

Feedback from Member Brainstorming and Roundtable Discussion

Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change 30th September 2017

Key topics which emerged during discussions

Background

The purpose of this round table discussion was to:

- Brainstorm on how the national dialogue on climate action might be assisted by the Assembly.
- Hear from the citizens about what can be done to engage citizens on the topic of climate change.
- Below are some specific questions to guide the discussion.

The purpose of this exercise was also to ensure that the Work Programme that is put before the Assembly addresses the topics and hears from the people that members identify as being important.

Feedback was then provided from each table in plenary session and footage from this is available on the Assembly's YouTube Channel.

This document is an edited transcript of that feedback session and includes a summary at the beginning of the key points raised across the room.

This feedback has formed the basis of the draft work programme for the Assembly's second meeting on this topic.

Conversation Starters/ Suggested Questions to guide discussions:

1. Why do you think some people switch off when they hear about climate change?
2. What are the challenges facing communities and individuals in taking action against climate change?
3. How can individuals and communities best communicate their concerns about climate change?
4. How should Government engage with people on this issue? Town hall meetings, social media, TV and radio (both advertising and programming), education (schools and universities)?
5. Addressing climate change will need action by everyone, what roles do you see for public authorities, private sector, civil society and individuals in taking action?

Summary of the key points raised:

Role of Government/Government Action

- The Government should lead by example.
- Leadership by the Taoiseach.
- There is a lack of guidance and leadership from Government.
- Clarity on relevant Department looking after issues.
- A feeling of “Why should you do it yourself if the Government isn’t etc”.
- Government should be more authoritative, it should lay down the law.
- Government needs to take the initiative and emphasize that there will be benefits in the long run.
- Politicians need to be held accountable for their decisions.
- Want Government to act on what's already in front of them.
- In relation to the Government’s approach in communicating to the community, it should be an interdepartmental approach with one harmonized message across all Departments.
- There is a lack of connection between various Government Departments.

Policy

- Only Government policy can make significant change to transport, energy and investment planning
- Funding incentives for Government Departments should be linked to performance on climate change targets.
- When the Government engages with people about climate change, they should link natural disasters to how it impacts on people living in Ireland.
- Absence of short term focus.
- Lack of positive re-enforcement.
- Role of the EPA

Local Government

- Individuals should be able to approach local government, local counsellors.
- From National level there should be consultations with local councils and local councils should have climate change on their agenda every month.
- County Councils should be involved; Local Councils should have a forum.

- Local Councils and Local Authorities play a big role in both encouraging the communities and also listening to the concerns of the citizens and this is how individuals can best communicate their concerns.
- Local authorities have a role to play - should lead on energy efficiency particularly in street lighting and areas such as that.
- Public authorities lead by example.
- Role of public authorities to legislate and facilitate.
- Authorities need to help those who have been affected by flooding.
- Make more demands on our local authorities.
- A matter for public authorities to look into trialling pilot projects for self sufficiency.

Transport

- Price of public transport must be reduced.
- Improvements to public transport called for.
- Government should announce a plan with ten major initiatives subject to time limits perhaps 2020, e.g. complete electrification of transport within a reasonable timeframe.
- Move to the bike and public transport to reduce over reliance on cars.
- Individuals using cars is unavoidable - no public transport where they live; Dispersed population.
- The Government appears to overly investing in roads whereas public infrastructure and public transport appears to be ignored.
- Where citizens wish to rely on public transport with a view to minimising the use of a car they had three problems with public transport.
 1. A degree of lack of trust in it - running times / availability;
 2. Public transport is quite expensive for the service received;
 3. In respect to citizens, particularly in rural areas, there is inaccessibility to public transport.
- Car pooling lanes.
- Bus sharing system.
- Walk to school scheme.
- Legislators, TD's etc. should purchase electric cars and encourage people to do the same.

- Remove carpark in Leinster House to encourage TDs etc to use public transport or cycling.
- The use of Ministerial cars - should be more environmentally friendly vehicles.
- The expenses structure for the public sector and for the Oireachtas is seen as one that favours car usage.

