



REPORT

Green Foundation Ireland

invites you to an evening online TALK
with **Bobby McCormack**,
co-founder and CEO of **Development Perspectives**

SDGs 2023 – Untapped Potential



Photo by: SASKO LAZAROV, Photocall, for *Coalition 2030*

Venue: by Zoom (details given after registration)

Thursday 20 April 2023 – 19:00 to 20:00

Admission to this event is **FREE** but you **MUST** register beforehand.
You can do so through **our Eventbrite page**.

SDGs 2023 – Untapped Potential

THEME

The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) cover the 5 Ps (People / Planet / Prosperity / Peace / Partnership) – however a different P lens could be applied (Potential / Progress / Procrastination / Postponement / Possibilities).

This exploration looked at how far we have come and raised some critical questions that will allow people to reflect on the Agenda 2030 framework and see if it is still relevant to their work and lives.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKER

Bobby McCormack



Bobby is the co-founder and CEO of [Development Perspectives](#). He worked as a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Humanities at Dundalk Institute of Technology from 2006-2019, has an MA in Development Studies and is a qualified mediator.

He is a board member of Dóchas and in 2017 was the recipient of the Dóchas "Global Citizen of the Year". Bobby has produced 5 documentaries, is an avid Manchester United fan and loves dogs.

ABOUT OUR FACILITATOR

Claire Downey

Claire, who is a Director of Green Foundation Ireland, is Policy and Research Director at the [Rediscovery Centre](#), in Ballymun, Dublin.

Prior to this, she was the National Network Co-Ordinator with Community Reuse Network Ireland (CRNI), an all-Ireland umbrella body funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that represents community based organisations involved in reuse and recycling.



ABOUT OUR TALK

Claire Downey welcomed everyone to our event and introduced **Bobby McCormack**, who began his talk by affirming from the start that he was not here to sell SDGs and remains very aware that they are not perfect by any means. Yet any review of them can be both critical and supportive of their overall aims at the same time.

SDGs are now over half-way through their proposed time period, hence Bobby considers it a good time to take stock. Nobody would disagree with the vision of the SDGs as encouraging us to live up to a more equitable, just, sustainable world, while tackling poverty, inequality and climate change through transformative education and active global citizenship.

Looking through all 17 of the goals – which began as 'millennial development goals' and changed over time – most agree that some major issues are not being tackled, especially those that call out tensions between the global North and South. Ireland (headed up by David Donoghue) and Kenya co-chaired the Sustainable Development Goals back in 2014 and it is important to note there is no hierarchy of importance or specific rationale for their numbering from 1-17, many of which are clearly interconnected. Bobby also referred to how many countries actually benefit from the promotion of 'conflict', which is not explicitly called out in the goals. Furthermore, Human Rights are not really mentioned in the goals which is also unfortunate.



Still the goals remain highly important in themselves and most of them remain hard to argue against. A major problem, of course, is that none of the goals are binding and some countries find ways of interpreting the goals to suit their own national interests. Categorising the goals into groups as building blocks, beginning at the base with environmental or biosphere – from which nothing will work or survive, if we don't have a liveable planet – to more societal/political goals and finally at the top to the so-called economy can be useful. Underpinning the goals are some very detailed rationale and analysis, which is worth examining – see [Agenda 2030](#). Bobby regards these founding documents as transformative and help unpack the apparent 'simplistic' nature of the goals themselves.

Overall however, Bobby remains critical of Ireland, which he believes has used the pandemic or more recently homelessness for instance to creatively avoid addressing the big SDG problems. He suggested that so many opportunities for transformative change have been missed. To put some comparative measure on this, he uses the [Voluntary National Review](#) and the [Social Justice Ireland Report](#), which shows Ireland is ranked 8 out of 14 across EU countries regarding Sustainable Development Goals. While we may be going up the ladders slowly, overall performance across the 14 countries is getting worse. Ireland's strengths apparently are in Goal 4 (Quality Education) – yet we were informed of lots of on the ground evidence of poor understanding of the goals in Ireland – as well as with regards to Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and, most surprisingly, Ireland appears to rank high with regards to Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). We are not so good in taking into account jobs and the economy, and are particularly poor regarding future proofing innovation and infrastructure. For example, energy/water and other infrastructure projects are not being well handled.

Reporting on SDGs also remains somewhat weak. While linking SDGs to our individual actions, Bobby is impressed, for example, with Fingal County Council's PPN, which makes a genuine effort to address the challenges in practical ways. Many County Councils are moving in this direction to benchmark their policies and future strategies. While there is always a danger of 'SDG-washing', at least solid attempts are being made.

So it is always important to acknowledge that there is good work being done which in turn can energise us to do more. We need strong citizens and knowledge to hold politicians and other stakeholders to account. PPNs try to be inclusive, for instance regarding migration, disability, health and other issues, and value the humanity in all of us. The SDGs can greatly assist in this process and discussion taking into account lots of questions and interventions afterwards helped to suggest ways of addressing this.

Bobby clearly demonstrated that the SDGs have much to commend them in spite of some caveats. Note, among various other sites there are several information packs and tools on usage of SDGs which can be found at <https://developmentperspectives.ie/>

There is obviously much interest in this topic – as was shown by the thought-provoking and informative Q&A session, as well as the comments throughout. It was mentioned that one of Ireland's key strengths is in the area of Quality Education (Goal 4) – yet there is still very low level of awareness around SDGs here (in fact in a recent vox pop showed that SDGs were often confused with SDTs!). How do we change this? It was also felt that Ireland has missed a trick in being very good around food security – how can we change the narrative regarding more sustainable food issues?

There is much work needed to change hearts and minds – however, on the positive side, Bobby was very impressed by younger people who are more active regarding Climate Change issues and are fed up with such poor progress in this area.

You can [access our video of the talk here](#)