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# Community Engagement and Sustainable Development (CESD)

*An information pack for prospective  
project participants*

WWF-UK & CAG Consultants

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# Contents

1. The Story so far: Measuring the impact of Community Engagement on Sustainable Behaviours.....	3
2. Are we ready to shift direction? .....	4
3. I'm in: what the pilot projects say about the CESD tool.....	7
Bristol City Council .....	7
Durham County Council .....	7
Lewes District Council.....	8
Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council.....	8
4. The Commitment: WWF-UK & CAG Consultants Research Partners Agreement.....	10
What will this research phase mean for the research participants?.....	10
How will CAG and WWF support this process? .....	10
5. Participant Agreement.....	11
Data Protection.....	11

# 1. The Story so far: Measuring the impact of Community Engagement on Sustainable Behaviours



## **The question**

In 2005 The Local Sustainability Unit at WWF UK were posed with the question, “*how does community engagement change behaviour, and where is the evidence.*” They spoke to CAG Consultants and together we agreed to pull together the evidence in a literature review.



## **The research**

We reviewed the sustainable development, community development and community engagement literature and research. But we came across a problem; we found a lot of information about measuring process and the policy context of the work, but very little information about measuring impact. ([link](#))



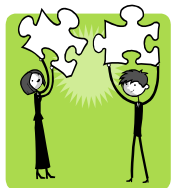
## **The consultation**

We weren't quite sure about the results of our literature review, so we asked a number of people from numerous NGOs, government and academic institutions, to look at the report and tell us what they thought ([Linked](#)). It seemed that not only did people agree that the evidence base was not yet developed, but that it would be useful if it was.



## **The design**

We then set about thinking about a way we could measure the impact that community engagement has on sustainable behaviours and started to design an evaluation tool. We wanted the tool to be as straight forward as possible, and we envisaged that research participants would join us to use the tool to collect evidence to answer the original question.



## **The pilots**

Once a basic draft was completed we asked other people to use the tool to find out if it worked in terms of being easy to use and in collecting information that would be useful in gathering data to answer the question.

Two groups of pilots helped, firstly Bristol City Council and Surrey County Council and then Durham City Council, Lewis District Council, West DEN and Kirklees Borough Council. Following each pilot stage the tool was redrafted, this work happened in 2005 and 2006.



## **The wider research**

The tool is now ready to be used by research participants to begin to gather the information that will help WWF and CAG answer this question. During the time we have been drafting the tool the people who have used it have found it helpful in planning and evaluating their work, and other people have begun to see what a strategically important question it is we are asking.

## 2. Are we ready to shift direction?

by Andrew Ross

Around the country this summer, local authorities are using all sorts of methods to encourage local communities to live in ways that will reduce their impact on the planet. Durham County ran its recent Action Packed Futures 2006 festival with a host of interactive activities to inspire people to take new actions such as using renewable energy and recycling more. Residents in Bristol are rolling up their sleeves to take part in preparing local sustainability plans. Lewes District Council on the south coast is working with local people to help them take actions to reduce climate change.

These activities are prompted by growing evidence that the direction we are heading in is increasingly unsustainable. WWF-UK has calculated, for example, that if everyone in the world was to live like the average UK citizen then we would need three planets instead of just the one we've got. As a Chinese proverb makes clear, 'unless we change direction, we are likely to end up where we are going'.

Are we ready to shift direction? Community workers and council officers report that, at a local level, there is an appetite for change and a willingness to participate in programmes that are designed to curb our unsustainable behaviours. A recent publication on how to promote more sustainable consumption also highlighted this shift in mood. The report, called *I will if you will*, was published by the Sustainable Development Commission (an independent watchdog) and set out an important leadership role for government. But it also suggested that "community initiatives and local feedback will reassure people that they are part of a collective movement that's making a real difference." Everyone, it seems, has a role to play.

To this end, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is supporting the Federation for Community Development Learning to help community development workers improve their skills and knowledge so that they can support communities to take a range of actions to improve local sustainability. These might include setting up recycling schemes, buying local produce and getting involved in local planning consultations.

There is currently no shortage of attempts by local authorities to involve residents in sustainability activities. But how do councils, or communities themselves, know whether this involvement is leading to actions and behaviours which make a difference?

A new evaluation tool, developed by WWF-UK, in partnership with CAG Consultants, may help to provide the answer. The CESD (Community Engagement and Sustainable Development) tool has been piloted by five councils – including Durham County, Bristol City and Lewes District – and a sustainability charity. WWF-UK is now seeking another 50 participants to take part in a research project, using the tool to measure the impact community engagement has on changing and maintaining sustainable behaviour.