Education

- A need to be re-educated.
- Schools and Education at a young age, transition year etc.
- Education programme, awareness raising, competitions for initiatives, incentivize car pooling.
- Start with children - inform them in a fun way; School education programmes, starting at primary school should be action based education.
- Engage with school children; specific reference to transition year students.
- Engagement with schools.
- Education for all.
- Idea of setting up green hubs or climate change hubs around the country in communities to provide information and act as a method of engagement and that they should take the approach of starting local and building it up with pop up educational hubs to inform people and raise awareness using technology such as apps for communication and to spread the campaign.
- Educational gap in providing people with practical examples of what people can do to act in the short terms to address this issue.
- Green Schools Action Expo should be rolled out to all schools.
- Use of a carbon footprint calculator.

Incentives

- Incentives for carbon neutral buildings.
- Profiteering of state bodies, no price control and there needs to be incentives.
- Financial incentives - benefit in your pocket more motivating.
- Funding incentives for Government Departments should be linked to performance on climate change targets.
- Grants for carrying out carbon reducing work in homes. Grants for home insulation.

Cost

- Financial cost may make people switch off.

- Cost of making home improvements / upgrading house on an individual basis is often cost prohibitive.
- Prohibitive cost of solar panels.
- The cost of energy is an issue.

Energy

- Solar panels in hospitals.
- Should be made easier for people to reduce their carbon footprint e.g. grants for solar panels.
- All new builds subject to minimum standards such as inclusion of solar panels.
- Challenges and expense of solar panels and similar equipment.
- Solar Panels, incentivised measures like this with more with tax breaks.
- Fuel boilers with a grant, it can be cheaper to do it without the grant.

Recycling and Plastics

- Plastic free supermarkets.
- Free recycling of plastic.
- Needs to be long term benefit similar to the recycling companies penalizing people for putting the wrong rubbish in the wrong bins.
- Penalties for companies who do not minimise packaging.
- Initiatives for recycling.
- All packaging needs to be recyclable.
- All packaging should be able to be put in green bin.
- Recycling is everyone's responsibility.
- More information needed on how to dispose of things properly.
- Hospitals take a lead in efficiency - look at taking small steps to make them greener, in such areas as recycling. The reasons for this are to improve cost/efficiency not only for the hospitals but they could also provide financial incentives.

Action

- Similar approach that was taken with plastic bags, no smoking – introduce legislation and enforce it.
- Government successfully succeeded in getting rid of CFC gases, smokeless fuel, plastic bags and unleaded fuel in cars.

Solutions

- Establishment of a National Organisation with central communications.
- Inclusion Week - a community based activity in a local authority.
- Green day.
- Cool town.
- Tidy towns replicated to a green initiative.
- Set up an agency similar to Citizens Information Board.
- Town Hall meetings and Social media.
- Online portal / National Information Campaign.
- Independent website.
- One point of information.

Taxation

- Green solutions are always associated with higher taxes.
- If a person amends their lifestyle to reduce their carbon footprint, there doesn't seem to be any reference to any grants or rebates or tax rebates available to them.

Retrofitting

- Retrofit of existing legacy buildings.
- Refurbishing Buildings – make it mandatory.
- Show houses to demonstrate change.
- New industrial buildings should include living roofs where possible

Communication etc.

- Communicate with local reps, social media and community based groups
- Should be an online portal with a National Information campaign to allow people communicate more easily
- National campaign to highlight national and local effects of climate change
- Not enough advertisements on TV and social media
- Meetings and Town Halls to discuss the issue and talking to local TD's
- Campaigns to reduce emission targets
- Campaigns should be more bite size and manageable – shorter term

Detailed Comments made at each table

Compiled from transcript of proceedings and notes taken at tables

Table 1

Scale of the Issue

Timelines too far in the future

Green solutions are always associated with higher taxes

Set up an agency similar to Citizens Information Board

Information on Recycling

Dispersed population

Price of public transport must be reduced

Grass Roots effort

Targeting young children

Change Planning Regulations

Public Organisations should play their part

Refurbishing Buildings – make it mandatory

Show houses to demonstrate change

Table 2

Do not understand the signs

Overwhelmed by information

Too big a problem

Fear is de-motivating

It's too late; Damage is done

Certain devices like TV need to be plugged in anyway – perhaps some kind of initiative to look at this

