



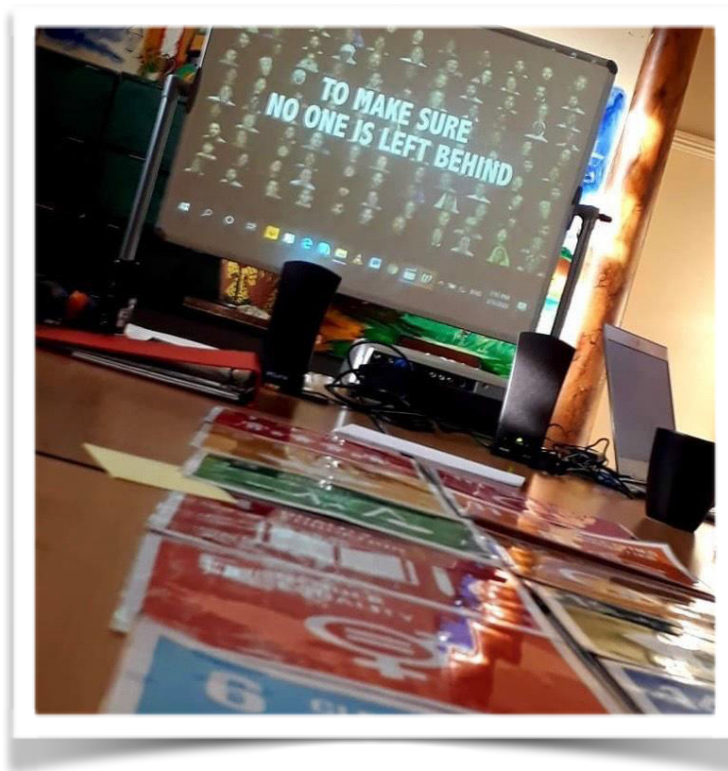
LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND



Conversations *Series 2*



INTRODUCTION



The 'Leave No One Behind Conversations' series 2 is an [All Together in Dignity\(ATD\) Ireland](#) project supported by [Concern Worldwide](#). A community workshop series based on inclusive conversations, the project sought to raise awareness among people from all walks of life in Ireland of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as expressed in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its Promise, 'To Leave No One Behind'. Specifically, the project sought to involve and empower marginalised groups to actively contribute to this public discourse through valuing their knowledge and lived experience of poverty and social exclusion.

The 17 SDGs, also known as Global Goals, were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit and came into force on 1 January 2016. They are the global community's response to the urgent economic, social and environmental problems facing the world today, from climate change to global poverty and inequality. They set out a bold vision for achieving a more sustainable world by the year 2030. Ireland has a particular interest in the SDGs, as its former Ambassador to the UN, Mr David Donoghue, acted as co-facilitator to the intergovernmental negotiations through which the Goals were agreed.

The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 2000-2015, and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The SDGs are unique in that they call for action by all countries, north and south, poor, middle-income and rich, in order to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognise that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for their achievement. Countries have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the Goals, which will require quality, accessible and timely data collection. Regional follow-up and review will be based on national-level analyses and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level.

On the 26th April 2018, Minister Denis Naughten launched *The Sustainable Development Goals: National Implementation Plan 2018-2020*, which set out how the Irish Government would implement the SDGs in Ireland and support countries around the world to do the same. The National Implementation Plan provided for a whole-of-government response to the SDGs and addressed the need to raise public awareness of, and engagement with, the SDGs. The plan identified four strategic priorities to guide implementation, namely: *Awareness*: raise public awareness of the SDGs; *Participation*: provide stakeholders opportunities to engage and contribute to follow-up and review processes, and further develop national implementation of the Goals; *Support*: encourage and support efforts of communities and organisations to contribute towards meeting the SDGs, and foster public participation; and *Policy alignment*: develop alignment of national policy with the SDGs and identify opportunities for policy coherence.

All Together in Dignity Ireland welcomed the launch of this Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan. At grassroots level, we began to spread awareness of the Leave No One Behind Promise through our Leave No One Behind Conversations Series 1 campaign which consisted of thought-provoking community workshops inviting people, including those with direct experience of poverty, to explore their understanding of the Leave No One Behind Promise as well as the challenges involved in delivering on such a transformative aspiration. Progress to date on the Implementation Plan in Ireland and the 2030 Agenda worldwide has in general been slow and disappointing. We hope that by further promoting the importance of the SDGs and the Leave No One Behind promise in a second series of community workshops, and by bringing forward the voices of those who have continued to be left most behind within Irish communities, we can shine a light on the **importance and relevance of the 2030 Agenda Goals and Promise** to those struggling the most. We also hope that the suggestions by the participants of our workshops on what we can do to ensure people are not left behind will be reviewed and acted on by Government, policy makers and other actors of influence.

METHODOLOGY



The Leave No one Behind series 2 community workshops took place from January to June 2020 with **6** groups and involving over **100** individuals from all walks of life around the country, many of whom had life experience of poverty. The subject of these conversations was the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular the Promise embedded in the SDG's to Leave No One Behind. During the community workshops, each of the 17 SDGs were discussed in depth, and participants rated each SDG in terms of its level of importance to their lives, choosing one (or up to three) Goals that meant the most to them. An important part of these workshops was ensuring that a true reflection of people's thoughts and feelings concerning the Goals was revealed, and how they would practically impact the lives of those people struggling the most. Based on an interview with an ATD community activist regarding the proposed methodology for these conversations, three major concepts emerged; **Encouraging, Empowering and Engaging**. These three concepts formed the basis for a participative approach. They were important elements at each step of the process; from recruiting participants; having inclusive, honest conversations based on their personal experiences; and recording their understanding, valuing of and willingness to commit to practical action around the SDGs and the Promise.

ENCOURAGING

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

The people who participate in the LNOB conversations come from many walks of life. They were engaged, not only through other activities organised by ATD Ireland, but also through other civil society organisations involved in the 2030 Agenda. Reaching out to different services also allowed for a good degree of diversity in those involved in the workshops including people of different genders, ages, nationality, disabilities, etc. and ranging from organisations focusing on adult literacy, addiction rehabilitation, immigration/direct provision, youth matters, etc.

As the process of reaching out to people was organic, there was not a firm focus on ensuring a fixed quota of people were involved. However, in total, the project met with over **100** individuals from **6** different groups across **3** counties in a total of **12** individual meetings. The groups that participated comprised: **the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC), the Cork Life Centre, the Dominican Justice Office, the North West Inner City Training and Development Project (NWICTDP), the Granard Family Resource Centre and ATD Ireland**. We wish to express our gratitude to all of the participants and groups that took part in the conversations, and for all the wisdom, courage and insights shared with us. Whilst we planned to do further workshops with 4 other groups, these had to put these on hold due to government COVID health restrictions. We are conscious that the pandemic has had a major impact on many people's health and welfare, especially those already experiencing poverty and exclusion - an important dimension we could not incorporate fully into this report. Nonetheless, we hope that this report provides insight into many of the related problems raised by participants, such as isolation and improper access to healthcare, that sadly have been further exasperated by the pandemic.

One of the most important aspects of 'Leaving No One Behind' is to find shared cause and solidarity with the most vulnerable and those most susceptible to poverty. Often, there are challenges in engaging with individuals and groups who have experienced hardship or trauma in their lives, which is why establishing trust over time is an ongoing process with every new person or group that ATD may come into contact with.

EMPOWERING



How can space be created in which people feel comfortable to speak up?

An ATD activist who took part in facilitating the workshops said: *“While specific scenarios such as games and ice-breakers are utilized to help to make people feel relaxed and willing to engage in discussion, it is clear that a sincere desire to listen, a readiness to laugh at oneself and a good dose of humility are perhaps most important in creating a space where people can speak with confidence”*.

From the outset, it was important to create a safe space for participants where there were no power dynamics or hierarchy. The conversations at times delved into quite heavy topics, so it was helpful to use ice breakers at the start to help build a rapport, and to help the group to get to know each other first. It was also important to explain or remind people what the SDGs and the LNOB promise were at the start of the workshops through presentations, and interactive and visual aid methods. In one introductory game used, each participant of the group took one of the 17 laminated SDG cards; we then went around the room getting each person to hold their card in the air, before discussing that SDG as a group. In another exercise to familiarise participants with the LNOB promise, we played the game, ‘Walking in Someone Else’s Shoes’, where each participant, standing in a horizontal line with others, was given a card with a different persona on it and had to answer yes or no (by either stepping forward or staying put) to statements depending on that character’s description e.g. ‘I have enough food to eat and water to drink’, or ‘I will probably go to college’, or ‘I am not affected in my daily life by changing weather patterns’ - thus allowing participants to experience the life of the character and the extensions of global inequality. The aim of this game was to get people talking about who moved furthest and why, and who got left behind and why? - and doing so through an interactive and accessible medium.

It was important that the project helped create a space where the participants felt comfortable in contributing their opinions and speaking about their experiences. Even the best attempts made by ATD community activists to encourage discussion were not met with immediate success. According to an ATD activist, *“Society in general is very judgmental, and this is a primary reason why some of those participating in the LNOB conversations can be initially slow to open up”*. He noted that participating in the conversations may be a unique experience for many present, and that for some they may *“have gone a long time, sometimes years, or perhaps they have never been asked their opinion before”*. Themes discussed in the SDGs, such as politics and the economy, can be intimidating as a result of gatekeeping in society, so it is necessary to undo the disillusionment surrounding these topics.

