

Submission by Friends of the Earth Ireland
to the
**Consultation Process for the development of a new Irish Aid Development
and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021 – 2024.**

Nature of views: Submission on behalf of Friends of the Earth Ireland

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Submission:

Friends of the Earth campaigns for environmental justice and sustainability. Internationally, Friends of the Earth is the largest grassroots network of environmental groups with over one million supporters and campaigners organized across 70 countries. Friends of the Earth Ireland promotes development education and action for environmental and global justice. We focus on fostering a more interconnected perspective in our approach to change, deepening understanding of the shared root causes of environmental and social injustice.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in this consultation process for the new Irish Aid Development and Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021- 2024.

Friends of the Earth Ireland participated in the IDEA task groups for Adult and Community Education and Youth Education and we endorse these submissions. We will aim not to duplicate what was outlined in these submissions, but rather highlight our key perspectives in relation to the questions set out by Irish Aid as it relates specifically to our work.

Q1. How can Irish Aid support life-long learning and increase public understanding of and engagement with development and global citizenship issues as well as increasing awareness of the Irish Aid programme?

Friends of the Earth supports the emphasis on lifelong learning (LLL). Adopting a LLL approach means that we should not see engagement in development education as a linear journey, but as building critical consciousness that further provides support and opportunities for people to take action at every stage of life.

We see an essential role for Civil Society Organisations (CSO's) and Adult and Community/ Youth sectors in this process, particularly in reaching communities and individuals that have chosen not to pursue higher education or who have not had access to more formal education spaces.

We believe that Irish Aid can provide support in the following ways:

1. **To promote and raise awareness of Development Education best practice¹.** Since the last DE strategy was created, IDEA's code of Good Practice was developed through wisdom accumulated over years of experience. Raising awareness of the Code with both partners already working in DE and also with potential DE partners in other sectors is crucial to amplify and increase engagement in DE and GCE issues.
2. **A commitment to flexible, adequate and appropriate funding.** Irish Aid should increase their investment in CSO's to carry out DE/ GCE. The current funding model limits organisations to one or two-year grants for planned activities, outcomes and reporting. We believe that taking a multi-annual grant approach will not only strengthen the impact and

¹ IDEA Code of Good Practice (2018), available here: <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/9e15ba29/files/uploaded/Code%20of%20Good%20Practice%20Principles%20April%202021.pdf>

outcomes of the work, but will provide additional financial security for CSO's and support opportunities for responsive, nimble and creative approaches which are essential components of DE/ GCE. We also believe that established DE/ GCE providers with experience are trusted with more autonomy around the use of their funds.

3. **To ensure the 'active' and 'citizenship' components of DE underpin the strategy.** We need to remain clear that *"DE is transformative. It enables people to analyse and challenge the root causes and consequences of global poverty and inequality and to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives and the lives of others. It aspires to change the way people think and act; empowering them to take action and become active global citizens in the creation of a fairer, more just, more secure and more sustainable world for all."*² DE is not just a classroom exercise alone, creating the conditions for both critical thinking and critical informed action are essential components of DE and must remain at the forefront of the new strategy.
4. **To engage new and strategic partners.** Irish society is changing all the time and these changes are reflected in the diversity that makes up our communities, classrooms, organisations etc. Ireland has come a long way from a time when only religious educators would talk about what is happening in far off countries across the Global South. Ireland is now a diverse society rich with different experiences, ethnicities and cultures. We need to ensure that the upcoming strategy takes into consideration these shifts not only in 'how' we deliver DE, but also recognising the importance and added value of embracing these communities, groups and organisations.
5. **To bring a thematic focus from local to global justice.** To explore the possibility of making key interventions on issues that resonate with people in Ireland - bringing a global justice perspective to these conversations/ spaces. We know there is widespread interest and engagement around issues relating to climate change, migration, gender etc and taking a strategic and thematic approach to these issues in bringing a global justice perspective to the narratives could foster deeper public engagement and strengthen widespread collective action.

Q2. Are there other groups or organisations we should seek to work with in order to build this awareness and engagement?

Friends of the Earth supports Irish Aid's collaboration and further engagement with new and strategic partners. We suggest Irish Aid takes steps to engage and collaborate with:

- Migrant communities and groups as well as migrant-led organisations such as MASI, LASC, MERJ etc;
- Irish Aid should be going out looking for organisations from new and diverse communities to ensure that they are active agents and partners in the further development of DE and delivering of DE/ GCE;
- Traveller and Roma communities, groups and organisations;
- Community and Youth Work Networks such as: Community Work Ireland (CWI) etc.;

² Irish Aid, (2021) available at: <https://www.irishaid.ie/what-we-do/who-we-work-with/civil-society/development-education-funding/>

- Environmental/ Climate groups and organisations;
- Think Tanks and other research groups;
- All-Ireland organisations and cross-border networks.

It would also be beneficial if Irish Aid were to consider organising exchange events to enable groups and organisations of all sizes to meet and exchange upcoming plans and ideas with a hope of strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration in applying for joint multi-annual grants as well as cross pollinating best practice and emerging challenges and trends.

Q3: What has changed in the external environment since 2017, both in the education sector and broader societal changes nationally and globally, and how should that be reflected in our priorities, our relationships and in our revised strategy?

