unrealistic and overly driven by the urgency of the situation. People have many concerns over and above climate change and they need to feel they are being listened to and that these concerns are being heard.



Participant quotes



Discussion bullet points

## There is a groundswell - the conversation is happening right now

*'People are actually ready to go, so people are very willing and keen and are actually very much on message and willing to get stuck in if there is a way to take this forward.'*

*'Climate change has moved out of the zone of the dedicated few...a very green hue is very much becoming mainstream and it is also becoming personal and people are realising climate change is not just about our children and grandchildren, it's about how we go to work, how we heat our homes and so on and so forth. So that is a massive change that has come about and has to be recognised.'*



- People are aware of issues – potential positive outcomes of Trump → community realise they can do it for themselves
- Climate is now personal
- People ready to go – need support
- Many people are willing to be involved if they are asked genuinely
- Trend toward sustainable consumerism?

## Most people are not that interested in climate action

*'I would question some of the commentary on this ground swell because certainly on our table we spoke about frustrations and I suppose that angst was a word that came up a couple of times because people who are trying to campaign for climate action but actually it is falling on ears where the concerns are elsewhere. I am just curious because different things have emerged at different tables but this question of ground swell does not seem to be uniform across the tables.'*

*'What came up quite strongly a few times was 'environment' as being a luxury good and the affordability, and this concept that if you are too worried about putting food on the table you don't really have space to be worrying about the bigger issues, and the cost, added to other worries.'*



- Frustrating engaging with people who weren't interested; tried to drive ideas, met with resistance
- Small minority suffering angst; majority slow to come with you
- Problem getting new communities in the door
- Hard to reach everybody not just the converted
- Getting people to engage on retrofitting difficult when oil price reduces; deep retrofit a hard sell
- Massive disconnect re climate change – 'only here for a few years' → language gap between experts and locals
- Finite pool of worries
- Struggle with attendee numbers – 8-10 people in SEC Network attend webinars
- Information events (school) poorly attended

## The message is important but how it's communicated is critical

*'In terms of the tone you use for communities, what works and what doesn't, we have three big NOs - preaching, working on guilt, how we try to make people feel guilty about their behaviours and lifestyle is not taken well, and then grime, being overly negative about climate change, it is a negative thing to talk*

about. *Big yes is humour, but we have added using humour with an amount of fact, being informative while being humorous, stats versus facts, people engage with numbers, like to see numbers, respond well to numbers.* 'Talking about the future, talking about children or employment, particularly in a rural context when talking about migration...how do we get to the future we want?'

To [get to] the people who don't have time to show up to meetings or town hall gatherings but are very active via their phones in their virtual communities... *Change by Degrees, for example, tap into a huge amount of people who ask us questions and we go back and forth on a constant basis with them and what we have learned is very valuable but nobody has ever asked us.* 'Have a message that is consistent and understand your message well...the language you use is really important, adopting a language that is accessible, speak to people's interests, you engage with people's way of understanding the world and their locality.'

- Translate the facts
- Messaging around climate action has to be clear and consistent
- Too noisy - contradictory messaging leads to confusion
- Tailor message - communicate differently to different groups
- Words - Depends on audience, pick up on what they say
- Different people have different agendas
- Establish what their tone is
- When it [climate change] is talked about, is it presented in a way that is overwhelming? - or not relevant enough to compete with the other concerns they have?
- Who does the communication?
- Independent, trustworthy information source
- Need to earn our social license
- Tone – dignity, honesty, conversational
- Relatable, local, trustworthy
- No preaching, guilt (evangelical component), grimness, yes to humour (with facts), stats are better than facts
- Perfect is a bully!
- Concern – not fear
- Normalize change → make action normal
- Generate a buzz

- To keep people involved, keep feeding new bits of information → simple, clear
- One step at a time
- Misinformation needs to be addressed
- Need to sell 'energy transition'
- But 'sales pitch' makes people weary
- Need to make on-line contact
- Advertise on social media
- Tipping point may be via virtual communities
- Use of relatable narratives, observational short stories
- EV'S – local stories re cost and maintenance – trust → infrastructure issues (fast charging). PVs – stories locally shared
- Stories re impacts → create campaigns to share
- 'Future' – helpful for some → importance – children, jobs/rural
- Ask them [older people] to tell what they have seen (memories – rural electrification) to demonstrate the possibilities for change
- Lessons learnt, experience from the past
- Life experience of resilience
- Use the media, blogs

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## The idea of balanced debate needs to change

- Balanced reporting (don't give equal representation for minority views)
  - Meet them [journalists] & build relationships
  - Local reporters (news) & regional reporters (TV) are more accessible
  - Feed good quality info
  - Media don't want quality info – they want quality stories
  - Give them good stories!
  - Encourage them to cover good news stories and 'solutions'
  - Give feedback on pieces/stories that are counterproductive

# Engagement

Participant quotes

Discussion bullet points

## Don't preach to the converted

- Are we organizing events to preach to the converted rather than working with the key audience to design how to ensure this is addressed most relevantly?