In addition, speaking about one’s own life experiences can be a difficult and distressing task for many people. As a result, **patience, consideration and empathy** played a vitally important role during these conversations.

ENGAGING

With the written permission of participants, these conversations were recorded as they were happening and then transcribed word for word.; however, the anonymity of individuals was protected. The quotes used herein are therefore directly selected from this written script. One ATD activist stated that he initially disliked the recording of the group conversations, finding it somewhat inhibiting. However, he later reflected that he could be “authentic”, as when his words are recorded, they are recorded in “Dublin” rather than in “perfect English”, as he put it. ATD’s commitment to recording what participants say verbatim is important as it *“has to happen this way, otherwise you’re not getting the true essence of people”*. Fundamentally, the LNOB conversations emphasise the importance of the participants’ lived experiences as, through sharing our experiences, *“we can all connect”* and topple hierarchies *“by reducing the distance between people”*.

We now present direct quotes from individuals who participated in the LNOB series 2 conversations when speaking on the personal importance of each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as illustrated in the chart below.



SDG 1: NO POVERTY



With **27** first preference votes, **SDG 1: No Poverty** was chosen as the **2nd** most important Sustainable Development Goal by the participants in our community workshops.

Many talked about poverty in relation to homelessness. It was highlighted that accommodation should be a right: **“everyone should have a place to call home”**.

It was discussed how often homeless people are afraid to go to hostels because they are **“afraid if they go into hostels that they are going to be robbed or stabbed or something like that”**.

One of the participants talked about their own experience of having to beg on the streets:

“I was working three jobs and I was still sitting on the streets begging people for money because I was sending money home to family and everything. I was looking at people who have money pass by me and ask their husbands - Why is he not going to work?”

Participants thought that poverty is perpetuated due to those in power benefiting financially from the status quo, with sentiments such as **“poverty is a big business”** and:

“They put so many obstacles in front of you so you cannot do anything because somebody making the laws is putting money in their pockets.”

The participants explained that life without poverty is a human right: ***“No poverty is a basic human right...It’s completely absurd.”***

It was noted that no poverty was linked with many of the other Sustainable Development Goals, including Quality Education, Good Health and Well-Being, and Decent Work and Economic Growth.

“I would put no poverty and no hunger together, and the health one too.”

“The other one I picked was good jobs and economy and growth because if you haven’t got the right education and the right job, how do you stay out of poverty. Everything is linked together.”

“If there is no poverty, people will have money to go for education and to their own house and to maintain their own communities around them. But people need money in their hands to do this.”

“If no one is poor, then of course, equality will rise because people will not look down on you. If I am poor, then you look down upon me, but if we are equal in terms of money, then we are seen as equal.”

There were calls for more redistribution of wealth to tackle poverty:

“The governments keep saying there’s no money but there is. They have money, people have the money but it’s just not distributed equally.”

Different perspectives on how poverty is defined and experienced were also touched on:

“It’s the lived experience of poverty too and it’s that my version of poverty might be different to yours. Who are we to go preach to a country that you should tell their government to build it a certain way? To us not being in poverty, it is not having a house, but then building someone something that basically looks like a shed to them might be their home. It just gives you a different view on poverty, like poverty is something terrible, but depending on where you are in the world and depending on whether you are male or female, how a society sees you is a very different thing.”

Extreme international poverty was also highlighted:

“I thought I knew what poverty was until I went to India. There I saw real poverty and I mean real. I thought I knew what disability was until I went to India. There I saw real disability. There’s nothing like social welfare in India. If you haven’t got the money so what- that’s it, you just haven’t got it. You get nothing done.”

“I am from India so I’ve seen extreme poverty and people suffering. We were blessed because we had a good family. But for example, there is a lady who is close to my heart. I came to realise that because she is not educated and her husband was a truck driver who died in an accident when her daughter was just 3 years- her pension was just 600 rupees which amounts to about 7 or 8 cents per month. No social welfare. They will get a medical card, but that’s just for the government hospital, no private. And then her house is in ruins because there is a lake close by and because of that, the damp is coming into her house. So how is she going to manage everything?”

SDG 2: NO HUNGER



With **9** first preference votes **SDG 2: No Hunger** was voted as the joint **8th** most important Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

Whilst it was generally agreed that sufficient access to food necessary for a person's survival on this planet, and therefore that 'No Hunger' is a basic human right/requirement for all, nonetheless it was ranked in the middle ranking when it came to its level of personal importance to our participants.

The main reason for this placing was the fact that other SDG's seemed to be more relevant to the immediate needs of the individuals from the community groups in Ireland that we spoke too. There was a general agreement among the

participants that, even though many people throughout Ireland live in poverty, most people manage to scrape together enough to eat, although sometimes at the expense of other necessary things.

One person described how from their understanding in Ireland **“even if you are poor you can still feed”** mentioning how **“at least there are places where they will give you food or the government will help”**.

This was discussed in contrast to the scale of hunger in many developing countries in the Global South where **“if you are not working, or your parents are not rich, you will not be able to feed yourself”**.

Despite the comparisons to places that were worse off, hunger in Ireland was still talked about as being on a smaller scale. Sacrifices and allowances made by some to make sure others get fed sufficiently first were mentioned.

“Some of the poorest mothers may have to make sacrifices because their income is so low they have to prioritise feeding their children properly over themselves.”

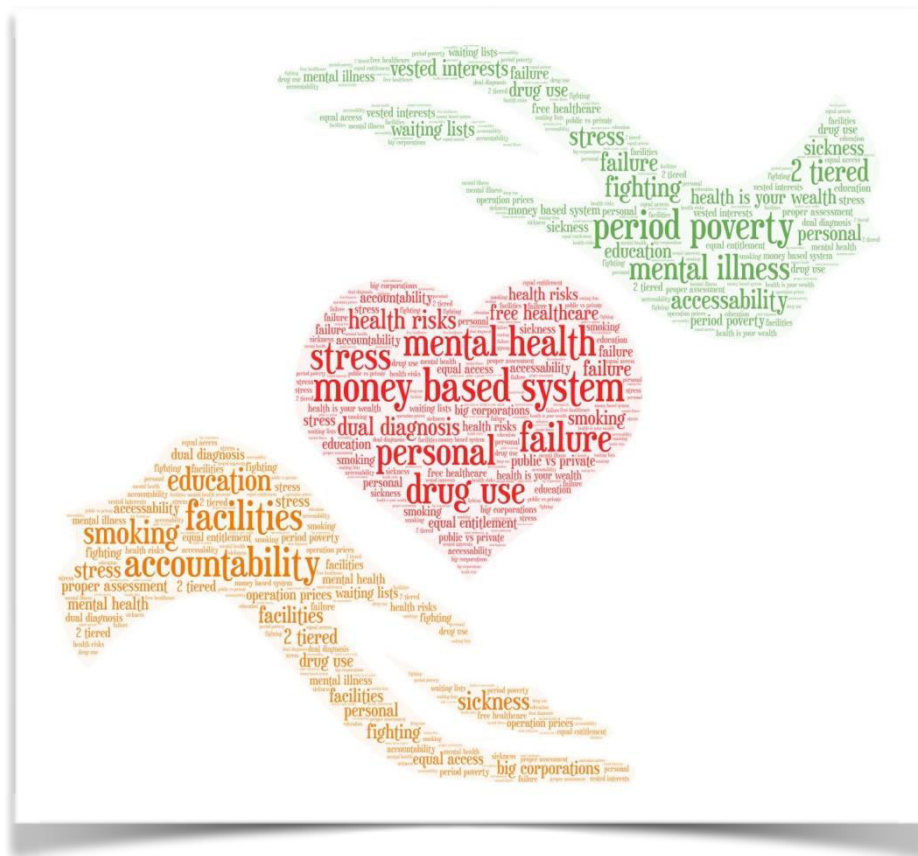
The importance of not only having an acceptable ‘quantity’ of food, but also an acceptable ‘quality’ of food was mentioned. It is clear that those with low incomes in Ireland are often forced to eat cheaper, less nutritious meals. On average, quality or organic produce costs much more than frozen or processed food, for example. Therefore, healthy shopping is made much more difficult for people from certain socioeconomic backgrounds.

“No Hunger is not just when the baby is born; it’s from the womb. Proper food that we can all afford is important.”

The huge problem of food waste in Ireland and abroad was also discussed: **“All the food that’s getting wasted from everywhere - and when you see the likes of people who have nothing - it’s unbelievable.”**

Clearly, ‘No hunger’ is a key element for a secure human existence and food is a very basic human right. While ‘starvation’ in Ireland is not common, for many people living in poverty or homelessness, quality food needs are not being adequately met. This SDG is therefore heavily interlinked with others, such as ‘no poverty’ and ‘health and wellbeing’.

SDG 3: HEALTH AND WELLBEING



With **36** first preference votes, **SDG 3: Health and Wellbeing** came out on top as the **1st** most important Sustainable Development Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

The main reasoning behind this placing was due to the understanding that without the foundation of good health, it is very difficult for a person to concentrate on or achieve anything else in their lives.

