



Educating and Acting for a Better World

**A submission to
the Department of the Environment, Community and Local
Government
on the draft document
*Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and
Community Development in Ireland***

April 2015

Contributed by 80:20 Educating & Acting for a Better World

80:20 Educating & Acting for a Better World is an Irish-based registered charity founded in 1996 promoting popular education on human development and human rights.

www.8020.ie

Introduction

80:20 Educating & Acting for a Better World welcomes the public consultation and call for submissions on the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's draft document *Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland*. As members of civil society concerned with the promotion of local and global justice, 80:20, as part of the development education¹ sector in Ireland has made an ongoing/significant contribution to community development in Ireland.

80:20 endorses the consultation submission made by the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)² to this consultation process on the Draft *Framework for Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland*, of which 80:20 is a member organization.

IDEA members represent a spectrum of civil society and NGO actors. The sector has been recognized by European colleagues as a strong example of good practice in development education³. With membership of 75 organizations in addition to 37 individuals, IDEA represents a significant voice within Irish civil society devoted to building public understanding of active citizenship and local - global approaches to shared challenges.

Development education and community development

80:20 welcomes the draft policy's vision of 'vibrant, sustainable, self-determining communities that have the social, cultural and economic well-being of all citizens⁴ at their core' and the document's emphasis on community development processes as a means to achieving this vision. We believe that development education can play a key role in the community development processes described in the policy.

There is a strong synergy between development education, community education and community development. They share a number of common and complementary core principles, such as social cohesion, inclusiveness, equality, social justice, empowerment, participation and active citizenship. There are also close links in terms of training and education methodologies as development education has a long tradition of using active learning, person-centered and participative approaches within communities across Ireland stretching back more than 40 years.

¹ There is no single standard definition for development education. However for the purposes of this submission, it is helpful to refer to Irish Aid's definition: 'Development education is an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. It seeks to engage people in analysis, reflection and action for local and global citizenship and participation. It is about supporting people in understanding, and in acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives and others at personal, community, national and international levels'. (*Irish Aid and Development Education*, 2003).

² For more visit <https://www.ideaonline.ie>

³ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/nscentre/ge/DE_Watch.pdf Accessed 29/01/14

⁴ 'Citizens' here be rephrased so as to emphasise the inclusion of all residents in our communities, not just Irish Citizens.

The development education sector envisions a world based on solidarity, equality and sustainability. Community-based development education can empower us to create this world, through enhancing active global citizenship and learning for our interdependent local-to-global communities.

We believe that there can be no local without the global. The roots of local issues are often located outside the community in broader national and increasingly international economic and political contexts, for example in changing patterns of employment and economic development. Therefore a framework for local community development needs to be underpinned not just by active local citizenship, but by global citizenship as well.

The framework could be strengthened by a more pronounced inclusion of core community development principles language, such as anti-poverty work, the tackling of inequalities in society and commitments to social justice and to universalism, which are presently 'thin' in the draft document.

The vision and principles outlined in the framework could be further strengthened⁵ by:

- promoting 'rights talk' through the language of human rights to empower community development organisations (supporting the use of human rights approaches to community development)⁶
- broadening the framework beyond a preoccupation with narrow economic concerns to social justice and sustainable community development
- committing to the creation of participatory democratic spaces at grass-roots community level that values the citizens' lived experience,

The context for development education work in Ireland in the community sector has primarily been funded through Irish Aid (Ireland's overseas aid programme)⁷ over the past 25 years. Over that period the community sector has been a priority feature of the programme. Most recently, for example, in the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy Plan 2007-2011 (extended to 2015)⁸, a core objective for the strategy included a focus on structural engagement with VEC's, developing enhanced curriculum options, coupled with accreditation standards and support for adult and community education providers and how to use them:

⁵ These points are adapted from recommendations in Professor Fred Powell's presentation on 'Community Development in Post-Crash Ireland: Ten Principles for Critical Citizenship (Dec 5th, 2014), Community Workers' Co-operative. See <http://www.cwc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Community-Development-in-Post-Crash-Ireland-November-2010.pdf>

⁶ We would welcome a continuation to human rights based approaches to community development, as exemplified by the work of the Combat Poverty Agency as a statutory agency

⁷ More info at <https://www.irishaid.ie>

⁸ To access the Irish Aid Development Education Strategy Plan 2007-2011 visit <https://www.irishaid.ie/news-publications/publications/publicationsarchive/2007/november/irish-aid-dev-education-strategy-plan-2007-2011/>

“Objective 3: Support the further integration of development education in formal and non-formal education programmes in Ireland

Community sector remains a priority area:

The community education sector has been a vibrant space for development education for many years. Irish Aid will continue to support structured education programmes at this level. The development of FETAC accredited courses will remain a priority.”