Niamh Carey, Project Director at WWF-UK, says the idea for the tool came about when WWF-UK realised the dearth of evidence available to justify why involving communities is beneficial for sustainability projects.

“There is masses of advice on how to involve people, but there is seemingly nothing that helps local councils and others to assess the impact of this involvement and how to make it more effective.”

Niamh has a background in community development work and knows that workers with these skills can make a huge difference. But she is anxious that, without the sort of evidence that WWF-UK hopes the tool will generate, community involvement programmes could be vulnerable to the shifting fashions of funders. “What we want to demonstrate”, she says, “ is that involving communities isn’t a luxury or a fad – it is a crucial part of creating lasting behaviour change.”

The tool allows practitioners to evaluate any sustainability project they are planning to do which involves communities. Participants are asked a series of questions at the beginning about their current awareness and behaviour. They are then followed up with another round of questions once a project is complete. Comparing the before and after responses will allow councils to track what programmes or projects have been most effective in capturing the imagination of participants, and what has worked best to influence behaviour change.

Emma Cranidge, from CAG Consultants, has led on the development of the tool. She believes that “it has challenged the pilot authorities to ask themselves ‘why are we doing this’, which is leading them to think about how else they can achieve the results they want.” Because the tool is based on accepted project management theory and practice, it will also help councils and other large organisations working with communities to decide how best to spend their participation budget to get the changes in behaviour they are looking for.

For example, take the problems around disposal of waste. Local authorities are responsible for increasing the amount of waste that is recycled to reduce landfill. Ultimately, though, it is residents themselves who will need to change their behaviour. Education and awareness-raising is expensive. So understanding what are the most effective ways of getting people to change their behaviour to reduce their waste would be practically beneficial, and also help councils financially too.

Maggie Bosanquet, Sustainability Manager at Durham County Council (one of the councils involved in piloting the tool), believes that it will help to quantify work that hasn’t been measured before. “The reality is that we now live in a performance management environment. If the tool can help us to measure what we are doing and demonstrate benefits, then that has to be a good thing.”

WWF-UK has been encouraged by the experiences of the pilot authorities so far, and now wants to sign up another 50 councils and other large organisations who use community engagement to promote sustainability. Organisations should already have a project they would like to assess using the tool. Participants will not need to commit any additional financial resources to their

project and WWF-UK will provide support throughout the duration of the research, including an online helpdesk. The research will run for 12 months from October 2006.

Niamh Carey says that it is an exciting time to be involved in this work, particularly as ministers consider devolving more power to local communities. “We definitely have the ear of government. They are interested in the ‘how’ of behaviour change and we hope our work will contribute to that.”

### 3. I'm in: what the pilot projects say about the CESD tool

by Andrew Ross

The Community Engagement and Sustainable Development (CESD) tool has been piloted by five local authorities and a community-based organisation. Here we report briefly from a selection of these pilots about how they have found working with the tool so far.

#### BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

The council is using the CESD tool to assess resident involvement in developing a sustainable neighbourhood plan for the regeneration of the Brislington area in the city.

The neighbourhood plan will include proposals for future development and a map, and will hopefully be used as a 'material consideration' in the planning process (that is, it will have influence even though it won't be a statutory plan). The process of developing the sustainability plan includes local people, agencies and businesses.

The tool will help the council to assess behaviour change as a consequence of implementing the finished plan.

Council officers Mark Leach and Steve Marriott are leading on this work. Mark says that "using the tool has already helped us in our forward thinking to understand what impacts the project will have."

"It is helping us to answer questions like why are we doing this project, and what do we hope to achieve by it? We can then better frame our benchmarks for evaluation."

Mark believes that the tool can also help authorities to assess what the impact of their decisions might be on sustainability, provided that the right data is collected. This will ultimately help to get sustainability funded if there is evidence that projects deliver the benefits they say they will.

#### DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

Durham is using the tool to evaluate two projects. The first is its annual Action Packed Futures Festival which focuses on sustainability issues through creating a kind of 'sustainability village', complete with village green. Having run the festival for a number of years the council wanted to find out whether people who attended changed their behaviour or not as a consequence. Officers handed out questionnaires to visitors at the most recent festival in June 2006, and will follow these up later in the year to find out what behaviour changes, if any, they made as a result of attending the festival.

The second application is working with a new initiative called North East Region Sustainable Communities. This will involve communities in designing a toolkit for creating projects to help

improve sustainability in a community. The council will use the CESD tool to help evaluate the impact of the toolkit on behaviour change in the area.

Maggie Bosanquet, Sustainability Manager at Durham County Council, believes that the tool will be able to help her team assess whether they are meeting their objective of ‘subliminal sustainability’, that is, inculcating an understanding of how people can change their behaviour without banging them over the head with it.