“Health is most important because if we are not healthy, we can’t participate or do anything to help anyone else.”

Throughout the workshops, many of the participants discussed the value of good health in terms of phrases like “your health is your wealth”, “without your health, you have nothing” or “without health, you can kiss everything else goodbye”. They referred to the quality of one’s health as a core stepping stone to a happier, more peaceful and successful existence. Without the constant worry of poor health and the threat of its detrimental effects, individuals have more self-control and freedom to go on to achieve other more personal, or even universal, goals.

“I picked good health because your health is your wealth. If you don’t have your health, what have you got? Everything else kind of goes out the window when your health does.”

Our participants made reference to the link between one's physical and mental health and the combined spiral into darkness that can occur when both are off balance.

“They are so interconnected. If you’re not feeling good mentally you’re not going to be as able to take care of your physical health, and vice-versa.”

An issue that came up a lot when discussing the importance of mental health in today’s society was the stigma (especially in the past) surrounding talking openly about it. Participants described how a fear of openness with regards to this topic prevented a societal awareness which, in turn, prevented diagnosis's being made that could have been key to the self-development and recovery of people suffering from mental health conditions. Several people mentioned how because of this stigma, there were now a lot of mental health-related issues coming up in their communities.

“Mental health in our generation is coming up now a lot. People are only finding out now in their thirties that they had ADHD or things like that because they weren’t properly assessed when they were younger.”

The connection between physical and mental health was expressed further in terms of the common side effects of substance abuse and related addiction issues. Several participants talked about how they had seen families ripped apart due to the rabbit hole cycle caused by these problems.

“I feel a lot of people went to use drugs because of their mental health - even around children and all you know!”

The lack of education around the interconnectedness between physical and mental health issues, as well as about the dangers of certain substances, was raised a number of times. People also spoke about the need for more preventative healthcare measures to be put in place in their areas by government.

“I need to quit smoking and all, but you need to be taught proper what smoking does to the body - you know what I mean?”

The depth of struggle that addictions carry on both a physical and mental level was highlighted as some participants opened up about the pain that drugs can cause, as well as the fear of failure behind quitting them. It was clear that this fear had not been made easier due to the lack of quality public support services for those people suffering (especially for those with less financial means). Despite this, many of those consulted, who are now in recovery, remained positive and hopeful for those still caught in the midst of addiction.

“If you want to beat addiction, you’ll do it, but you have to want it - you cannot be doing it for anyone but yourself even if it takes years. It’s fear that stops people more than anything else.”

Workshops with the various groups differed at times with reference to their experiences of, and feelings about, the Irish healthcare system. Many people discussed how one’s treatment of care in the health services was an unequal experience, depending on your socioeconomic background and how much money you had in your pocket. For example, one person mentioned how:

“In Ireland, it’s the public versus the private. Everyone has an entitlement to services no matter who they are or where they are, but if someone is waiting for 2 years to be seen on a public waiting list, then the stress of that alone is adding more health issues. Everyone should have equal entitlement to the healthcare they need.”

In reference to access to mental health services specifically, another participant shared:

“I picked good health as my SDG because there are not many facilities for people like myself really, and for other people like me who live with illnesses, to help teach them how to look after a person that’s sick. Like, my partner has a mental health issue that I know nothing about it – I’m only learning as I go along – there’s no training or courses to teach you how to look after people with that mental health issue.”

In one workshop where the majority of women originally came from Africa, it was very interesting to note their perspectives on the quality of the national healthcare system in Ireland. This shows the different levels of inequality and poor treatment in services depending on what part of the world a person is from and how much money s/he has.

“For me where I’m coming from, if you don’t have money, there is no such thing as a medical card. There is nothing called free health or anything! It all has to do with your money and it’s so bad as opposed to Ireland where if you come to the emergency room, they will attend to you before talking about money. They don’t think how you pay them, whereas back home it is always money first! If you are in an accident, if the person who brings you to the hospital has no money, they won’t treat you! Here you get appointments. You even get reminders. They give you hope. 95 percent of the time, they treat you well and they give you another appointment to come back.”

It was largely acknowledged that there is a certain level of ownership and responsibility involved in taking care of your health. For example, one person described how **“I picked good health because I think it’s personal, so it’s one out of all those goals that you can really take on yourself because you’re responsible for your own health”**: while another participant said: **“If I can’t take care of my own health, how can I ask you to take care of yours or ask an entity to take care of yours?”**

Another participant focused on the importance of self-care:

“Good health also has to do with us checking on our health as often as possible, every 6 months or something, so we don’t get sick and not know what’s going on. Self-care is also about personal hygiene, with the coronavirus everywhere, we have to shower as often as possible, wash our hands as often as possible, brush our teeth, etc. So, personal hygiene as well covers good health because if you are not physically okay, it can cause other problems. It’s physical, but it’s also mental health.”

It was also commonly agreed that there exists an inequality of opportunity in the social platform for good health care.

“There are communities where people are not educated enough; give money to that community so that the people will get educated, their health will be okay and then they can go to work and they can give back. Because if I’m not healthy, I’m not going to give back to communities, I’m not going to be able to study. If I don’t have money, I can’t buy the fruits and vegetables I need to eat.”

In conclusion, it was apparent in these conversations that the reasons why health and wellbeing was picked as the most important Sustainable Development Goal was largely due to how detrimental and interlinked people’s physical and mental health are to the quality of their life, and therefore for their future prospects. Good health and well-being are at the core of everything we do. Access to quality healthcare services, education and treatment is a fundamental human right that everyone should receive equally regardless of background or socioeconomic status. We all deserve to be offered the same social platform of opportunity for good health care and hope for our future.

SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION



With **24** first preference votes, **SDG 4: Quality Education** was ranked as the **3rd** most important Sustainable Development Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

The common consensus was that quality education was instrumental to an individual's future quality of life. It was also apparent that it was not just quality education that was needed, but also equal access to this resource for all.

“For me, this is most important, the right to equal education. The SDG says ‘quality’, but I say ‘equal’ because quality education you can get, but you will not get it everywhere.”

Participants made constant reference to the importance of education and how everyone is entitled to attain it at the same level, no matter whom they are or where they are from.

“I think education is very important. I think every single person on this planet should be entitled to an education.”

The importance of education in terms of how many other areas of life it is linked to was also widely recognized throughout our conversations. Some people spoke about this in relation to how difficult it was to get a decent job if you were not given an equal opportunity to access quality education. This was related to the fact that without a quality education and a decent job, it was much harder to get out of poverty.

“The other one I picked was good jobs and economy and growth because if you haven’t got the right education and the right job, how do you stay out of poverty?”

“I picked Education for obvious reasons; we just need that for everybody. Everybody has a right to it regardless of who/where they are or what their circumstances.”

As well as the clearly link between equal access to quality education and a better future, the importance of education when it comes to teaching human and emotional intelligence was also raised.

“Education is so important in how it links to learning how to treat people well because there’s always bullying going on in the workplace and it’s all lack of education because if they are taught to understand, they would not do it to another human being.”

Participants from the various groups expressed their belief that quality education for all had the potential to create a fairer world where everyone could learn to treat people better, regardless of their differences. One participant gave a personal example of this:

“There’s not enough education on things which we need to learn about like disability. There is awareness, but that’s not education.”

In one workshop with participants that had been through the direct provision system, the group mentioned how in their countries access to the education system was based purely on how much money you and your family have.

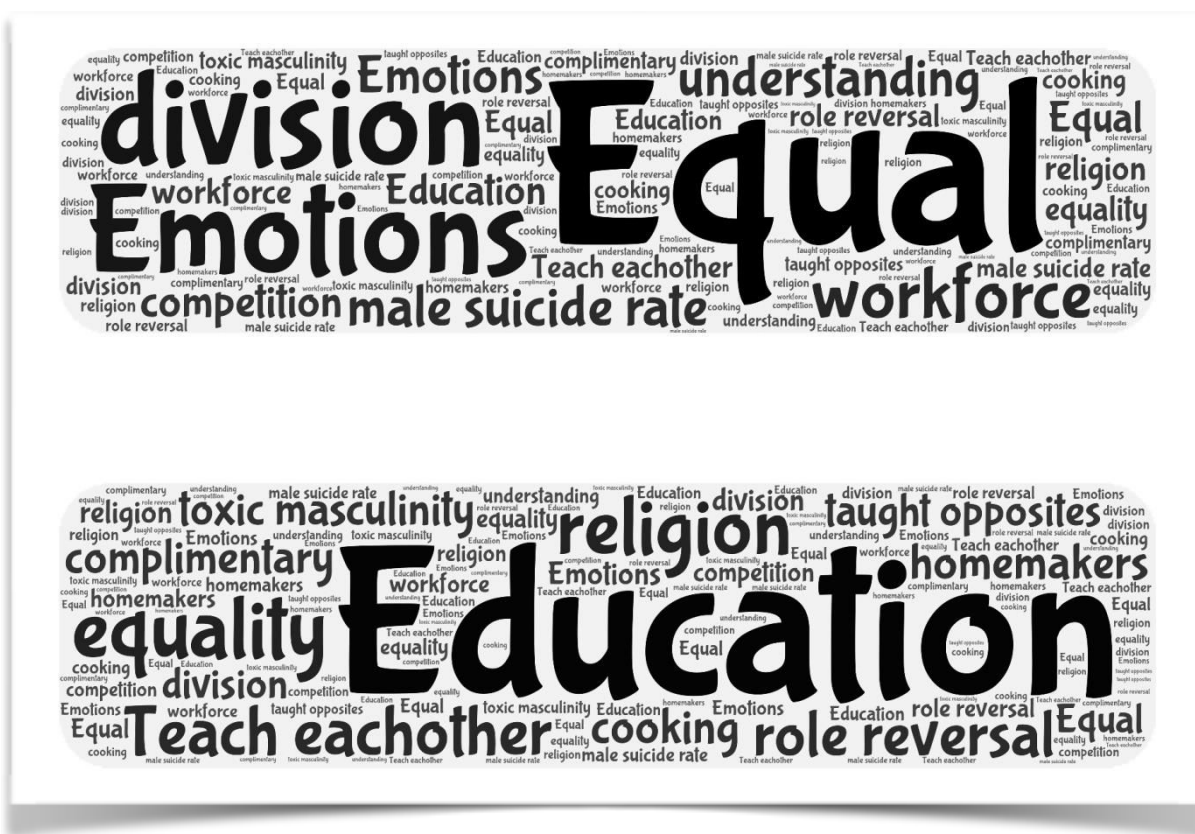
“Back home, education is purely based on money. Even though your child may be intelligent, if you are poor, you cannot afford to pay for the school. That means they have deprived that child of being all that they could be in life – just because you are poor. Opportunities die just like that. As long as you have money, that’s all that counts. No money, no school! Politicians send their kids abroad to school.”