- Page 11, Irish Aid Development Education Strategy Plan 2007-2011 (extended to 2015).

In addition, the recent launch of the international development programme policy places a strong emphasis on increasing development awareness and engagement work in Ireland through community engagement

“We have an excellent reputation for the high quality development education we support in Ireland. This development education aims to deepen understanding, and encourage people towards taking action for a more just and equal world. It provides a unique opportunity for people in Ireland to reflect on their roles and responsibilities as global citizens. We are committed to undertaking a more strategic approach to development education with support more closely targeted at a number of areas. This will include teacher education at primary and postprimary level, the improvement and broader dissemination of appropriate teaching resources, and more focussed work with the community and youth sector.”

– page 35, One World Our Future: Ireland’s Policy for International Development (2013) by Irish Aid⁹

Development education initiatives are well-placed in community organisations and NGOs that have played key roles in engaging local groups and in community settings in Ireland around ‘sustainable development’. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will impact on local citizens initiatives, policy processes (such as the recent Department of Education strategy on Education for Sustainable Development¹⁰) and the government’s role on delivering on these goals at home and as part of overseas work. Development education should be included within the present framework as part of preparing for community engagement in Ireland following the publication of the SDGs in September 2015.

⁹ Access One World Our Future: Ireland’s Policy for International Development (2013) by Irish Aid online at <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/one-world-one-future-irelands-new-policy.pdf>

¹⁰ See the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (2014) by the Department of Education and Skills, which includes community development approaches to ESD. See <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Strategy-on-Education-for-Sustainable-Development-in-Ireland-2014-2020.pdf>

80:20 therefore also recommends that the policy context and as part of the objectives for the framework policy for local and community development in Ireland should include the long-standing strand of development education community engagement policy support.

Objective One: Engaging with Communities

Development education is particularly relevant to Objective One of the draft framework, 'Engaging with Communities'. This objective sets out how the framework will 'provide local people with a real voice and real power in the development of policies and strategies that identify and seek to address their communities' needs.' Development education can help achieve this by contributing to the knowledge, skills, values and action dimensions¹¹ of community development:

- *Contributing to Knowledge:* Development education facilitates an understanding of how local and global issues affect our own lives. Development education enables participants to make connections between communities, and encourages us to bring global awareness, solidarity, inclusiveness and resilience to local issues.
- *Building Skills:* Development education builds critical thinking, creativity, communication, intercultural awareness and acceptance, political and economic literacy and media literacy. It enables people to see issues from different perspectives and to engage with those who have different needs and priorities.
- *Strengthening Values:* Development education can strengthen core values of community development, such as equality, justice, empowerment and participation. Development education also strengthens individual and collective abilities to understand and challenge the effects of social inequality and educational disadvantage on communities.
- *Promotes Action:* Development education enables people to explore and analyse a range of possible responses to community issues and concerns. It aids understanding of how change happens and how power structures can be constructively challenged. Development education empowers people to effectively plan and carry out targeted actions, and builds and engages an active citizenry at local, national and global levels.

¹¹ These dimensions are further elaborated on in a recent publication by the members of the IDEA Community Sector Working Group, 'Development Education in Adult and Community Settings: Guidelines for Good Practice (2014)

http://www.developmenteducation.ie/media/documents/Good_Practice_Guidelines_for_Development_Education_in_Adult_and_Community_Settings.pdf

Given the qualities of development education as outlined above, we feel that it is essential to include a development education dimension in a strategy for local community development. This should include:

- Prioritising representation of development education organisations and practitioners in Public Participation Networks (PPNs)
- Specific inclusion of development education, and integration of development education practice into all Local and Economic Community Plans (LECPs),
- Including development education organisations in the delivery of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

There are many IDEA members who are currently active in community education and community development projects across Ireland, including 80:20. Their participation in the further development and implementation of the draft framework should be supported, as their input could significantly strengthen and enhance delivery of local and community development.

For further information on 80:20 please contact:

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