Bureaucracy of administration

Difficult to access existing initiatives

Lack of factual information

Clarity on relevant Department looking after issues

Green initiatives in school brought out to the community

Public authorities lead by example

Tidy towns replicated to a green initiative

Carbon neutral buildings should get initiatives

Gov should lead by example

Public Service should lead by example

Funding incentives for Government Departments linked to performance on targets

Incentives for carbon neutral buildings

Retrofit of existing legacy buildings

Table 3

Fatigue at listening at constant bad news

Making personal change can be difficult and expensive

Change – current practices are embedded

Feels abstract

More concerned with the here and now

What can I do kind of scenario

Feel it is more national and industrial level

Difficulties and obstacles to making change

Making change should be made easier for people

Improvements to public transport

Local forums (communication)

Knowing where to go for information/communications

TV ads

Make information more accessible

Town Halls

Schools and Education at a young age, transition year etc

Pod casts and live streaming

Role of public authorities to legislate and facilitate

Car pooling lanes

Bus sharing system

A national day and award; similar to Tidy Towns;

A green day; Cool town; engage communities and school children

Life changing events

Table 4

People not empowered to make individual change

Their contribution is a drop in the ocean

Costs make it prohibitive

Complexity of challenge makes it a disincentive

Communicate with local reps, social media and community based groups

Get involved with other groups such as tidy towns

A robust public service announcement and media programme

Not enough advertisements on TV and social media

People are not engaging as they are not familiar with issue

Initiatives for recycling

All packaging needs to be recyclable

All packaging should be able to be put in green bin

Recycling is everyone's responsibility

More information needed on how to dispose of things properly

Table 5

Language is too scientific for the ordinary person

Scale of problem too large

Lack of guidance and leadership from Gov

Problem too far away affecting others rather than at a local level

Cost of upgrading house on an individual basis

Lack of information on how to mitigate change

Should be an online portal with a National Information campaign to allow people communicate more easily

National campaign to highlight national and local effects of climate change

Similar approach that was taken with plastic bags, no smoking – bring in legislation and enforce it

Disappointing that no Q&A after the speaker from the National Mitigation Plan and Adaptation Framework. This damages the entire purpose of why we are here

Lack of leadership

Government could lead by example

Solar panels in hospitals

In addition to fixing the climate change through mitigation, we would be saving money

If the Government is seen as not even willing to lead, why should you do it yourself if the Government won't even do it and they are in a stronger position to do so

Table 6

Lack of information

People get bored and feel powerless

Sheer scale of information, complicated and technical

It doesn't resonate with people in their daily lives

Needs to be presented in a simpler and more engaging format

It requires effort and it requires change of mind set

On an individual level it is expensive

Meetings and Town Halls to discuss the issue and talking to local TD's

Government should take leadership

Legislators, TD's should purchase electric cars and encourage people to do the same

When the Government engages with people about climate change, they should link natural disasters to how it impacts on people living in Ireland

It should start from the top down

Government needs to lead with example

Private sector needs to be held accountable

Authorities need to help those who have been affected by flooding

Should be made easier for people to reduce their carbon footprint e.g. grants for solar panels

Table 7

A serious attitude change required

Individuals need to know how it affects them

Feel that we are too small to make a difference

A need to be re-educated

Prohibitive cost of solar panels

Fuel boilers with a grant, it can be cheaper to do it without the grant

Profiteering of state bodies, no price control and there needs to be incentives

Needs to be long term benefit similar to the recycling companies penalizing people for putting the wrong rubbish in the wrong bins

An independent website

One point of information that would cover grants, all information about saving heat etc., and FAQs

Gov successfully succeed in getting rid of CFC gases, smokeless fuel, plastic bags and unleaded fuel in cars

Up to the Government to make the moves in this area

Public authorities should lead by example

Only Government policy can make significant change to transport, energy and investment planning