Although Ireland is not as extreme in this division between rich and poor - wealth is undoubtedly still a factor in determining the quality of one’s journey through education in this country too. Private and public schools, for example, play a part in this segregation. This is further evidenced by the continuing low percentage of young people accessing third level education from disadvantaged areas,

Referring to how a fairer education system could inspire those who are not currently given the same opportunity for future development, participants highlighted the difficulties faced in this regard by people currently living in poverty and/or homelessness in Ireland. It was said that above almost anything else, ‘dignity’ and ‘hope’ was what people most needed to get their lives back on track. Equal access to learning is vital to realizing this.

“It’s really education that they need and to get their dignity back as well. You can put somebody into a home, but then a couple of weeks later, they could be back to square one again. You have to get them an education - do you know what I mean? You have to get them their dignity back!”

SDG 5: GENDER INEQUAITY



With **9** first preference votes, **SDG 5: Gender Inequality** was voted as the **6th** most important Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

It was clear from our conversations that the topic of gender inequality was important and significant to many participants' lives. There was a consensus amongst those consulted that everyone should be treated equally regardless of who they are or what their background is, and that their sex was no different.

“I chose gender equality because we all come into the world equal, so we should go through life being equal. Even just coming down the stairs here this morning, we had a group of mothers, and their babies and there would be people in that room that would be very well educated and there would be people in that room that wouldn’t be very well educated, yet the babies (regardless of status or gender) were all enjoying each other and interacting, and there was no differences whatsoever. They got down on the floor and they were all at one level.”

Whilst men's mental health and high male suicide rates were briefly mentioned, women's issues in particular came up more frequently in conversations. An example of a gender inequality in Ireland relating to women today that discussed was period poverty and reproductive rights. One man described how if men got periods and gave birth to children, and therefore needed access to free sanitary products, then **"We would be out there fighting for our rights" and "It wouldn't be just women, it would be men too involved"**.

Whilst issues such as gender based violence toward women were briefly mentioned, others noted how far we have come in Ireland since the church-state days where women were treated much more as second class citizens and told that their place was in the home. One person described how, **“I think our children now in secondary school are more**

perceptive to gender issues, whereas when I was growing up, it was taboo. I find now that my daughter is 40, she was brought up about this very differently, and my grandson even more so.”

Whilst it was mentioned that lack of women in power is still a major issue, it was also noted how this narrative may be slowly changing. **“If you look when Mary Robinson became the first woman president in this country, no one thought that was going to happen. So that’s basically saying, you can be what you want to be.”**

Gender equality in Ireland compared to other (especially developing) countries was also discussed. One person described how, **“Gender inequality should be a thing from the past, it shouldn’t exist. There is still a ways to go, but I think it’s improving - definitely more so in some countries than others.”**

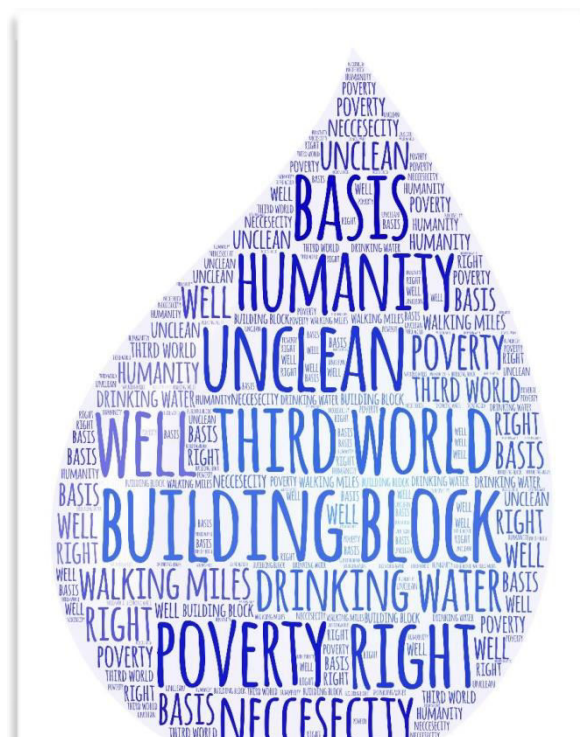
The facilitator described how:

“Yesterday was National Women’s Day and it was a reminder that there are many women and girls around the world who are not treated equally and experience violence and poverty and injustice. What we need are international frameworks like the SDGs. We need targeted government policies which support women, and we need strong civil societies. Above all, we need to be able to listen and respect the experiences of women and girls who suffer.”

A group of younger people consulted also brought up the point that it is not just the more traditional male and female issues that matter; there are more and more transgender and gender fluid people becoming more open about their true identity, and it is important to highlight the discrimination that they continue to face in Ireland and abroad.

In conclusion, it was apparent from our conversations that, whilst perhaps not as heightened an issue as in the past or in other countries, gender inequality (especially in regards to women's rights) is something that needs to be further promoted and progressed in Ireland.

SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



With **9** first preference votes, **SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** came out as the joint **8th** most important Sustainable Development Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

It is interesting to note how this goal was placed in the middle ranking order in terms of its significance and relevance to those who partook in our workshops. Whilst many participants discussed the necessity of access to clean water and sanitation as a core and fundamental human right, others felt that it was not as important to them as other Goals as it had already been substantially achieved in their experience.

Many participants described how **“everybody has a right to clean water”** and how **“it speaks for itself - it’s just human dignity.”** They described how access to clean drinking water and working sanitation systems was an absolute foundational entitlement for humans in order for them to achieve any quality of life. It was often linked to or discussed with other key elements of everyday survival, such as food and having some sort of safety/security e.g. a roof over your head. One person noted:

“When you break everything down to a foundational level, the very basic needs of a person are food, water, safety and security, and if we have those wrong then everything else after it is going to become wrong. It’s just inevitable.”

It was widely agreed that in Ireland, many people take access to clean water and working sanitation systems for granted and that we are very lucky compared to other parts of the world in this regard. The fact that most of us, besides certain communities e.g. the homeless population, can drink/use the water from our tap is a key security in our society.

“So we know that we are lucky in Ireland that we have water that’s clean, that comes straight from the tap, but that’s a privilege not everyone has.

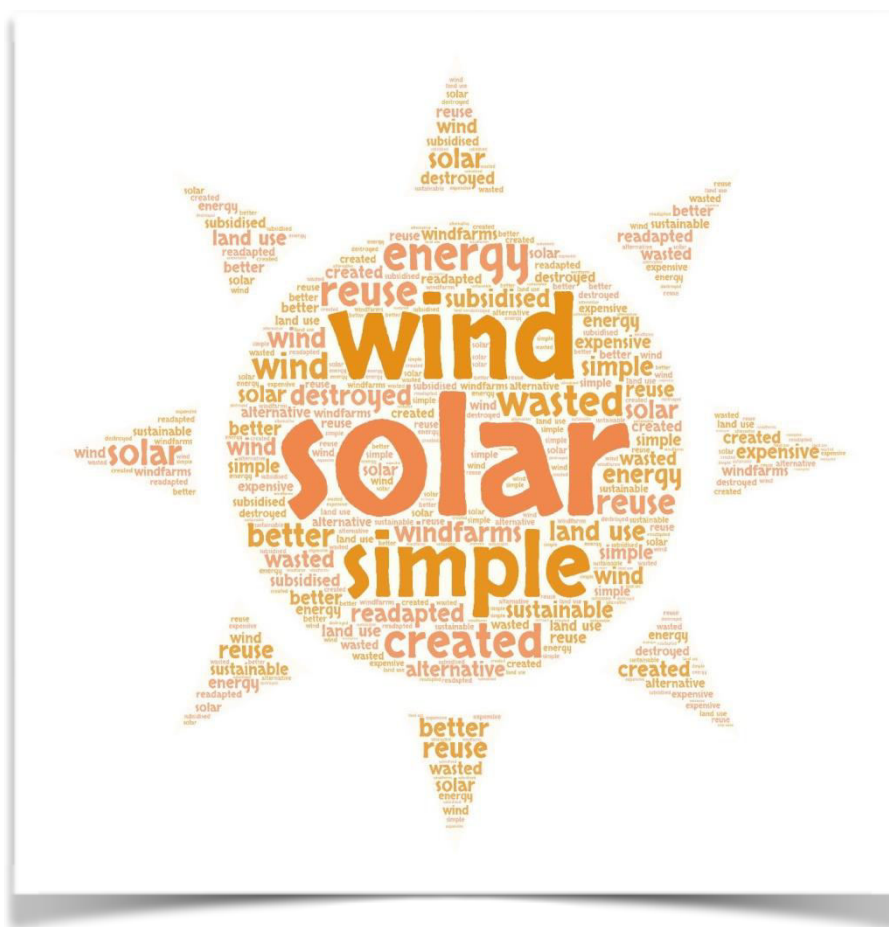
“That’s one thing we take for granted isn’t it – clean water! A lot of people in developing countries don’t have that.”

