

Summary

Engaging Everyone for the SDGs

Side event at
2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF)
UN Headquarters, New York, 18 July

On 18 July, the [OECD Development Communication Network](#) (DevCom) and [Government of Canada](#) co-organised *Engaging Everyone*, a side event at the [2017 High Level Political Forum](#).

Two years after the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted, it was pivotal to ask:

- How are citizens engaging with the goals? What do they know and think about the SDGs?
- What are governments and other development actors doing to engage with citizens, to understand their concerns and build confidence in the 2030 Agenda?
- Who are the innovators in development communication, and what lessons can they share? How can we leave no one behind in SDG communications?

Part I: Panel Discussion

The event was opened by **Celina Caesar-Chavannes**, Parliamentary Secretary to Canada's Minister of International Development.

Ms. Caesar-Chavannes took stock of where people stand on the SDGs, citing data from DevCom's briefing on [What People Know and Think about the SDGs](#). She discussed how Canadians were engaging with the SDGs through initiatives like [Millennium Kids](#), [WE](#), and the consultations for Canada's first [Feminist International Assistance Policy](#) (15K stakeholders in 65 countries participated). She also discussed how Canadian [businesses](#) and [civil society](#) – often invisibly – are engaging with the goals (if not the global agenda itself).

Bathylle Missika, Head of the Partnerships & Networks Unit of the OECD Development Centre, moderated a conversation with four panellists:

- **Norma Munguía**, Director General for Global Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico
- **Marie Ottosson**, Deputy Director General, Swedish International Development Agency
- **Oliver Henman**, Head of International Networks, Civicus Alliance
- **Mitchell Toomey**, Director, UN SDG Action Campaign



Ms. Munguía shared highlights on public engagement since Mexico's [2016 Voluntary National Review](#), including the establishment of a new multi-stakeholder [National Council](#) and the ongoing mobilisation of citizens and young people through [MyWorld Mexico](#). She also informed participants of Mexico's new [open data platform](#) (beta version), which allows citizens to explore progress on more than 100 indicators.

Ms. Ottosson shared highlights from Sweden's [2017 VNR](#). Sweden has set up a multi-stakeholder committee for the SDGs, which has "awareness raising" as one of its six strategic priorities. Swedish has issued a call for proposals for innovative ideas on SDG implementation, including how to raise SDG awareness. The ideas generated, including card games and art projects, have helped reach entirely new communities.

Mr. Henman explained how the [Action for Sustainable Development](#) platform and [Leave No One Behind](#) partnership embody a transition in civic engagement: attention is shifting away from dominant international NGOs and towards more direct engagement with citizens through networks, often driven from the South.

Mr. Toomey discussed how the [MYWorld 2015](#) survey had helped establish the SDGs as “the people’s goals”. The follow up survey, [MYWorld 2030](#), will allow individuals to share their views on SDG progress, generating data that can serve as a basis for policy dialogue and public engagement strategies.

Direct participation and citizen-generated data is also the goal of Civicus’ [Datashift](#) initiative, which promotes the use of tools and apps for citizens to share information and help monitor the goals in their environments. This can help fill data gaps in national statistical offices.

Part II: Open Discussion

In a room filled to capacity, more than 60 participants shared lessons from their own efforts to engage citizens for the SDGs, including [Project Everyone](#), the [World’s Best News](#) and [Earth Charter](#).

Participants discussed the challenges and success factors for effective SDG engagement.

- In addition to engaging the general public, the SDG community still faces the enormous challenge of engaging decision-makers for SDG implementation, including government departments and private actors unfamiliar with global development issues. High level leadership is needed.
- SDG campaigns are reaching the “middle men”, and many communications efforts have been powerful in raising attention, thanks to high-quality iconography, videos, celebrity ambassadors and more. However, the road to deeper public engagement is long, and the language around the SDGs (acronyms; UN summits etc.) is still poorly suited for a general audience.
- Some recommendations:
 - Appeal to both hearts and minds: find the right balance between compelling data/evidence and emotionally engaging human interest stories.
 - Show people what the SDGs mean for them personally and for their communities. Show them how small personal actions can accumulate and make big differences.
 - Focus on the content of the goals, not the “bureaucracy” around them, and recognise that many SDG efforts are already going on without being labelled as SDGs.
 - Focus campaigns (and resources) on the national level, finding local champions and tailoring messages.
 - Celebrate SDG achievements and find positive narratives to help counter growing levels of pessimism among young people in many countries.
 - People can show you the way: listen to and consult with them from the outset.
 - Bring in expertise on media and marketing, but be careful: people are not just consumers, and glitzy advertising campaigns can backfire.
 - Adapt to the evolution of the media industry: media consumption and attitudes to the traditional media are evolving and development institutions are not adapting fast enough.
 - Reach young people and work with schools: they embody the future.

Next steps

In closing the event, Ms. Missika briefed participants about OECD DevCom’s efforts to bring together lessons and examples of effective SDG engagement. DevCom is creating a [peer learning hub for SDG communicators](#). Ms. Missika invited participants to join the DevCom community and share their resources and ideas.

For more information, please visit the [DevCom home page](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) or write to Dev.Com@oecd.org.