CCJ - they should have used solar panels instead of glass

Every little thing each individual does will help

Table 8

Agree that citizens generally tend to switch off on hearing this issue

Nothing they can do about it

Nothing to do with them or that it is too far into the future

The issue is always expressed in very general terms

Hasn't directly affected a lot of people in this country perhaps flooding and other issues tend to be in localised areas

Main challenges facing communities and individuals is getting politicians to listen to them, bureaucracy

People individually don't feel empowered

People are willing to be led

Feel that they are not being led and response is not coordinated

Individuals should be able to approach local government, local counsellors

Groups / collective bodies should approach the Department of Environment directly

Local Councils should have a forum

There should be a network at both levels. So there should be intergovernmental committees between governments of different countries but then the Government should also consult with local sub committees in Ireland

Engagement with schools

Examples in the past - Gov initiative- recycling, smoking ban and drink driving

Government should be more authoritative, it should lay down the law

Government needs to take the initiative and emphasize that there will be benefits in the long run

Politicians need to be held accountable for their decisions.

From National level there should be consultations with local councils and local councils should have climate change on their agenda every month.

A coordinated approach

Grants for carrying out carbon reducing work on homes

Education programme, awareness raising, competitions for initiatives, incentivize car pooling

Government should lead by example.

Table 9

Lack of leadership from Government

Government should announce a plan with ten major initiatives subject to time limits perhaps 2020 e.g. complete electrification of transport in a reasonable timeframe

All new builds subject to minimum standards such as inclusion of solar panels

New industrial buildings should include living roofs where possible

Support and incentivize hydroponic farming, land fill waste reduction, replace peat harvesting with solar panels on that same land, move towards plastic free supermarkets, paper bags for fruit and veg etc.

Free recycling of plastic and planting of native trees on farmland and incentivise the same

Want Government to act on what's already in front of them

Table 10

Message is not clear enough

People don't understand as the numbers in the public domain don't sound serious
i.e. 1% increase does not sound very serious

Doesn't seem like it's a priority

No strong leadership from Gov on climate change

No real ownership of problems

No Government support

Cost of making home improvements often cost prohibitive

Lobby politicians and EPA

County Councils should be involved

Equivalent of Tidy Towns for climate change

TV advisement and programmes

Education for all adults

Make the problem real

Incentive by realistic grants for home insulation

Easier to access grants for a single item

Tree planting

Client ambassadors

Table 11

Financial cost

Does not affect us now...it is somewhere down the road

Scale of the problem / intimidating

Lack of leadership

Better if it was coming from the Taoiseach / might take it more serious then

Media - there are no large scale campaigns

Paris Agreement - not enough people know about it

Costs

Challenges and expense of solar panels and all that sort of equipment

Lack of information, lack of leadership and lack of resources

People sometimes don't buy into the whole issue of climate change

Local communities work to organise themselves and form a delegation

Local communities or individuals would be better to ring Joe Duffy if they had an issue to really express concern or get the matter raised

Town Hall meetings, social media, TV and radio and advertising

Should start with children - inform them in a fun way

Establishment of a National organisation with central communications

Remove carpark in Leinster House to encourage TDs etc to use public transport or cycling

Hospitals take a lead in efficiency - look at taking small steps to make them greener, in such areas as recycling

The reasons for this are to improve cost/efficiency not only for the hospitals but they could also provide financial incentives

Private sector companies encouraged to draw up their own plans on how to be greener - lead to positive PR

Local authorities have a role to play - should lead on energy efficiency particularly in street lighting and areas such as that

Dundrum shopping centre lighting on 24 hrs a day - companies should be encouraged to turn off lights or possibly fined if they are not meeting certain targets

Green Schools Action Expo should be rolled out to all schools around the country

The use of the carbon footprint calculator

Better engagement from the EPA

Idea of setting up green hubs or climate change hubs around the country in communities to provide information and act as a method of engagement and that they should take the approach of starting local and building it up with pop up educational hubs to inform people and raise awareness using technology such as apps for communication and to spread the campaign

Engage with school children; specific reference to transition year students

The climate change calculator should be made available to all citizens for their use