“A lot of us take for granted that we can turn on the tap and take water from there when you think of the bigger picture. For a spell, we were on a boiled water notice and it felt devastating, and there’s people that have to walk miles in some parts of the world to get water” .

In conclusion, whilst most participants in our groups did not see addressing water and sanitation as a top pop priority in our country due to necessary services already in place, they still considered it an important Goal that without which all else will fail to grow. One participant even noted how we still have a long way to go ensure the quality of our national water sources.

“My pet rant is when people say, “Aw god, we have a lovely clean country, the best country in the world”, when not any more we don’t. Half the bloody water is poisonous. The treatments are poisoning it. The water here is terrible. You don’t know what’s in it, or if it’s safe to drink. You could buy a bottle of water in the shop, but who says that’s okay?”

SDG 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



With 4 first preference votes, **SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy** was voted both the joint **14th** and second last most important Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

This SDG was, notably, one of the least discussed in the conversations. This is perhaps due to its seeming vagueness in relation to the everyday lives of the communities from which our participants came. While the importance of other significant environmental SDGs, such as Climate Action, were highly rated, it was apparent from our conversations that issues directly related to affordable and clean energy were not highlighted perhaps as much as might have been expected, particularly given rising energy costs.

Despite this, the importance of the benefits in making a switch to more renewable forms of energy for the future of the planet was raised:

“I guess renewable energy is about not overusing and exploiting our resources, and finding alternatives that aren’t as bad for the environment. And not using bad energy like carbon admissions which is a main issue in climate change. Apparently by 2030, we will all have to be using electric cars.”

However, the lack of affordability and the resulting stress for those with insufficient income was also noted in relation to this particular topic.

With 7 first preference votes, **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** was the 9th most chosen Sustainable Development Goal by the participants at our community workshops.

One of the main points the participants brought up in discussions about this SDG was the difference between full employment and everyone having decent work.

“The minute I saw that (SDG 8), I thought of the Government minister that was on the television the other day. His spiel on this was, ‘It’s done, we have full employment, there’s more money in people’s pockets, etc’. No, there’s not! The jobs he’s talking about are poor quality ones with low pay. And he was trying to get kudos because he had had a plan for this, and therefore it was done.”

“When you dig deep, there are a lot of people in very precarious employment- low paid, zero hour contracts, lack of pension- a whole lot of basic workers’ rights which have been stripped away. So it’s one thing to have full or high employment, but what’s the quality of that work for a lot of people. We are seeing this in a lot of developed countries including Ireland. It’s not enough to have just economic growth. We have to be conscious of what sort of growth it is and who benefits from the growth and that’s a big issue of discussion. You can’t just have growth by itself; it needs to link to decent jobs for everyone. You need to look at what quality of employment that growth is generating!”

The participants also emphasized that everyone is entitled to decent work:

“Everybody should be entitled to a good job in an equal way, so that we can all get over this poverty trap, you know?”

Some recent positives in Ireland’s employment situation were also expressed:

“There are a few positives in Ireland recently: We have the lowest level of unemployment in a long time. The minimum wage has gone up. But can we do better to make our economy grow more? Can we get to 0% unemployment? Are people being paid fairly for the jobs they are doing?”

Another area of discussion was how people may be employed but are not in the careers they wish to pursue.

“In Ireland, I know there are some good jobs, but there are some working people who do not have good jobs here. They end up getting maybe cleaner jobs. It’s not what they have a passion for. It’s not what they want to do, or are even qualified for. A lot of foreigners come here with high degrees, and they end up doing low paid work that don’t match their training or careers”

“In this country, so many educated African women like us are carers, although that’s not what we are qualified for. You should be able to do the work you want to do. But because there is no other choice, we have to go for care. There are no other jobs for us to do.”

Some participants talked about how the Celtic Tiger didn’t benefit everybody:

“There would have been a big argument before 2008 about who actually was benefitting from the Celtic Tiger? It was a general consumption that everyone was but of course not everybody was and there are people today who would tell you there was no benefits from it in their life, they were struggling with this, that and the other.”

The limitations of the current minimum wage were raised:

Whilst it was not talked about on the same level as other SDGs, the interconnectedness of industry, innovation and infrastructure being important for the easing of problems in the day-to-day lives of people was raised in the workshop conversations.

“If we don’t have the infrastructure to keep people connected, then that’s going to be a problem. Infrastructure for me is about access to services and to sustainable areas and communities.”

An issue raised by many participants was access to quality internet networks which depend on factors such as where they were living and what packages they could afford. In one group in Longford, it was mentioned that:

“The internet here is middle-of-the-road and it’s quite slow. There’s certain parts of Longford where it’s very bad and there’s others, like where I live, where it’s not too bad, but then again, it wouldn’t be as quick as what my parents have in Dublin. Some parts of the country have very poor coverage.”

Another example of obvious inequality when it came to this SDG was general access to industry and certain infrastructure being determined by factors such as people’s socioeconomic background **“Some people are being denied proper accessibility and as a result, they cannot participate fully in society.”**

One man with a physical disability described the many difficulties he faces on a day to day basis:

“Accessibility has gone out the window even here in this building. Granted a wheelchair is able to come in here, but a person in a wheelchair, like myself or anyone else, cannot open the doors as they seem to always pull out to you. We need doors that push in.”

While it was clear that there is still a long way to go in this country to provide adequate and equal access to industry, innovation and infrastructure, one African participant remarked how there are some quality systems in place here.

“Infrastructure in Ireland – I’m impressed! When I look at where I come from - Nigeria - while it’s getting better in some parts of the country and there are good roads, there is a great difference compared to Ireland where they are always building new things.”

SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES



SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities was the **10th** most popular Sustainable Development Goal amongst the participants at the community workshops, with **10** first preference votes.

Increasing income inequality was raised in the conversations:

“That gap between the world’s richest and poorest people – it is so large and unfair, and it just really shouldn’t exist at all.”

“The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer- the money that we have, takes a long time for us to make, while richer people can make the same amount in just one hour.”

The participants discussed how while income inequality may be less dramatic in rich countries like Ireland compared to developing countries, there are still extremes:

“So the government does support people more than in other countries, but there are still extremes here. There are people who are very rich and there are people who are living in extreme poverty in these very wealthy countries, and often that is ignored.”

Increasing access to decent work was identified as a way of tackling income inequality:

“I was thinking inequalities in terms of opportunity for the masses to work, to have access to basic rights in terms of their work environment. There should be greater opportunity for jobs so that each household can more easily access work. It would make the difference in come levels not too high or too low. It would mean that each household has something on their plates. The gap would not be that massive.”

Another area of conversation was discriminatory labels and how they prevent communities coming together:

“I picked Reduced Inequalities because in my eyes it covers so many things. I’m fed up with all the racism, homophobic, transphobic- I’m fed up with all that and I want it to stop because it is very wrong and it should have gone years ago. I also feel that if we get that under control, other things will start coming naturally such as SDG 10 will be tied to SDG 11. It will get a community going if they are no longer being divided. You can’t build a community or a city until you first find a way to get rid of the labels.”

Access to education was also discussed as a key inequality in Ireland that needs to be addressed:

“We don’t have the same chances for a good education. The government has to bring about equal access to quality education for everyone. They should make it totally free for everybody because if you have quality education, then you can achieve many things for yourself.”

Unequal access to healthcare in developed countries was also highlighted:

“I chose reduced inequalities because often when we look at countries like Ireland and America, we think they are rich countries and that people don’t go without food or healthcare, but actually in America which is one of the richest countries in the world, people have to pay for healthcare, and if they don’t have it they are treated like the people we heard about today in Nigeria.”

A participant from the Traveler community talked about the discrimination faced by Travelers. They gave an example of a conversation they overheard on a bus in Darndale, Dublin:

“These were talking about reinforced stereotypes. As soon as they started talking about the news in Darndale, their minds went to Travelers, some of whom live in Darndale. And then they thought we can insult these Travelers, but if the wrong people had been on that bus, they might have got dragged off and been given a few slaps, but the Travelers would have been the bad ones in the newspapers for attacking such and such. It would never have been mentioned that these people had been saying despicable things because that’s what it was. And it was the fact that they were going through the area, but didn’t think once. They were so casual about it!”

SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



With **4** first preference votes from the participants at our community workshops, **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** ranked **12th** out of all the Sustainable Development Goals.

The groups discussed how providing services and community spaces in buildings is incredibly important:

“In places (where) they build sustainability- the people still live there after 50 years. They put facilities inside and everything. They have gyms, they have schools - everything is inside. And there’s no criminality, there’s no nothing because people receive an education in the building-.”

“This SDG also has the word, ‘communities’, and this family resource centre is a good example of that. On Thursday evenings, for example, there is a youth club where about 80 young people come. They hang around and chat, and they play music and do art etc. At least they have one place in the community because if you’re fourteen, you’re not supposed to be in the pub, so where do you meet if you have nowhere to go? So everything that was mentioned about what is done in this building seems to be all about community.”

“It’s so important to have a place for teenagers because they are at that vulnerable age where if they meet on the street god knows what devilment they are going to get up too. If they have nowhere to go, it can cause problems.”

“The sports bodies and fairs are great, - you have the GAA, for example; it provides positives alternatives.”

To highlight this point, participants spoke of areas that were not built with adequate community services.

“There were loads of houses built there, but they were built in the wrong places. They were built without any nearby services. No thought was put into it at all. It’s about how we can plan our living spaces. Ensuring there is a good mix of social and eco-housing.”

The need to provide adequate infrastructure across Ireland was raised: **“You need to build infrastructure so you can start something. You cannot start something from nothing.”** Participants thought that resources should not be wasted on excessive construction: **“Like, you’re should not be building five bedrooms in your house if you don’t need them, you know.”**

An interesting point from these discussions was that sustainable building is often dependent on context and circumstances.

“You’re not going to build houses when you need land to grow your food. If you need green grass to grow your vegetables and this, that and the other, you’re not going to be able to do that if there’s a house built there. Or building houses on floor lands! What’s sustainable to some people is different to what’s sustainable for others depending on your job, lifestyle and where you live etc.”

Old buildings that are not adequately maintained were highlighted as a being a failure in achieving sustainable buildings and communities.

“Take, for example, buildings where there are windows that are years old and the draft is coming through. Older people are not able to cope with the bad weather and the damp.”

One participant discussed what exact services are needed for communities.

There’s a few different ways to look at this SDG. Communities need to be living in an environmentally sustainable way. When you look at how people actually live, if you look at how things are in society at the moment, you’ve got house prices and rents which are astronomical and public services that just aren’t there or aren’t funded enough. For a community to be sustainable, you need homes, you need public services, and you need public transport to be accessible.”

The need for rural communities not be left behind was agreed to be important:

“...particularly in rural areas, you need communities to be connected and you need them to have the same infrastructure that you’d expect a city or town to have, or else rural areas are just going to collapse.”

SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



With 5 first preference votes, **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** was the **11th** most voted for Sustainable Development Goal by participants at our community workshops.

Participants discussed the increase in fast food in the diet of Irish people:

“You have McDonalds and places like that making millions, billions of dollars and you have people who before 20 years old were healthy, they were normal and now they are 200 pounds, 300 pounds. They are now using drugs and everything to suppress that.”

Some participants brought up that each individual has responsibility to shop and consume sustainably:

“Responsible consumption is about everything you consume, from food to clothes. Buying local is important. People describe us sometimes as a consumerist society- that the market place creates goods for consumers and it’s creating that demand for goods and big shopping centers. We need to be conscious and responsible about that because, of course, we all have to consume something, but at what level?”

Something that was mentioned more than once was how people are moving towards using charity shops in order to make consumption more sustainable:

“There is a leaning now towards going to the charity shops and recycling which helps for all sorts of things. It could also help Life on Land or many of the other SDGs. A main aim should be avoiding waste. Eliminating plastic, for example - there’s a whole lot of areas where a difference can be made.”

One participant made reference to the link between agriculture and the deforestation of the Amazon rain forest.

“I also picked Responsible Consumption. I watched a film on Netflix about veganism and one thing that fascinated me was about what they do to the land, how they destroy forestry, and it’s for feeding all the cattle. You have to have vast amount of fields and all, and that’s what they are doing in Brazil. They are clearing forests in the Amazon to grow stuff to feed all the cattle and there is all the methane gas and other stuff around that.”

Leading through example in terms of sustainable consumption was something that was important to the groups:

“So I had to start thinking, what am I doing about that? I thought about it this morning when I took my little coffee cup and made sure I recycled it, and I even went as far as taking an envelope and took the gum strips and the window off it, so I could recycle it. So it’s the tiny things really, but if I don’t do it, who else is going to do it? If I can walk that walk and talk that talk and do it with passion, maybe I could convince someone else to do it. And if I can convince one or two or three people to do it, then I’ll have the roaring effect!”

As well as environmental issues, the treatment of workers in certain industries, such as clothes production for fashion, was highlighted as very important when it comes to responsible consumption:

“I chose Responsible Consumption because I kinda remember listening to some things about companies and what they’re doing. I don’t remember what company exactly, but it was a shock to find out that cheap clothes are one of the biggest producers of waste. And also, this industry violates a lot of human rights in the sense of sweat workshops, unequal pay, and poor safety and sanitation. So, I feel like achieving this goal could help people who are in less fortunate situations - for them to get paid properly and to work in nicer environments.”

SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION



Receiving **18** votes, **SDG 13: Climate Action** was the **4th** most voted for Sustainable Development Goals at the community workshops.

Some participants were grateful for Ireland's moderate climate compared to other parts of the world:

“Climate change is about earthquakes and flooding, too much rain and everything about climate in general. We are lucky right now in Ireland - apart from the rain - not to have too many of those things. The government should keep monitoring things like that in accordance with climate changes in the future, and they should help people so that they can help prepare themselves for any negative effects that might be on the way.”

An issue which came up frequently was the need for international cooperation is to tackle climate change:

“I think its number one because the way things are going at the moment, we can see what’s happening through social media; it’s not getting hidden or anything like that. And I think they need to get a grip on the situation, I think all the countries in the world - the wealthy countries, the poorer countries - the whole lot! Some countries are tackling the problem now, but other countries are like 50 or 60 years behind and they are always saying, we need to act, but I think it’s up to everybody, every country to stand together.”

Participants explained that even though previous generations might have been responsible for a lot of the effects of climate change, it is up to all of us now to take action:

“Climate change is not necessarily fully our fault; it is there because of our ancestors, wars, power, money and everything, but we need to have climate change action now because we have maybe 10 or 12 years at the most to redo everything - like growing more trees is one thing.”

Throughout the workshops, many people discussed the inequality that poor countries face in tackling climate change compared to rich countries:

“And the thing about climate change is that even though Ireland isn’t affected in a severe way, what we are realising is that is is often the people who are the poorest who are most affected by the changes in climate. So a lot of people in Europe, they know about it on an intellectual level, but because they are not affected by it directly, they feel it’s not my concern. Even in the places affected by flooding, people’s entire house can be affected by it, so it is something that we are waking up to maybe too slowly, but we have to wake up for the people who are most vulnerable.”

Participants were clear that climate change will in time affect everyone:

“Do you not think that climate change affects everyone though? Maybe not yet, but it will eventually.”

SDG 14: LIFE BELOW WATER



With **6** first preference votes, **SDG 14: Life Below Water** ranked **10th** in our workshops.

One of the main concerns about this Goal was the problem of overfishing:

“I chose Life Below Water, so for example, fish resources are being depleted due to overfishing. And in Ireland, this has caused problems for people in fishing communities because you have these big trawlers coming from Spain and from different countries”

Some participants described the visible impact of river pollution:

“When you go near a river these days, you can’t see the bottom of the river. Years ago you’d go to the river and you could see the fish.”

An issue that came up more than once was a fear about the long term impacts of water pollution, and the lack of awareness of this problem.

“Everyone’s just dumping things into the sea - nuclear this, nuclear that and the plastic that’s on everything. It won’t affect us so much in our time; this is going to be decades or even centuries down the line. We don’t even know all the damage that is being caused. So, I think our waters really need to be protected now.”

“We are never really sure how polluted the ocean is.”

A positive contribution in the workshops was that children are being educated about the impact of plastic on marine environments:

“I think plastic is an issue at school that our children are learning about because my kids will come home and they will talk about how the fish are eating the plastic.”

Some participants were frank in expressing that human needs should be prioritised over marine life.

“I know we don’t want fish to die, but I’d rather a fish die than a person.”

SDG 15: LIFE ON LAND



With 4 first preference votes, **SDG 15: Life on Land** was the **12th** most voted for Sustainable Development Goal at the community workshops by participants.

It was discussed how beneficial nature and land is to everyone, and how this is often overlooked. For example, a participant brought up the significance of land in relation to food production:

“We don’t appreciate how much the land contributes to our lives and how it affects every person all over the world. It is so important! Here in Ireland, we need to value more the role of the farmer and how he’s the source of so much stuff for us all. So the land is hugely important and I think maybe not all of us value that enough.”

Another participant shared how nature was important to them on an emotional and psychological level:

“I’m down in the country very often and I love going out to nature and going for walks in the forest or finding a lovely little spot next to the river. I’m at peace when I’m there and I love it, so that’s why I picked Life on Land.”