The tool is also an extremely useful way of quantifying work that hasn’t been measured before. “The reality is that we now live in a performance management environment. If the tool can help us to measure what we are doing and demonstrate benefits, then that has to be a good thing. This is just the sort of information we need to demonstrate that our spending leads to change, and to stave off any threat of budget cuts.”

#### LEWES DISTRICT COUNCIL

Lewes District Council understands the potential impacts of climate change in its area and wants to raise awareness of its residents too so that they can take action. The council is using the tool to assess an awareness raising campaign about climate change that aims to influence people’s behaviour.

Using the tool has involved an initial survey of 1000 households in one area of the district to establish current levels of understanding. The council received 300 returns and it will go back to these households with a follow-up survey once it has finished its climate change communication campaign in the local area (which includes consultation and information sessions) to see if this awareness raising has an effect on changing household behaviours.

While it is difficult to totally isolate what influences individual behaviour, Trevor Watson, the lead officer at the council, hopes that it will be possible to identify whether the authority’s campaign has been influential. He says that “engagement is a key method for us so it is important to monitor whether or not it makes a difference. This is why we wanted to be part of testing the tool.”

#### KIRKLEES METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Kirklees is using the tool to work collaboratively with other parts of the council. It wants to influence the decisions people make about their transport, and to get more people walking. The Environmental Information Coordinator, Heidi Smith, has integrated the testing of the tool with attempts by the Highways section to improve the transport infrastructure in Littleton and Mill Bridge.

She has used the tool to establish a baseline understanding of why people in these areas do or don’t walk to local facilities. This will then influence the infrastructure that the council develops to encourage people to walk – for example pedestrian signs, walking maps and so on. The tool will then assess levels of walking to discover whether the new infrastructure influences behaviour.

Heidi believes that “the principle of the tool is good and the tool is useful – casual observations and assumptions are just not sufficient in persuading sceptics that sustainability projects can work. Measuring the impacts of a project is valuable and is a step that is often missing”.

She believes that the tool can help officers responsible for sustainability to improve their project management of consultation. But it is also important for these officers to persuade larger council services to use it too. “We have to avoid using the findings of the tool to only preach to the converted – one way of doing this is to get other parts of the council involved from the start so they can see the benefits too. The tool can be a good way of communicating with colleagues.”

## 4. The Commitment: WWF-UK & CAG Consultants Research Partners Agreement

WHAT WILL THIS RESEARCH PHASE MEAN FOR THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS?

During the course of this research phase we ask partners to commit to:

- Use the research tool to plan and evaluate a project that aims to deploy community engagement to influence behaviour
- To record actions and activity in the forms supplied in the tool
- To share information gathered with WWF UK and CAG Consultants
- To share any comments or information about the process of using the tool
- To attend workshops as agreed.

We estimate that this will require minimum worker time of 10 days (including attendance at workshops) over about a one year to 18 months.

HOW WILL CAG AND WWF SUPPORT THIS PROCESS?

During the course of this initial pilot phase, CAG and WWF will commit to:

- Provide direct support to the research partners on request, either via email, on the phone or (occasionally) face to face
- Work with research partners to think through how the tool could be practically applied, and to discuss any problems which arise, if requested by the research partner
- Make their own records of the process and discussions and share these with
- The research partners.

## 5. Participant Agreement

Please complete the following if you would like to participate and commit to the Community Engagement project.

Name *(please print)*: \_\_\_\_\_

On Behalf of *(insert name of organisation)*: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Forms can be returned by either fax or post to Rachel Brown at WWF-UK.

**Postal Address:**

WWF-UK  
Panda House  
Weyside Park  
Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR

**Fax:** 01483 426 409

**Email:** [rjbrown@wwf.org.uk](mailto:rjbrown@wwf.org.uk)

### DATA PROTECTION

Because privacy and the protection of personal information are issues of increasing concern, we make every effort to ensure that your use of the Community Engagement Tool and website ([www.wwf.org.uk/community-engagement](http://www.wwf.org.uk/community-engagement)) is secure and non-intrusive.

Any personal information submitted via the Community Engagement Tool and the Community Engagement website is treated in accordance with The Data Protection Act (1998). This means that you have the right to advise us at any time if you no longer wish to receive mailings from us or from organisations (CAG) with whom we cooperate. It also gives you the right to request a copy of the personal information that we hold on you.

### Tell us how to talk to you:

WWF-UK would like to contact you with information and updates of the Community Engagement Project. Your information will be held on our database. If you **don't** want us to contact you in this way, please tick this box.

WWF-UK would like to contact you with with information about ways you can help, such as campaigning, events or appeals to support our work. Your information will be held on our database and may be used to help us choose the most relevant information for you. If you **don't** want us to contact you in this way, please tick this box.