## Meet people where they are at (whatever their agenda)

*'Starting with where people are at and having conversation about their interests, wishes, desires, hopes, future plans etc., rather than starting with a discussion on climate action, and interestingly meeting people where they are with their agenda which may be very much different and at conflict with our stuff because the key thing is to try and get the communication and the dialogue and not have it as a one-way flow. There were a couple of good examples, one being the Dingle Hub, who had a Farmers' Forum and that was really listening to people in the area and what they are interested in and you had this engagement between farmers and climate change campaigners and they would not normally be having positive discussions in a room.'*

*'We need to engage with all stakeholders in the process at the different levels at which they are willing to engage.'*

*'Link it to people's immediate concerns as opposed to climate change, which is very nebulous for a lot of people - it's abstract, people are not that aware of the consequence. Talk instead about employment, or other examples and ask people what they want and support them to get it.'*

*'When we have a dialogue with the communities, link it back to what they need, what are the key issues in the community, transport might be first, then housing, and climate change is twenty fifth - acknowledge that, it's fine, then we have to work out how to get it up that ladder in what's important to that community - coming and saying this is important, is pushing our agenda... If we just push our issue, it's them against us and we never get co-ownership.'*

*'The age of authority and preaching is over, it has to be about conversations and supporting people to name their own concerns and then finding a way through that.'*

- Have a dialogue on what makes each community successful? (climate change is a subsection)
- How does a community thrive? → putting climate change in a silo allows us to compartmentalize and ignore
- Need to find out what's special in an area, the hopes, what the assets are
- Engage all stakeholders
- Invest time, get people in the room, work on their terms
- Bring in a group and listen to their concerns rather than presenting – then present next time based on their concerns
- Start with a chat – what are your interests, what's happening?
- Find the trigger of what energises people → talk to people, ask questions (snowball)
- Ask people what they want → talk clearly → support their wants
- A picture emerges, e.g. employment, climate change

## Go out there, build a bridge

*'Getting people to come to an event can be quite difficult. The discussion was around - do we need to go to them rather than them coming to us?'*

*'To get people into the room other than those actively committed, use a variety of spaces, go to their room, have conversations and use insiders to talk to experts; farmers to farmers, women's group to women's group.'*

- Go to them (those not committed)
- Build relationships first
- Approach people you know are interested
- Find common connection (where we can work together)
- Find what we agree on – start there
- Understand why they are cynical
- If you argue you give them oxygen → don't argue, go and work with others
- Personal connection with people
- Cup of tea

## Listen and learn

*'Listening is key but so is understanding so to move beyond the listening is a great start but to try and get an understanding is another key thing.'*

- Chinese saying 'Listen first to understand then speak to be understood'
- Understand their needs
- Cross-generational learning through dialogue

## Encourage key leaders in the community to get involved

- Community champions
- Ambassadors
- Early adopters
- Local influencers
- Look for champions in the local authorities as well (the champion thing goes both ways)
- Key role for co-ordinators/chairs to ensure dignity is maintained

## Is tapping into existing groups the way to go?

*'Yes, if people see the resulting process links into their core goals.'*

- Involve local organisations!
- Leverage support from SEAI, Tidy Towns, LDCs, GAA, Teagasc, Trocaire, PPN's
- Include reps from different stakeholders so all feel represented/relatable
- Go to people where they are at e.g. Agri shows, Farmers' groups
- Piggy back on existing events
- Active retirement and other groups – peer to peer support
- Church and parish community
- Work through artists who are already working with these communities
- Tidy Towns has new sustainability section
- No traction with Chambers of Commerce

## Engage honestly on what can be done

*'One of the things which came out was around having real honest conversations with local people to show respect, to say "yes you are going to be impacted by this, we are not here to sugar coat it, and we are here to help resolve the issues, working together".'*

*'Maybe start from the Citizen's Assembly model where we acknowledge our own bias, we are coming from a standpoint, whatever that is, that allows people to challenge that and talk about, agree or disagree but it's not just experts.'*