One of the most talked about aspects of this Goal was international deforestation:

“Deforestation is a big issue. In science, we know that trees give us Oxygen and CO2. We need trees in our communities and in our lives.”

A facilitator commented on this:

“Forests are being stripped down to make way for farms, the local ecology is being destroyed and indigenous communities displaced from their homes in the forest because of what was happening.”

The discussion also highlighted animal extinction:

“I picked Life on Land because of all the extinction that’s going on. A lot of species are going to be extinct in the next 20, 30 years, you know what I mean?”

SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



With **14** first preference votes, **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** was voted as the **5th** most important Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

In our conversations, it was widely acknowledged by those who spoke about this Goal that both inner and outer peace were key to a person's overall wellbeing, safety and progression in life.

“Peace is of course the most desirable thing on this earth isn’t it? Be it worldwide or be it inner peace. If you have inner peace, it might reflect outwards and you might spread it.”

People discussed peace as a flower in terms of how if you manage to attain it internally, it can sprout and bloom into many other important areas of your life. It was clear, however, that this state of inner calm was not thought of as being equally accessible to all. Opportunities to achieve inner peace were seen as differing depending on your background and where you are from. One participant commented in this regard:

“Peace and justice should be for everybody, but it’s not for people living in poverty. That’d be a good Goal to reach though - for our future, for our children.”

Many others spoke about how levels of peace, justice and strong institutions vary heavily from country to country, depending on factors like politics, economics, war and corruption. While problems with violence/crime were widely discussed in Ireland (especially in neighbourhoods with higher levels of poverty), it was agreed that globally there were many places where these problems exist on a much greater scale.

“In Ireland, we are really quite lucky because we don’t have at the moment war or stuff like that in our faces, but abroad there’s kids being sent to fight wars that they don’t want to be in.”

One participant originally from Nigeria told us how: **“In Ireland, there is justice. If something happens between the rich and the poor, the rich can’t just say, ‘I will kill you’ – nothing like this will happen. They won’t get away with that, whereas in Africa if a rich man says he is going to kill me, he will go for it. I have to run for my dear life. But in Ireland there is a justice system.”**

Another African participant discussed the level of safety in Ireland positively, saying: **“Here you can walk during the day and even at night. Once it’s 7 o’clock back home, you have to be indoors. Even in the daytime back home now. You constantly have to watch your back – there is no peace of mind.”**

It was obvious, however, that it is believed there is still a long way to go to achieve peace and justice here in Ireland. Anger was expressed at the injustices on the streets and within certain institutions e.g. the police and courts, and taking place on a local level too. The overall need for people to stop fighting was recognised across the workshops. There was also recognition, however, that violence was to some degree being caused by the inequalities between people which are already in place.

“We’re not gonna achieve the Goals if we’re constantly fighting. But most of the things we’re fighting over are about inequalities of one sort or another.”

While groups spoke about how **“if you have peace and justice, you have a better chance of having health, education and all the other things that are so important”**, they also discussed how it was very difficult to gain this tranquility if you don’t have the basics in life like food, water, climate stability and no poverty.

In conclusion, what came across through our conversations was a greater need for equal access to means for achieving internal and external peace/justice, both nationally and internationally. Whilst it was recognised that Ireland is **“a longaway”** from war zones where there is **“is no peace or justice”**, like Syria, and is more peaceful/just than countries with extremely corrupt institutions, like Nigeria, there was still a feeling of disappointment when it came to the freedom of opportunity for peace and justice within poorer Irish communities.

One participant spoke about the correlation between natural peace outside and natural peace inside - acknowledging that *“with mindfulness at school now”* it's getting easier for some kids to *“learn to reach a balance where everything is flowing naturally”*. They spoke about how after you have arrived at a certain level of inner tranquility - *“this is how you go about changing your world in baby steps or massive steps and to correcting injustices”*. It is clear that whilst this is true there are many basic needs that need to be met first before a person has a fair chance of gaining this peaceful sense of liberation and spiritual freedom.

SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



With 3 first preference votes, **SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals** came out as the **17th** and least important Sustainable Development Goal by the participants of our community workshops.

It was interesting to note that SDG 17 hardly featured in terms of its importance/relevance to the workshop participants. It would seem that, for the individuals from communities across Ireland that we consulted, establishing partnerships for the Goals felt like a distant topic. As one participant expressed it:

“There is a complication in communication between the government and the citizens, so how do you have a partnership? Where’s the communication? Where’s the link? The (SDG) forums once every two months are too slow!”

What came across quite clearly throughout our conversations was a huge disconnect between ordinary people at the bottom and officials at the top who are meant to be leading the implementation and development of the SDGs in Ireland. This divide is resulting in an increasing sense of disillusion in people, like our participants, when it comes to the prospect of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ever being fully achieved, especially by the 2030 target. It is no surprise, therefore, that participants were not optimistic when it came to establishing a global partnership across all Goals, and decided to focus instead on SDGs like ‘No Poverty’ and ‘Health and Wellbeing’ that were more important and relatable to their daily lived experiences.

Focusing on the Leave No One Behind Promise, participants in our workshops were asked:

WHO IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHO IS BEING LEFT BEHIND?

Those experiencing homelessness and living within the limitations of homeless accommodation were mentioned by several people:

“I think of all the families that are stuck in hotel rooms - mothers with their kids and fathers with their kids - and the homeless on the street. Like, when I come in to my clinic every day, there’s people with sleeping bags on cardboards, and it just breaks my heart!”

“So for me people in homeless accommodation are being left behind because they are not getting the attention they need. There are a lot of people in hostels who are not getting treatment or access to the services that they need.”

“I agree with everything being said that the homeless are left behind the most. Definitely, there’s not enough help for them out there. And it is getting worse and it won’t get any better. The government doesn’t care about housing these people, that’s why they are left there. No matter what you’re trying to do, like, you can go around with food and clothes for them, but you can’t give them a home. You’re just leaving them there and there’s nothing you can do. It’s a horrible situation for them.”

Children and the elderly were also discussed:

‘Kids are getting left behind, I think. There’s not enough money being put into the North Inner City and the kids are growing up around drugs and gangs constantly. You walk down there and you see empty tablet trays, syringes. All the parks are closed off because that’s where people go to use and sell. So, there’s nothing for them to do and then they end up going into using, or selling.’

‘I think about isolation and being older – it’s much more of a struggle for these people. I think elderly people are not heard and they are just basically forgotten about. They really are.’

Others spoke about how no one group is necessarily the most left behind:

‘There are different stages of discrimination, but I don’t think any group should have the monopoly over being discriminated against, you know. It doesn’t matter who you are, you shouldn’t have the monopoly over who gets discriminated against.’

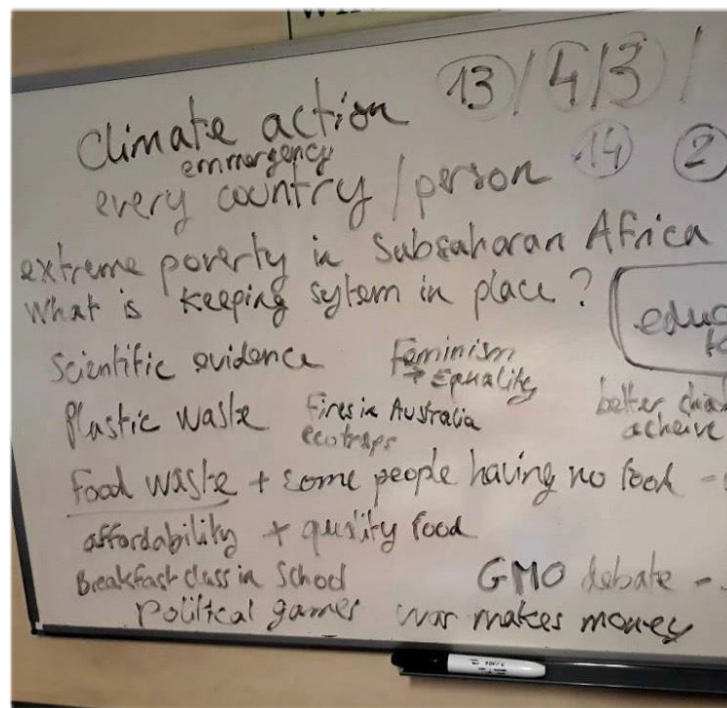
Another person said that who is being left behind in their community stems from more systemic factors, such as lack of mental health support:

‘I think in my area at the moment, it comes down to education. Mental health is a big thing in my area. I think it’s important to understand that these people are getting left behind and the government is just washing their hands and the medical people are just washing their hands too. Some of these people are probably using drugs and all that, but I listened to a few of these people and they were just looking for help, and the reason why they can’t all get help is that if they are taking drugs, they won’t be treated. But in the first place, their mental health might be the reason why they are on the drug, so it’s a catch 22, you know that way. Doctors won’t recognise people if they’re on drugs, and they won’t treat them for mental health problems, and I think that’s wrong, big time, you know. So I think that in areas like that with alcohol, drugs, things are coming up that do link to the homeless on the streets. And I know that some of the people homeless on the streets – I’m saying some, I know it’s not all – they chose to live on the streets, I know one or two, but the majority would have no choice but being on the streets, you know. But that’s why I think mental health and the way it’s treated is a big thing. And I think they are being left behind with not being treated, and the government is not recognising it at all, you know.’