Table 12

People don't understand and are overwhelmed by the scale

It is not about us, it is a problem for the next generations

No sense of urgency generated

Looking at dates of 2050 there is an absence of short term focus

Educational gap in providing people with practical examples of what people can do to act in the short terms to address this issue

Absence of leadership from Government level

Main challenge is seen as cost for individuals

Grant structures are seen as not being a sufficient incentive around improving homes for example and that they are too little

It seems like there is an onus on the private sector to address this that is not matched by Government

Prioritisation - climate change has to compete with other issues such as, more immediate issues, e.g. homelessness

Walk to school scheme

Example of the fire station

Individuals and communities are exemplary to other communities

The use of Ministerial cars - should be more environmentally friendly vehicles

Advertising campaigns focussing on benefits to the individuals of taking certain actions

School education programmes, starting at primary school should be action based education

More engagement with people on social media as some people are too busy to be attending Town Hall meetings on this topic

A prohibition on Ministers for a period after they leave office from entering the private sector in non environmentally friendly companies

Move to the bike and to move to public transport

The expenses structure for the public sector and for the Oireachtas is seen as one that favours car usage

Public authorities leading by example

Inclusion Week which was a community based activity in a local authority

Climate change should take precedence over public sector activity over the Private sector

Table 13

General negativity around climate change and talk about it

Volumes of information, overwhelming and it was described as a boring topic maybe to the younger generation

'I'm only one' - a sense of individual helplessness about it

Make it more immediate to lifestyle

Analogy of the smoking ban, drink driving, these campaigns were successful and this requires a cultural change as well.

Criticism of the Green Party

Too long term and described as Horizon Planning

Solar Panels, incentivised measures like this with more with tax breaks

The cost of energy is an issue

There doesn't seem to be a structure in place that people can use to do things about improving emissions and climate change

Individuals using cars is unavoidable - no public transport where they live

Communication again is still sometimes being done through the local TD

Letters might be written but you can be guaranteed that no response is the most likely outcome

Parish councils

Tidy Towns Committees

Lack of structure - People don't seem to know how to go about this as a group and as individuals

Campaigns to reduce emission targets

Campaigns should be more bite size and manageable – shorter term

In relation to the Governments approach in communicating to the community, it should be an interdepartmental approach with one harmonized message across all departments

Lack of leadership

We should be making more demands on our local authorities

Uber were refused a licence to operate in Dublin - companies like this should be allowed to trade

Penalties e.g. for companies who don't minimise on their packaging

Lack of structure

Lack of democratic representation at an executive level at town and village and rural area

Need for leadership; Need for executive function

Responsibility of Government

Table 14

Much doom and gloom in relation to climate change

Absolute lack of positive reinforcement

A lack of financial incentive for people to get actively involved with climate change

If a person amends their lifestyle to reduce their carbon footprint, there doesn't seem to be any reference to any grants or rebates or tax rebates available to them

A lack of connection between various Government Departments

An overreliance on cars

The Government appears to overly invest in roads whereas public infrastructure and public transport appears to be ignored

Where citizens wished to rely on public transport with a view to minimising the use of a car they had three problems with public transport

1. A degree of a lack of trust in it regarding running times and its availability
2. Public transport is quite expensive for the service they receive
3. In respect to Citizens, particularly in rural areas, there is inaccessibility to public transport

Local Councils and local Authorities play a big role in both encouraging the communities and also listening to the concerns of the citizens

Tidy Towns and similar such organisations are very good inspiration - positive reinforcement

People who got involved in these matters and the community engagement they were shown: positive action of what to do rather than negative and what not to do

Financial incentives - benefit in your pocket more motivating

Worse case scenarios go hand in hand with positive reinforcement / Individuals are told what they are to do in order to avoid such issues

A matter for public authorities to look into trialling pilot projects for self sufficiency

Smaller towns in Europe where they aim towards being self sufficient

Quite disappointed that America and a certain President of America has not engaged or fully ignored the Paris Agreement and they felt that they were concerned that this might water down the attitude of other countries towards the Paris Agreement