- Real, honest conversation with local people – show respect/humanise the design process
- Be honest and balanced → don't exaggerate the bad side
- Be honest about who's not in the conversation
- Need to acknowledge the challenges not just the positives with RESS
- Recognize and own our biases

## Connect at an emotional level

- Engage in an issue that is emotive

## Focus on climate justice

*'We also discussed joining social justice issues with environmental issues and how initially they can seem very separate but through discussion and engagement the similarities and commonalities can come across.'*

- People who have come to Ireland may have done so because of climate change
- Hear their stories → giving language to the issues → witnesses of climate change

## Women are much more central in engagement

*'Really interesting point about gender balance, technical experts around climate change tend to be male and maybe some of the action takers tend to be women.'*

# 3 Empowerment and Action

Participant quotes



Discussion bullet points

## People need to know the benefits

*'I think we need to sell the energy transition, because the fossil fuel companies are out there selling and we need to sell the alternative. Somebody needs to have that role in society.'*

- Community engagement versus selling a product? - need both
- Long-term engagement requires a visible gain
- People will engage when it's worth their while
- They are interested in other questions (will my community exist, school, etc) - urban Ireland (quality of life now) – make houses warmer
- Talk about - comfort in home – economy
- Emphasise additional benefits – health/innovation/?? – wider SDG's – good examples from Tipp Energy Agency
- Make sustainability convenient and even cost effective!!!
- Selling energy v buying energy
- People more interested in rubbish than climate change
- Locally specific → what matters to people, e.g. traffic, water → capturing sentiment
- Climate change is the background music to job creation and training
- Link CC discussion back to basic things like food production, etc

## Be creative and active – build while doing

*'Something that worked quite well that came up through the plastic free Kinsale initiative was this idea of mirroring so, rather than necessarily being seen as an influencer, mirroring the behaviour of people locally and then giving that back through a virtual system, through social media, or through whatever other ways you are communicating with them, so that there is this reciprocal situation where you are trusted and you are acting like the people locally and you are answering the very simple questions and showing actions that are undertaken day to day and you are showing how they can be implemented or how those can be addressed.'*

*'We had a really interesting discussion here about Operation Transformation type of initiatives where you are trying to re-adapt peoples behaviours and way of thinking, trying to normalize a new way of thinking about the world. This being one where lifestyles are simplified, where you can see people dealing with a problem that is quite substantial - obesity and being unfit - but is something that has had quite an impact at national level.'*

*'I have always been interested in the difficulty we have had in bringing the sustainability message, energy message while food, cycling, plastic, are like wildfires. There is a lot more traction in those and I am very interested in why that is. Why energy/climate change isn't really getting that level of traction so far while other stuff does.'*

- Active engagement
- When they say what they want be able to offer a solution
- Focus on what you can do
- Enable people to take the next step
- Re-adapting/normalizing different alternative behaviours
- Action oriented knowledge
- Get the basics right (e.g. Dingle Farmers' Forum)
- Not just public meetings
- Face to face meetings, info evenings, newsletters
- One on ones, open sessions, continuous feedback and follow-up
- Art, comedy, crafts
- Community days (small community)
- Target consumption behavior, initially plastic reduction, then broaden to going green - plastics is a gateway to the media, it is tangible
- Outline steps businesses could take: a set of specific actions as 'enabler', coupled with longer term goal; food waste next step
- Timing is important
- 'Listening' for moments in time to act
- Priming is important, leads to trust
- Plastic Free Kinsale - prime your audience over time with simple messages they can relate to before you move onto bigger issues beyond plastic
- Mirror/influencer

- Adapt Tidy Towns concept to household → micro-level – a clear and concise strategy
- Look at a particular theme, e.g. sustainable fashion
- Give people a toolkit
- Ground the message in reality, e.g. transport, food, etc → what is feasible
- Sense of achievement?
- Carbon calculator app specific to Ireland → visible threat
- Metrics, e.g. BER for retrofits
- ESB bills – cost and CO2 emissions
- Future proofing homes for ageing – should include energy retrofit
- Enable down-sizing in community – win-win

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## Co-ownership of solutions

- For co-ownership: people need to own the question first and want to invest energy into it (!), and then act to address it
- Marry local energy with local ownership

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## Show examples

*'Showing not preaching, showcasing. We had a good example...from Tipperary where some of the early movers who got their homes retrofitted opened them...so people could come and look and ask questions.'*

