

SDG Accord Case Study



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



Mary Robinson addresses participants in the Youth Leaders for Sustainability workshop hosted by University of Galway staff and students in the Mary Robinson Centre and involving 40 secondary school students from Co. Mayo.

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Integration of SDGs in

- Institutional governance/strategic level
- SDGs in research
- SDGs in campus operations
- SDGs in curriculum development
- SDGs in student engagement activities
- SDGs into community activities
- SDGs at a whole-institution level

Focus on

- Goal 1 - No poverty
- Goal 2 - Zero hunger
- Goal 3 - Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4 - Quality education
- Goal 5 - Gender equality
- Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation
- Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10 - Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13 - Climate action
- Goal 14 - Life below water
- Goal 15 - Life on land
- Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

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Summary:

Through a strategic partnership between University of Galway and the Mary Robinson Centre in Ballina, we are promoting scholarship and engaging local community groups and international researchers in the key themes of Mary Robinson's life and career: climate justice, human rights, gender equality and youth leadership.

Mary Robinson is the former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and current Chair of the Elders. She has advocated for sustainable development on a global stage for over thirty years. In partnership with the Mary Robinson Centre (Ireland's first Presidential Library), University of Galway is preserving, interpreting and encouraging engagement with Dr Robinson's extensive archive.

Beyond the archive, we are animating the key themes of her work through a programme of events during the year. In February 2023, we co-hosted a Youth Leaders for Sustainability workshop with 40 secondary school pupils from Co. Mayo, which inspired them to identify actions to progress an SDG in their community. Participants were invited to report back on their impacts at our inaugural Mary Robinson Climate Conference in July 2023, which will include international researchers at the intersection of climate and multiple disciplines, from data and environment, to culture and health.

Our strategic partnership is a powerful example of the impact we can have by working together in the spirit of SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals. As University of Galway President, Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh, remarks: "University of Galway has great affinity with the values of Mary Robinson that are espoused in the Mary Robinson Centre, particularly a lot of excellent work in the University around climate justice, climate change and human rights. A lot of work is very close to the work Mary Robinson did both as President and as an activist and advocate".

Chairperson of The Mary Robinson Centre Emer Gilvarry notes "Through her work, Mary Robinson has been a lifelong advocate of Meitheal and collaboration for good. Putting the SDGs into action reminds us of our global inter-dependence, and it is in this spirit that we recognise that our collaboration with the University of Galway amplifies our potential to achieve impact and results."

Outline the 3 key benefits of integrating this theme:

- 1.** *Scale:* Partnering with the Mary Robinson Centre enables the University to advance engagement with the SDGs on a bigger scale by pooling our resources and talent. The University provides access to archive resources and expertise, an active research community and an engaged student body, while the Mary Robinson Centre has access to facilities, world-class speakers, funding opportunities and community volunteers that can maximise the impact of our collaboration.
- 2.** *Reach:* Partnering with the Mary Robinson Centre broadens the University's reach in two key ways: at a local level, it enables us to connect with community groups and schools in Co. Mayo with whom we can programme events, share learnings and raise awareness about the urgency of the SDGs; and at a global level, the University can engage wider audiences in our SDG-aligned events and research, by leveraging the Centre's professional networks and the weight of Dr Robinson's legacy.
- 3.** *Multiple perspectives:* At our Youth Leaders for Sustainability event in February 2023, Mary Robinson articulated the need for diverse and inclusive responses to the challenges facing our planet:

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“Delivering on the SDGs can’t just be a whole-of-government approach, it has to be a whole-of-people approach, and especially young people”. By partnering with the Centre, the University can bring together multiple perspectives, connecting scholarship with activism, youth leadership and community engagement.

Outline the barriers or challenges encountered in integrating this theme and how you overcame these:

- 1.** *Geography:* Our main university campus is in Galway city, which is a two-hour drive from the Mary Robinson Centre in Ballina. This is a barrier to regular in-person collaboration between the Centre and our broader university community. We overcome this obstacle by hosting hybrid meetings of the Mary Robinson Centre board and the University’s Mary Robinson Archive interest group, and through regular phone calls between key contacts in Mayo and Ballina. In some ways, the geographical barrier can be considered an advantage. Because the University is at such a physical remove from communities in Ballina and its hinterland, it adds value to our strategic partnership with the Mary Robinson Centre in terms of the potential reach of joint activities.
- 2.** *Perception of archives:* There is a perception that archives are stuffy and that they are only of interest to researchers in specific fields. The Mary Robinson archive is full of engaging and accessible items – from photographs with well-known world figures, to speeches and signed agreements, and even pictures submitted by school children over the years. We are at an early stage of cataloguing the archive. However, our university archivist is already very active in overcoming this barrier by engaging through blogs, books, social media and TV about some of the gems held within the archive, and linking them with the SDGs, and contemporary issues and events.
- 3.** *Resourcing:* It can be challenging securing funding to programme conferences and other events of scale. This will remain an ongoing challenge, but by maintaining contact about potential funding opportunities and by collaborating on joint applications, we aim to maximise the impact of the partnership over time.

Please outline your conclusions and recommendations to others (Max 200 words):

University of Galway’s strategic partnership with the Mary Robinson Centre is delivering real impact and benefits for both partners. We understand the value of collaboration because of (a) our shared values, (b) the focus we can both bring to the SDGs, and (c) the different communities we serve and networks we can leverage. Our recommendations for other universities seeking to build SDG-focused partnerships with other organisations are:

- *Know your values:* When developing a strategic partnership for the SDGs, articulate the values that your organisations share. With the Mary Robinson Centre this was easier because the values of the Centre’s work mirror the key themes of Mary Robinson’s life and work: climate justice, human rights, gender equality and youth leadership. These, in turn, align with the

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University's values of respect, openness and sustainability, as well as specific disciplines and areas of research strength.

- *Know your strengths:* When developing a strategic partnership for the SDGs, be clear about what strengths each partner brings. This will help build a focused programme of engagement with real impact. In our case, we knew that the University could deliver expertise in archives, SDG-aligned research and a community of over 20,000 socially engaged students. The Mary Robinson Centre delivers facilities in Ballina, world-class speakers, funding opportunities and community volunteers. When we collaborate on events, we draw upon as many of these strengths as possible to maximise our shared impact.
- *Keep it human!* Strategic partnerships are written on paper, but success depends upon the people in the partner organisations and the interpersonal relationships that they build over time. It takes time to develop understanding and trust. It is important to remain open to new ideas and to be prepared for failure. It is through innovation over time – in an inclusive culture based on positive intent – that we can deliver the greatest impact for the SDGs together.