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Community-led Behaviour Change – Interim Policy Note 1

Climate Challenge Fund: ingredients for success

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Changing our every-day habits – be that transport, heating or waste - is important to reduce carbon emissions, and a key motivation behind the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund (CCF)[1].

The CCF is based on supporting community-led organisations to run local projects to reduce carbon emissions. Since its launch in 2008 total funding has reached £101 million, with 1,097 grants across Scotland (as of May 2018).

A three-year research project is looking at how effective CCF projects are in catalysing low-carbon behaviour change. In short, we want to hone in on the particular features that make a project have an impact and support people to engage with climate change through changes to their behaviours. What is it that the CCF-funded projects change, at what scale and what are the mechanisms that enable change?

But this is not an easy ask! We cannot pinpoint behaviour change to a specific project action, or even a specific funding period. What we can do is provide some insights into the processes of change, and how local projects learn and mature to maximise their impact.

Our approach is to follow five case study projects, reflect their learning over time and the different pathways to change. A year in we have held 15 workshops - three with each of our five case-study CCF projects. We also have insight from individuals in the projects' wider communities, collected through interviews and surveys.

Here are some reflections on what we have heard so far.

1.1 Do CCF projects feel that they are changing behaviours?

They certainly feel that they are achieving change. Whether that change results in a significant carbon reduction depends on the nature of the behaviour. For people within the communities it is perceived as relatively 'easy' to reuse shopping bags and recycle glass and plastic, whereas being a vegetarian and commuting by bike is perceived as more 'difficult'.

What does this mean in terms of the success criteria for a CCF project aiming to get people to use their cars less, a behaviour that is highly dependent on infrastructure beyond the project's control? Is the project a success if it increases the community's awareness of the impact of petrol and diesel cars? Is it a success if it increases the support for active travel infrastructure?

These are some of the aspects of community engagement that the projects feel they do well:

[1] https://www.keepscotlandbeautiful.org/sustainability-climate-change/climate-challenge-fund/

- **Reaching into the community** with approaches made *by* local people *for* local people; they know a lot about the community, the groups in that community, who they are and what motivates them.
- **Raising awareness and developing new knowledge** in the community about environmental impact. Several projects used the process of gathering monitoring data (weighing, meter readings, surveys) as an opportunity to communicate their messages.
- **Changing social norms** by staff and volunteers themselves setting an example through their own behaviour – modelling low-carbon actions and making the actions visible.
- **Building new habits** by creating reminders in the local community, hosting events and offering support.

1.2 What influences success?

The CCF projects are very aware of the challenge of engaging with their communities about climate change, and have had both negative (e.g. losing people because of the way in which climate change was incorporated into an activity) and positive (e.g. facilitating engaged conversation during or getting new volunteers after an activity) experiences.

It is a key tension for the CCF projects that they are motivated by climate change and cutting carbon emissions, but climate change and carbon may not feature prominently in their conversations with the community.

Being able to reflect on these experiences is an important part of our research project, and something that has been welcomed by all the participants in the workshops.

These are some of the project characteristics identified as supporting behaviour change:

Confident volunteers – Volunteer training is a key issue in building confidence and setting the individual project actions into a bigger picture: Well trained volunteers can better spot opportunities to widen a conversation or explain the reasons for individual project actions, e.g. weighing clothes in a swap shop. Volunteers with less training may be more likely to 'just go through the motions' of their individual activity. Several projects mentioned the **Carbon Literacy for Communities** training as useful.

Time – Behaviour change doesn't happen overnight. Time to embed new behaviours is important in itself but time is also important to achieving the other building blocks for success.

Access to space – Having a physical space provides a base from which to do the project activity and be visible in the community. It can also be important as a place for volunteers to gather, and a base from which to offer tools or equipment that can be supportive of creating new habits and adopting low-carbon behaviours, for example a shed for locating power tools for a 'tool share scheme'.

Partnerships – Sharing space with other community groups increases reach and links to what is already going on in the community. Partnerships can spur new projects from shared interests. Some projects work with schools or attend other organisations' events.

Ability to shift and change over time – Successful projects seem to have 'an ear to the ground' – they know what the local agenda is and react to it. Their impact on behaviours does not start and end with specific funding periods, and some initiatives sow seeds for change not realised until years later.

Our sense is that small groups can leverage CCF support to create big change within their community, but how to measure that impact and support them to achieve it may change over the lifetime of a project. As we continue to make sense of the information collected through our workshops and analyse additional interviews with community members and stakeholders as well as community surveys, we hope to distil further lessons that can be used to foster community engagement with climate change and other issues.

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