*[In an application for a Greenway] '...rather than having just a standard exhibition where you invite people to look at plans and designs, to actually engage so what you show them is children's work and bring people along the route by the canal to see what the route is, bringing peoples' hopes and concerns into how you show the plans and what is happening.'*

*'We have a good example from ESNB in relation to Dingle...they have identified five key people that represent different stakeholders within the community and they are beginning to retrofit their homes and there is a...lot of work going on in relation to that and the messaging. And that this is long term and they are not going to pack up their tents and leave very quickly.'*

- Need inspiration, no barrier once they are engaged
- Show, not preach - ECTC - solar lights; lend energy monitors; role models opened their homes to people showcasing success
- Visual symbols of outcomes

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## Focus on children and young people

- Meet them and see what they understand by climate action
- Ask what their solutions are, often (better) innovators
- Ask what you can do for them
- Who are their role models?
- Engage intergenerational angst and anger
- Be sensitive with message
- Role of schools – showcasing
- Work with transition year students
- Local school → others in the community want to follow their example
- Social influences
- On-line platforms – where are they having their conversations & you start following them, repost/ retweet
- What campaigns are young people following – what is viral & resonating with them
- Understand their conversations → the memes, images, language, mediums
- Offer experiences in nature to establish a connection
- Offer practical projects
- Help them make their own short films outlining the issues
- How can we get them to display their environmental values and demonstrate responsibility?
- GAA – health programme 'sustainable charter'
- Music, culture
- Get the young people to do the investigative studies (e.g. biodiversity) rather than consultants
- Involve and enable in decision making/policy making
- Need for research workshop with younger people

# 4 Governance and Resources

Participant quotes

Discussion bullet points

## Evaluation is important

*'How to evaluate a project if it's successful or not, we talked about an effort benefit analysis, a play on cost benefit analysis, if you really have to put a lot of effort in for little benefits then its maybe not a good approach to take.'*

- Need to capture it's learning
- Learn from the experience of other groups
- Pre-and post-surveys
- Lessons learned from water meters' debacle? versus success of plastic bag levy, property tax
- Learning from mistakes and extremism within the 10%

## Communities need capacity building

*'There was a strong belief and consensus from everyone that agencies should be there to serve and support locals in taking action and maybe that was not being delivered on at a local level across the board. And that that is something which should be addressed by individuals with public representatives and with the agencies whenever the opportunity arises by inviting them to visit and take part and by expressing the issues that are raised.'*

- Build capacity - Engage with community of workers to green the building - now engaging with all the arts centre
- Education/awareness trips abroad useful for the group
- How to empower the 10% to influence the 90% to act
- Peer to peer – knowledge transfer (CPD)

## Resourcing issue needs to be addressed

*'If we are serious about this, it can't just be lumped on the same few people and expecting them to do it on top of the hundreds of thousands of things...we have to shift beyond volunteerism because this is much bigger than just a few people.'*

- Communities need to be resourced to undertake projects
- Resourcing an issue – rely too much on free time → is getting worse

- Make funding available
- Rural electrification didn't happen through volunteerism (alone)
- People are time poor; need hand-holding; make the process painless
- People afraid to volunteer – need specific task
- Need technical support
- Project co-ordinator, funded through energy credits → co-operative, local management of monies between community groups
- Need to pay people to attend meetings

## Once people are inspired make sure the barriers are removed

*'Once people are engaged, the biggest problem is the systemic barriers, like access to finance, spatial planning, all of these things contribute to making people disengage.'*

*'There was a barrier locally in terms of dealing with local authorities, so people who have run local initiatives and have been very successful in getting schools on board and things like that, there has been an issue with getting local authorities buy in.'*

- Barriers turn people off
- Can't implement things in the same way
- Retrofitting - what didn't work: rules changing, bureaucracy, cost of deep retrofits – suggest phased basis; gets more difficult to engage hard to reach groups over time
- 'Value for money' favours bigger industries in urban areas → rural areas losing out → SEAI looking for big bang
- SECs/community groups feel like they are doing the work of SEAI
- Keeping momentum is challenging, hard to build; businesses investing but local auths./govt. not supporting, e.g. waste segregation bins; barrier with local authority
- Big initiative – social enterprise – very successful/very challenging – difficult to duplicate
- Public taking a 'hit' on their lifestyles
- People have no access to decision-making
- Biggest problem is inside host organisations