Below are some suggestions made by participants when asked the question:

WHAT CAN WE DO TO NOT LEAVE PEOPLE BEHIND?

A main focus for the participants in response to this question was the importance of supporting the homeless population - those living within the homeless services, or at risk of becoming homelessness. While some suggestions were focused on wider, more systematic governmental actions, many others revolved around individual or community actions, as this was something that participants felt was more attainable. Among those mentioned were:



- More affordable accommodation
- More help for families/single people that are homeless
- Safer hostels/anti bullying policies and more assistance in hostels from staff
- More food runs – soup runs/ busses – hot food e.g. pizzas, sandwiches, tea, etc.
- More clothes runs – hand out clothes left behind at launderettes, charity shops – gather donations, etc.
- Leave items in boxes somewhere dry or hanging up – such as the coat initiative on the bridge - where the homeless population can pick them up.
- Gather good quality, second hand books and share them with the homeless as they may enjoy reading.
- Free swimming pools and gyms for homeless – build on existing schemes.
- Run auctions or raffles with possible donated items to raise money to buy necessary supplies for the homeless e.g. sanitary products for women.
- Bring back experiences from interactions with homeless people s to their community centers. What did you learn? Does it change your perception?
- Possibility of holding events that bring in someone with direct experience of homelessness or working with the homeless to talk to group/public in order to learn and change attitudes, etc.
- Design actions around supporting the homeless population with more dignity, independence and self-esteem.
- Good support from key-workers

- Bring helpful items, e.g. stool/clothes/food directly to people living on the streets and start a conversation with them.
- Make it mean more than just handouts – interact and chat to the homeless on a human level.
- Make sure you are giving back unselfishly – no ulterior motives e.g. no photos unless they agree and would like their story to be shared online, etc.
- Support them practically, but also emotionally.
- Gain Trust! Relate! LISTEN! - to the homeless population
- No judgement – get to know them – discover their backstories – treat them as individuals with different lives, experiences, addictions and backgrounds - not just as a group.
- Lend not only an ear, but provide practical advice and encouragement when able – possibility of linking and introducing those you visit with other groups/organisations that may be able to provide further support/help e.g. Peter Mc Verry*.
- Try to find places which can provide a space for those living on the street to get clean and to look after their hygiene needs.

Others spoke about the need for more preventative measures for young people and those living in poverty, isolation, or at risk of experiencing mental health/addiction difficulties:

- Youth groups or community centers to keep kids busy/ give them more options.
- Detox places and after care work – only 34 beds nationally?
- Better, more affordable mental/physical health care and awareness raising.
- Mental health education and de-stigmatisation programmes in schools.
- Have your voice heard/not being labelled.
- Platforms for equal opportunities as way to build safe space for people to have a voice.
- More funding for education in the community.
- More opportunities for jobs for ex-prisoners.

- Improve childcare (playgrounds, games) for migrant children and chances to socialise and learn English.
- Help for students like homework clubs in community centers.
- More access to facilities and social activities for kids/parents in hostels.
- Better support from social workers.
- Building and developing trust between social workers.

Participants discussed how these suggested actions could be communicated to the Irish government and general public:

- Give list of recommendations to Ministers.
- Share small actions on the internet.
- Spread the word and possibly interact with initiatives that are already in place.
- Organise a march/demonstration.
- Build friendship with people through regular contact, such as phone calls, WhatsApp group – with a rota system – similar model with senior citizens.
- Fundraising ideas to sponsor activities in the community – sport, crafts, board games.
- Speak Out : Community event with local groups/TD's – interaction between community and local organisations around them – flyers.
- Newsletter: People can share poems, recipes, useful info, events, and important phone numbers – 2 pages – quarterly flyer – use radio stations..
- Socialising – arrange to meet up, trips away.
- Event – showcase actions by the local community.

Participants also mentioned the importance of more environmental-based community actions:

- Recycling – outreach in the community to pick up rubbish as a way to engage with the local community clean up – how you dispose of waste - education and partnership with Dublin City Council around this.
- Community garden project - tidy towns involvement.
- Plant more flowers/trees on the streets in marginalised areas to increase positivity and community pride.

CONCLUSION



According to one participant: “If you don’t get the basics right, the rest of these (Goals) are way too aspirational - they have no real meaning to the people who are actually living in this. No poverty, quality education, good health and clean water/ sanitation are key, simply because they’re the building blocks, and if you don’t have that foundation, then sustainable cities and communities or good jobs and economic growth – they are meaningless. They are unreachable and they are not accessible.”

There was a clear consensus throughout the LNOB series 2 community workshops that the implementation of SDG 1 **No Poverty**, SDG 3 good **Health and Wellbeing** and SDG 4 **Quality Education** were instrumental in providing an important foundational level of support to people before the other more global SDG’s can be built upon e.g. SDG 7 **Affordable and Clean Energy**, SDG9 **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** and SDG 17 **Partnership for the Goals**.

What also came across strongly was a massive disconnect between the institutions and governmental officials at the top (who were making the rules) and the people at the bottom who were feeling the effects of these problems the most. The imbalance of this power dynamic has created a lack of trust in, and conviction about, the overall SDG implementation process and the belief that these Goals will ever be met, never-mind by the target year of 2030. It is obvious that those experiencing homelessness and suffering from poverty and its detrimental effects in all its forms - e.g. poor health and improper access to education - continue to be isolated and left behind despite the widely-acclaimed ‘Leave No One Behind’ Promise. If anything, with the impact of the Covid pandemic, the national and global inequality between the world’s richest and poorest has only grown more apparent since these community workshops took place. Due to Covid, the absolute number of people living in extreme poverty rose for the first time since 1997. Dooley (2021), shows for example, how economic contraction and job layoffs due to lockdown measures in many countries caused poverty to rise by almost 100 million in 2020 alone to 745 million without off-setting measures.

In reference to the Irish government and institutions of power, one participant explained how: “You people know nothing -, the reality of what 90 percent of the world is living through is utterly meaningless to the people at the top. No disrespect to them, but it’s the people at the ground that the Goals and Promise has meaning for. People won’t have meaning until they have a safe space to sleep, safe drinking water, food on the table, and a job to get up and

go to in the morning – to give their lives meaning and to give them a sense of pride and self-esteem. That’s where you start, because if you have pride in yourself and where you live and your family, then that pride expands out into your community and the world. But if you are literally fighting everyday of your life to just stay alive, who cares about sustainable energy?”

Although it was not an immediate priority for the majority of the participants, the importance of addressing climate change and its obvious worsening effects on land and sea, as well as its impact on the world’s poorest people most harshly first, was not forgotten or ignored by our participants. Neither were the pressing issues of achieving peace and justice on a local, national and international scale, and bridging the gap of global inequalities around race, gender and socioeconomic status.

One person described how in his opinion: “I picked **‘No Poverty’, ‘Gender Equality’ and ‘Peace and Justice’**. They’re three huge SDG’s and I felt they’re very connected kind of politically. I think this is why these 3 would be so hard to attain because they’re so staked in politics. And they will be part of the political games, so I think these would be the biggest. I don’t think poverty will ever be fully eradicated. I don’t think that’s gonna happen. And gender equality - I can’t see that being across the globe either - again political games and people’s perceptions. As for peace and justice? Well, we all know that war makes money so, you know, I would love to think that’s gonna happen but realistically, I don’t think we’re ever gonna see a planet earth where war is all over.”

Another participant told us: “I picked **‘No Poverty’, ‘Good Health’ and ‘Climate Action’** because I think that these are the primary and most pivotal SDGs for the continuation of our live. And if our lives are at risk from these big threats, what’s the point in everything else? The way things are going, it doesn’t look like everyone is going to survive this; it’s looking like people are already dying.”

It became clear from the conversations held in our Leave No One Behind Series 2 community workshops that many people are feeling increasingly hopeless within the confines of the current neoliberal capitalist system and, understandably, are being led to believe that any vague promises being made by those in power to improve their situations are likely to prove false. While the SDGs and the Leave No One Behind Promise of Agenda 2030 may offer us a roadmap for much-needed change for the future, they also show us where we are continuing to fail and let down those left most behind. As someone expressed “It goes to show the difference in lives. What they have over us. They have everything, but we have nothing. Nothing!” It is our collective civil duty to work together to break this inequality and to keep those who live in poverty at the forefront of the decisions we make as individuals, as a society and, in particular, as members of governing bodies. As the renowned artist, Frida Kahlo once said:

“There is so much wealth and so much misery at the same time, that it seems incredible that people can endure such class difference, and accept such a form of hunger while on the other hand, the millionaires throw away millions on stupidities.”

We must call on governments across the world and those in positions of power in Ireland to act quicker and with more strength and empathy to address the importance of the implementation of the SDGs and the Leave No One Promise in relation to all peoples and especially those most marginalized by poverty, exclusion and injustice. We must not forget, as one participant said: “Some people are barely surviving, it’s a fight” and how for many millions of people living in persistent poverty across the globe, their full and timely implementation may literally mean the difference between life and death.



"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."

- Joseph Wresinski (ATD International Founder)