

How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change.

Submission to the Citizens' Assembly from the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA).

11/08/17

Introduction

Climate change must be addressed through the three pillars of sustainable development: the social, the economic and the environmental. A whole of government and a whole-society response is required for Ireland to be a leader in tackling climate change. It requires ambitious and clear Government action. It requires education that enables all people in Ireland to identify, challenge and address the root causes of climate change. Popular education, public participation and active citizenship are essential to make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change.

IDEA, the Irish Development Education Association, is the national network for Development Education in Ireland. We represent over 100 members involved in the practice, promotion and advancement of Development Education. Our members include International Development NGOs, Domestic NGOs, schools networks, youth sector organisations, adult and community educators. Their work encompasses global citizenship education, education for sustainable development, human rights and equality. IDEA members deliver Development Education through formal, non-formal and informal education. This breadth of engagement is one of the sector's core strengths, enabling it to engage with a wide array of audiences using a range of tools drawn from education and development practices.

The Citizen's Assembly has shown great leadership in prioritising and highlighting this discussion on climate change. We are calling on you to make strong recommendations to the government to take urgent and transformative action on addressing climate change and educating the people of Ireland.

How the State can properly engage the public on the wider issue of climate change?

To be a leader in climate change Ireland must prioritise and invest in education that addresses the social, economic and environmental aspects of climate change and which enables all people in Ireland to identify, challenge and address the root causes of climate change. To properly engage the public on the wider issue of climate change Ireland must prioritise and invest in education.

Global Education First, former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon’s global initiative on education, very clearly outlines the central role of education in tackling climate change:

“The world faces global challenges, which require global solutions. These interconnected global challenges call for far-reaching changes in how we think and act for the dignity of fellow human beings. It is not enough for education to produce individuals who can read, write and count. Education must be transformative and bring shared values to life. It must cultivate an active care for the world and for those with whom we share it. Education must also be relevant in answering the big questions of the day. **Technological solutions, political regulation or financial instruments alone cannot achieve sustainable development. It requires transforming the way people think and act. Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful, tolerant and inclusive societies. It must give people the understanding, skills and values they need to cooperate in resolving the interconnected challenges of the 21st century.**”¹

The need for global citizenship education is echoed in the Sustainable Development Goals. In Goal 4.7, all United Nations member states, including Ireland, have committed to:

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”²

Properly engaging the public on the wider issue of climate change requires building on existing good practice, policy and experience. Strong foundations and excellent development educational practice exists in Ireland. The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development³ and the Irish Aid Strategy on Development Education⁴ have the potential to facilitate a national campaign of popular education on climate justice and Ireland’s role in tackling climate change. However, they are not sufficiently prioritised and not adequately resourced. IDEA members and our partners deliver excellent educational programmes reaching all areas of Irish society. Development Education enables public engagement with climate justice and inequality in formal education settings such as schools,

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gefi/priorities/global-citizenship/> (Highlights added by IDEA for this submission) Accessed 11/08/17

² <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-4-quality-education/targets/> (Highlights added by IDEA for this submission) Accessed 11/08/17

³ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Strategy-on-Education-for-Sustainable-Development-in-Ireland-2014-2020.pdf> Accessed 11/08/17

⁴ <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/60aboutirishaid/IA-DevEd-Strategy-English.pdf> Accessed 11/08/17

colleges and universities, as well as non-formal settings such as in youth work, community development, adult education, training programmes, festivals and public events. Ireland's Development Educators have an excellent international reputation for the quality and creativity of our work. The State has strong foundations to build on, through existing policies and existing practice, but to make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change it must prioritise and invest in education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

We must also challenge beliefs and values that are deeply embedded in our education and knowledge systems which are contributing to unsustainable development. "Far from being an agent of change, education often underpins individualism, unsustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption, directly or by default"⁵. Professor Daniella Tilbury, Chair of the UNESCO Expert Group on the Monitoring and Evaluation of Education for Sustainable Development stated that "the paradigms deeply embedded in our education knowledge systems and relationships are contributing to unsustainable development"⁶. David Orr says "that those who contribute to exploiting poor communities and the earth's ecosystems are those who have BAs, MBAs, MSCs and PhDs ...".⁷ Professor Tilbury goes on to say that "Paradoxically, Education holds the key to change. Higher education has shown that it can break social paradigms and bring transformation to societies." We must take into account the risks and challenges inherent in our education system in order to create a transformational education strategy.

To properly engage the public on climate change, education must focus on the 3 core pillars of sustainable development: the environment, the economic and the social. It must address global inequality, local to global interconnectedness and rights based approaches. Issues of sustainable development cannot be separated from global justice, inequality, human rights and cultural diversity. A narrow focus ignores the roots of sustainable development in social, economic, political and cultural practices and creates a danger of 'greenwashing' or superficial engagement with complex and often uncomfortable issues; for example, focusing only on recycling of waste and ignoring unsustainable consumption.

Ireland's energy, transport and agriculture sectors

To be a leader in tackling climate change Ireland must put in place a meaningful and transformative action plan to ensure we meet our existing commitments to reducing emissions and tackling the social, economic, political and environmental root causes of climate change. Ireland has made commitments as a signatory of both the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. At present we are not meeting these commitments and a meaningful national implementation plan has not been put in place.

⁵ Sterling, Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, Issue 6, 2008, p.9

⁶ IDEA webinar, September 23, 2013

⁷ David Orr, 2004

The Sustainable Development Goals are a set of 17 goals agreed by UN member states to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. Ireland has been a leader in the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ireland and Kenya co-chaired the negotiations which created the Goals. Ireland needs to be a leader in their implementation.

Stop Climate Chaos⁸ and others have highlighted many of the ways in which Ireland is failing to meet our international commitments and responsibilities on climate change. Political leadership and a national action plan for the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals are urgently needed.

IDEA is a member of Coalition 2030, an alliance of Irish civil society groups calling on the government to put in place a national implementation plan for the Sustainable Development Goals. We call on the Citizens' Assembly to make a strong recommendation for the state to honour its international commitments and urgently put in place a transformative national implementation plan.

In Finland, a whole-society commitment to sustainable development has been put in place involving "companies, corporations, educational institutions, administration, political parties, cities and other actors".⁹ Ireland needs to take a whole-society approach to climate change. This requires public engagement and public education.

Conclusion

We commend the Citizen's Assembly on your leadership in prioritising and highlighting this discussion on climate change. We call on the Assembly to make strong recommendations to the government to urgently put in place a national action plan for sustainable development, to prioritise education that engages the people of Ireland with the root causes of climate change, and to develop a whole-society commitment to sustainable development.

⁸ <https://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/> Accessed 11/08/17

⁹ <http://kestavakehitys.fi/en/commitment2050> Accessed 11/08/17