- Plenty of academic knowledge but basic knowledge missing
- 'Stop the turbine' signs across Ireland - 'immediate threat'
- Wind farm proposal caused division
- Government/business won't use compensation when dealing with local communities – no honest communication regarding the local impacts of wind turbines
- Communities tired of being manipulated – how to avoid this
- No signals being given to market – stop start – no certainty

## Policy needs to be clear & fair/just

*'There is a huge investment needed...how you fund how we move around and eat our food, it has to be policy driven.'*

*'Policy that is being developed needs to be clear and fair and just. It needs to encompass everyone and there needs to be nobody left behind in the change that is required.'*

*'I think we don't give people respect enough to allow them the time to learn. I think it is really hard to expect politicians, civil servants or state agencies to understand what it actually takes to do these things in the real world and I think we often give out that they are not doing this in the right way...When you bring them down and open it up and open the book and say this is what it is, engage, have a look, ask the hard questions, and they do.'*

- Need certainty in the market
- Disconnect between policy makers and stakeholders, e.g. Dept Ed and schools
- Do we need to challenge much more the statutory development plan process? Or build it up to address the need?
- Can climate action be incorporated into the local action plans in a way that is relevant to our communities?
- Visibility of policy changes in the community
- We're not going to move if you don't
- Reciprocity leads to trust
- Political cynicism re lack of carbon tax in last budget – sent wrong signal
- Signals from Govt. are all wrong
- Leadership is weak and pathetic

- Public sector driving an agenda and not interested in people's lives
- Agencies should serve and support locals in taking action; address this with public representatives and agencies by inviting them to visit/engage with initiatives
- People way ahead of political process

## A National Party (Cross Party consensus) is required - 'We have 11 years'

*'For various reasons, one of the things I've studied over the years is why the Berlin wall came down. There isn't a single reason, it's not as simple as somebody did that and it came down, there was a tipping point. So we need to be more into the accumulation of things, levering on each other, to achieve tipping point rather than 'if only we deal with these pieces it will all be ok'. There aren't any magic bullets.'*

*'I have this image in my head the last few days of being in a circular room full of doors and I'm the climate change person, I want to push all the doors, but some won't open yet. We have to go in through the ones that will open and wait for the others when the time comes. In a number of discussions people have said that things have changed in Ireland in the last two years, in relation to plastic and LGBT, things are very different. When is the right moment to make that move?'*

- Show them [politicians] real stuff – educate
- Engage across parties with 'high potential' people likely to be leaders of tomorrow
- Impact on policy – quote back the policy
- Campaign at grassroots
- Focus on local politicians - go to their clinics - discuss with them on the doorstep
- Phone their office, e-mail them, text/WhatsApp them, follow them on Twitter
- Give them simple digestible messages
- Talk about the future
- Publicise positive messages
- Advocate for environmental GHG measure
- Create competition to ensure that only those who deliver remain



## Concluding remarks

This workshop '**How do we Engage Communities in Climate Action? – Practical Learnings from the Coal Face**' invited community development and climate action practitioners to discuss their experience of engaging communities in action, and, in particular, in climate action, and to recommend approaches, actions and rationales. The proceedings highlighted two key principles underpinning climate action in Ireland today: engaged citizenship and participatory democracy, and also highlighted two complicating factors: the need for substantial change and the imperative of acting now. This report has aimed to capture the key messages and themes arising from the workshop discussions, including participating in active honest engagement, getting the messaging right, targeting key community leaders and tapping into existing groups, and engaging young people. It was unanimously agreed that for climate action to thrive at community level more practical support, capacity building measures, and financial resources need to be provided.

Two key principles underpinning climate action in Ireland today are: engaged citizenship and participatory democracy. Two complicating factors are: the need for substantial change and the imperative of acting now.





Go out there, build a bridge

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## Appendix 1

### **Participant List**

Aileen Campion & Terry Griffith, Birdhill Tidy Town & Energy Communities Tipperary Co-op (ECTC)  
Catriona Fallon, CEO, Siamsa Tire, National Folk Theatre & Arts Centre, Tralee  
Chris Chapman, Facilitator/community development worker  
Claire McElligott, Dingle Project Engagement Manager, ESNB  
Dara Carroll, Associate Director, M.CO  
Dara Ó Maoildhia, Cathaoirleach, Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann Teoranta (CFOAT) - Aran Islands Energy Coop  
Fergal Conlon, Social Inclusion Programme Manager, West Cork Development Partnership  
Fergal Gough, PhD student, Dept. Of Sociology, UCC  
Jessica Mason, Freelance environmental educator, facilitator of the Global Action Plan Greener Living Programme  
John Aston, MD, astoneco management  
Liz Creed, Transition Town Kinsale  
Madeleine Murray, Director, Change by Degrees/Plastic Free Kinsale  
Orla O'Shaughnessy, Marketing Exec, Tipperary Energy Agency  
Paul Kenny, CEO, Tipperary Energy Agency  
Rebecca Hatchett, Engagement, Learning and Co-Design Facilitator  
Ruth Doyle, Associate Director, M.CO  
Siobhán O'Dowd, Community Worker, Ballyphehane/Togher Community Development Project  
Ursula Morrish, marketing professional,  
worked formerly with the UK sustainability and communications consultancy, Eco-Age  
Xavier Dubuisson, MD, XD Sustainable Energy Consulting Ltd



