

Overview

Cork Environmental Forum is a good practice model of an organisation which adheres to the local features of UNCED Agenda 21.¹ and offers an opportunity for replication throughout Ireland. Since its inception in 1995, supported by both local authorities in Cork and the Department of the Environment, it has successfully had a key role in:

- Providing a forum to engage in **debate on current environmental issues** and seek agreement on ways of resolving them.
- Stimulating and sustaining the level of **active environmental awareness**, concern, care and activity among people in Cork.
- Participating in relevant **networks** which assist in fostering, promoting and implementing sustainable development.

Structure – when CEF was founded it was to create a forum in the Roman sense of the word where there was an inclusive representation and where all viewpoints on the topical environmental issues of the day could be expressed and debated openly. Representation reflects society and is drawn from **4 pillars** - Business & Commercial, Public Sector, Community & Voluntary and Individuals.

Rotation – **the maximum time on the Management Committee is 6 years, with the maximum as an Officer 3 years.** This democratic and equitable structure allows for new people to lead and direct the organisation and bring new ideas, energy and commitment to promoting, fostering and implementing sustainable development in the Cork Region.

Strength – there is diverse representation but CEF is not aligned in any one sector this facilitates engagement with activities and projects by a wide cross section of society.

Range of stakeholder engagement:

- **Direct actions** e.g. tree planting, Rebel Pedal .
- **Seminars** (plenary sessions) - bringing together experts on a particular subject which allows the conversations/ discussions about critical issues to happen and to reach shared viewpoints and resolutions as well on occasion to inform CEFs position papers.

¹ **Local Agenda 21** (an agenda for the 21st Century) was an important agreement reached at the United Nations Global Conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This milestone agreement acknowledged that environmental care is most effective at a local level and that individuals and communities must be supported in caring for the environment. It recognised that all sectors share responsibility for the environment and opportunities must be developed for them to work in co-operation and agreement and that this can be achieved by partnership of all stake holders, sharing ideas, information and resources, consultation and joint action. The principles of Local Agenda 21 are recognised by the Irish Government in environmental policy making.

Local Action 21 has evolved from Local Agenda 21. It was agreed and signed up to the Johannesburg World Summit in 2002, where over 500 representatives of Local Authorities from all over the World formally adopted this programme for implementation of sustainable development.

- **Partnerships:** The majority of our work is carried out in partnership with a wide range of key local stakeholders and this is something we see as an essential model to deliver our programme and to realise our aims and objectives. We bring together networks of people and organisations from different backgrounds and sectors in the course of our work, and use those established networks to promote the work and events that we undertake. Almost all our activities and projects are delivered in conjunction with partners that range from Cork City and County Council, Coillte, Cork Chamber of Commerce, Tidy Town projects, Engineers Ireland, the Irish Wildlife Trust, Cork Sports Partnership, HSE Health Zone Project, the Lifetime Lab, Irish Natural Forestry Foundation, Lifelong Learning Festival, the ESB, Transition Town groups and many other local community groups.
- **Global Action Plan Training** – the current programme supports individuals at a household level to live in a more sustainable way by changing attitudes and behaviour.
- **Childrens Thematic Workshops** : creative art and craft workshops, mostly re-using materials help to highlight aspects of environmental care with children e.g. Biodiversity Day, Christmas Decorations.
- **Networks** e.g. Our members frequently take positions on other local committees or in other organisations with complementary aims and that result in mutual benefit e.g. Strategic Policy Committees, City and County Development Boards, Coillte panels, EcCoWell, Cork Food Policy Council, Transport and Mobility Forum.
- **Influencing policy** e.g. submissions to Development Plans, responding to consultation calls on National Policy. CEF has also developed 15 position papers as follows:
 - PP1 – Sustainability Principles (2001)
 - PP2 Integrated & Sustainable Landscape Management (revised 2005)
 - PP3 Planning & Development (2001)
 - PP4 County Sustainable Housing policy (2001)
 - PP5 Transportation Priorities (review process commenced)
 - PP6 Priorities for waste Management in Cork (revised 2005)
 - PP7 County Sustainable Energy Policy
 - PP8 Mineral Extraction Policy Priorities (2001)
 - PP9 Nature Conservation Priorities (2001)
 - PP10 River Catchment Management (2001)
 - PP11 Forestry Priorities (2001)
 - PP12 Woodland Conservation (2001)
 - PP13 Hedgerow Conservation (2001)
 - PP14 Sustainable Agriculture (2005)
 - PP15 Sustainable Economics & Business (2005)
- **Support for local groups/ projects/ Springboard for focused community action** – Participation is promoted by reaching out to all citizens, local responsibility is encouraged and support is offered to individuals, groups and communities who are seeking ways to act or develop projects that will lead to sustainable development in their own localities. Awareness and education about sustainable development and how communities can be part of the process are intrinsic elements of all CEF activities and projects. CEF emphasises the shared knowledge and self-learning, in particular, through our Global Action Plan Programme. Through engagement with the activities, projects and processes of CEF participants can then implement the process deeper within their local communities towards a more sustainable society.