The landscape within which we are working has significantly changed over the past four years. We believe that the following events should be reflected in future priorities, relationships, and strategies:

- **The rise of the far right and new nationalism** – evidenced by Brexit, Trump, Bolsonaro, the rise of racism and xenophobia, misinformation and political extremist ideology – all of which presents a growing challenge to the shared understanding of interdependent world and the shared ambition of sustainable future set out in the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Global Citizenship Education is one part of building a bulwark against these regressive trends and a key tool to strengthen critical thinking and deepen people’s understanding of the root causes of these issues.
- **The rise of youth-led climate movements** – evidenced by the school strikers and global youth engagement in climate action. This has shown us that action can precede education and lead to further engagement in learning about the issues and deepening understanding and critical thinking, as opposed to the usual perception that informed action will only happen as a result of critical education interventions. This is something we should learn from and explore further as a way to potentially reach new audiences.
- **The rise of social justice movements** – In addition to the rise of climate justice movements, we have seen huge shifts in global racial justice movements (BLM) as well as increased awareness and support Government departments, Local Authorities, Educational Bodies, and wider Civil Society.³
- **The time for Climate Justice is now** – The release of the IPCC special report (Oct 2018) highlighted the urgent need for a global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. The upcoming strategy needs to be proactive on climate change and strong on climate impacts such as climate migration.
- **Reduced emphasis on the SDG’s by the Irish Government** – We’ve seen a notable decline in the use of the SDG’s to frame work by the new Government. At the time the last strategy was developed, our Government were very strong on the SDG’s, having co-chaired the UN negotiations to agree them. By contrast, the recent programme for Government had very

³ Action Plan Against Racism, (2020) Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/6bedb-action-plan-against-racism-for-ireland-to-be-drawn-up-by-new-independent-anti-racism-committee/>

little reference to the SDG's and the new Government has not prioritised the SDG's as a way of framing its actions on national and international problems, and it has failed to produce a new national implementation plan that was originally envisaged for 2020. This is a challenge for DE. There is a need to encourage the Irish political system to recognise the importance of the SDG's, and indicates that one of the key targets for the new GCE strategy needs to be the participants in our own political system.

Q4: What do you consider to be the key areas of progress made since 2017 in the implementation of the Irish Aid Strategic Planning process? Are there any key lessons learnt or gaps in the current response?

Friends of the Earth endorse the key areas of progress made and lessons learned as outlined in the IDEA task Group submissions for Adult and Community Education and Youth.

Q5: With reference to the five output areas of the current Irish Aid Development Education Strategic Plan, what do you consider the key priorities for 2021- 2024 should be?

Friends of the Earth endorse the strategic areas and actions as outlined in the IDEA task Group submissions for Adult and Community Education and Youth as key priorities for 2021-2024.

We agree that the integrated approach proposed by Irish Aid for the next strategy is best served by removing the categories of 'formal' and 'non-formal' and replacing them with strategic priorities areas that address all sectors.

Q6: Irish Aid is considering changing the name of the programme and strategy to Global Citizenship Education, do you have any comments or concerns in relation to this suggestion?

Friends of the Earth support the changing of the programme and strategy name to GCE as long as the educational work that is carried out remains aligned to the Code of Good Practice[1]. We feel that the language of GCE is more accessible than DE and many groups are already using this language through their work.

We recognise that Development Education has a long, rich history and centres the importance of 'development' at local and global level. We agree that individual practitioners and providers should retain the autonomy and freedom to choose their own terminology.

We are also aware that there are some concerns regarding using the term 'citizen' which can reflect exclusionary language for some communities such as; undocumented migrants etc. So it is important that we are mindful of this in our communications and are clear that "global citizenship" is a most inclusive term, and specifically that everyone in Ireland, regardless of their residency status or nationality, is a global citizen.

Q7: What opportunities have arisen from COVID-19 experience and how can we learn from it to reach a broader audience?

Inequalities and injustices have been exacerbated for many communities around the world as a result of global pandemic. It has increased the need for global justice and solidarity as we collectively tackle issues of scarcity, insecurity and isolation which further compounds other social justice issues already being experienced by so many.

Some key takeaway's we've identified:

- **The digital divide** – COVID has shifted work online in ways that many thought could never happen. This brought about many positive opportunities but also poses many challenges for DE.
 - **Geographical divide** – The transition to online working has made it possible to engage comrades in the Global South to equally participate in activities and speak at events in a way that was not as accessible prior to COVID 19. It has also reduced urban centric organising which has resulted in more participation in online events from people across the island of Ireland and beyond. However, many communities still struggle with broadband connectivity.
 - **Participation and accessibility** – Our work has sought to increase participation of those who are currently underrepresented in the environmental movement such as Travellers, Roma, Migrants, Refugees, LGBTIQ* communities etc and sadly the shift online has just exposed the gap in access to both digital hardware and digital skills to support effective and meaningful engagement in online organising spaces. Trainings have had to be adapted to take into consideration the fact that many people may not be able to read slides if they are joining via a mobile phone for example. We need greater flexibility for funding to enable us to direct funds towards increasing participation of those without access to the means necessary to participate fully online if a blended way of working is to continue moving into the future.
 - **Moving forwards** – regardless of whether organisations and communities are more equipped to organise online – we must remain mindful not to lose the added value of DE methodologies and the value of creating real world opportunities for people to connect with one another, to build and sustain relationships and to meaningfully and fully participate. Research is also needed on the impact of online learning versus in-person learning. Much of our educational work focuses on building a sense of solidarity and collective empowerment – it is not yet clear if online learning matches the emotional impact and connection of in-person delivery.
- **Importance of interdependence** – COVID has shone a light on the added value of local resilience and the inextricable interconnected and interdependent world we live in.
- **Importance of being flexible** – COVID has reminded us of the value of not being tied to your plans – that having the ability to be responsive, to adapt plans and take a nimble approach is crucial in DE. There is huge value in being able to confidently throw out a plan and reimagine what that activity could look like based on changing landscapes and contexts. We need to be able to react and to do that we need more responsive funding structures.