## Appendix 2

### Projects and initiatives mentioned by workshop participants

#### AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard 2015

[https://www.accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AA1000SES\\_2015.pdf](https://www.accountability.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/AA1000SES_2015.pdf)

#### IAP2 – International Association for Public Participation

<https://www.iap2.org/>

**The Smart Farming programme** focuses on eight key areas on farms, including soil fertility, energy, water, inputs and waste, with a view to cost savings and cutting environmental impact  
<https://smartfarming.ie/about-smart-farming/>

**The Rediscovery Centre** provides a variety of exciting and interactive workshops that are linked to the primary curriculum and which can be delivered either in our centre, in the Boiler House Ballymun, or in the classroom. Their educators are trained in the delivery of environmental education

<http://www.rediscoverycentre.ie/education/primary-level-education-programme/>

**Incredible Edibles** is a healthy eating initiative for Primary School pupils. It encourages schools across the country to get busy growing carrots, lettuce, potatoes, strawberries, turnips and herbs. Schools are supplied with grow packs containing everything they need to grow a veritable feast of healthy foods.

<http://www.incredibleedibles.ie/>

**Green-Schools/Green Flag Awards** promotes long-term, whole-school action for the environment, and is a student-led programme with involvement from the wider community. The programme is operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce.  
<https://greenschoolsireland.org/about/>

**Plastic Free 4 Schools** is a programme to help schools to go plastic free, through 3 plastic free asks, and in turn, act as ambassadors for change in their communities. It has been designed by Change by Degrees and tested through Plastic Free Kinsale - a community initiative to free a whole town from single use plastic.

<https://www.change.org/ie/plasticfree4schools>

**Tús** provides opportunities for people who are unemployed to break the cycle of joblessness and helps to improve a person's work readiness and support them in returning to the labour market.

<https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Tus-Community-work-placement-OG.aspx>

#### Palm Oil Ad

A Christmas commercial by the British supermarket, Iceland, which used a short cartoon made by Greenpeace to demonstrate how palm oil growing destroys the rainforest, was blocked by Clearcast, a non-governmental agency that checks ads for major broadcasters before airing in the UK, who stated that the short film breached the 2003 Communications Act which bans political ads.

<https://www.inverse.com/article/50915-banned-palm-oil-tv-ad-why-it-s-sharply-divided-environmentalists>

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/dec/05/iceland-banned-palm-oil-advert-should-have-aired-says-itv-chief>

**Global Action Plan Ireland** is part of GAP International – a global network of organisations in over 27 countries, that facilitate behaviour change to promote environmental sustainability. By focusing on environmental behaviour change, GAP programmes empower individuals to change their long-term consumption habits with sustainable living tools and programmes.

<http://globalactionplan.ie/>

#### SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

#### Marriage Equality campaign

<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/how-the-yes-was-won-the-inside-story-of-the-marriage-referendum-1.2418302>

#### Operation Transformation

RTE reality TV campaign which documents the experiences of 6 Leaders on their weight loss journeys

<https://ot.rte.ie/>

#### 30 Wears Challenge Campaign

Will I wear this 30 times before making a new purchase?

<https://shopvirtueandvice.com/blogs/news/what-is-the-30-wears-challenge>

**The Green Carpet Challenge** uses celebrities to showcase ethical creations at high profile events

<https://www.mochni.com/what-is-the-green-carpet-challenge/>

#### Eco-Age Green Carpet Collection

<https://eco-age.com/green-carpet-collections>

#### Sustainable Fashion Awards

<https://jakandjil.pl/sfa2018/>

#### Eco-Logic Awards

<https://www.eco-logicawards.com/>

#### Global Leaders of Change

Recognising transformational business leadership in ethical and sustainable development.

<https://eco-age.com/gcc-leaders-change>





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