

# Towards a Better Understanding of How We Engage With the Sustainable Development Goals Across the Whole of Our Life

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## Introduction

The wicked problem of our future survival is framed by the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1) which offers 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The political, educational and social challenge is to encourage, educate, guide and nurture at a global scale, a multitude of educational systems, cultures and societies to practically embrace the co-created vision of lifelong learning for all within a context where learning through and across life contributes positively to the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

**Figure 1** UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

**17 SDGs:** (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reducing Inequality, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life On Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, (17) Partnerships for the Goals.



## Personal SDG statements

The first stage of the inquiry was to familiarise ourselves with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Figure 2 shows the 17 SDGs and the derivative Good Life Goals (GLGs). By mapping our interpretations and involvement with the SDGs on to the framework we can begin to see the ways in which we are already engaging with the SDGs in our everyday lives. We did not expect participants to be engaging directly with all the goals or even a majority of them. Rather, we anticipated that they would be engaging with some of the goals and some more than others.

### TASK 1 WEEK 1

Using the Personal SDG Framework (Figure 2) participants were invited to reflect on their life, habits and behaviours and what the SDGs meant to them in the different situations, circumstances and contexts that formed their life. They were asked to select and highlight the SDGs that were important to them and write a short explanation of their past, current and possible future involvement. They were also encouraged to share their map and explanation in the LinkedIn discussion space, and to comment on each other’s posts.

1 UN Sustainable Development Goals	2 Good Life Goals	3 Past, Current & Near Future Opportunities for Learning & Actions
(1) No Poverty	1 Help End Poverty	
(2) Zero Hunger	2. Eat Better	
(3) Good Health and Well-being	3. Stay Well	
(4) Quality Education	4. Learn and Teach	
(5) Gender Equality	5. Treat Everyone Equal	
(6) Clean Water and Sanitation	6. Save Water	
(7) Affordable and Clean Energy	7. Use Clean Energy	
(8) Decent Work and Economic Growth	8. Do Good Work	
(9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	9. Make Smart Choices	
(10) Reducing Inequality	10. Be Fair	
(11) Sustainable Cities and Communities	11. Love Where You Live	
(12) Responsible Consumption and Production	12. Live Better	
(13) Climate Action	13. Act on Climate	
(14) Life Below Water	14. Clean the Seas	
(15) Life On Land	15. Love Nature	
(16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	16. Make Peace	
(17) Partnerships for the Goals	17. Come Together – get involved	

**Figure 2** Framework for Personalising and Implementing UN’s 17 Sustainable Development & Good Life Goals

## Analysing personal SDG statements

SDGs were clustered into 6 groups each containing SDGs that seemed to be related (Figure 3).

Responses to each SDG were compiled using a template before producing a synthesis statement which is reproduced in this article.

**Figure 3** SDG clusters

SDG gp	Sustainable Development Goals
A	(1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger
B	(3) Good Health and Well-being (12) Responsible Consumption (6) Clean Water and Sanitation (7) Affordable and Clean Energy
C	(4) Quality Education (5) Gender Equality (10) Reducing Inequality (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
D	(8) Decent Work & Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Production
E	13) Climate Action (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life On Land
F	(17) Partnerships for [Sustainable Development] Goals

The analysis recognised that engagements with an SDG could be at three different levels:

- 1 (micro) what you do in your personal/work life that impacts only on you and those immediately around you;
- 2 (meso) what you do in your personal/work life that impacts on your neighbourhood or your local environment;
- 3 (macro) what you do in your personal/work life that impacts regionally, nationally or internationally.

## SDG GROUP A, PERSONAL/LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Group A contains the related goals of SDG #1 No poverty and SDG #2 Zero hunger.

### SDG #1 No Poverty / GLG Help end poverty

13/21 participants provided examples of how they had engaged with SDG#1. The scale of poverty in the world is overwhelming, intimidating and humbling. One honest respondent commented, *I cannot think of anything I have done or currently do in order to help end poverty. There were occasions where I have given beggars some coins, I wouldn't consider this as help to end poverty though. I think it is very difficult to help end poverty as a private person with low or average income.*

Strategies for addressing poverty at the micro level (things that affect only us or family) include buying fair trade goods when we shop or buying goods made locally when we travel abroad. Some of us give to and buy from charity shops knowing that these agents are helping others who may well be less fortunate than we are. The idea of educating oneself and also our children so that we and they are aware of inequalities and understand the value is expressed: *I teach my kids simple financial literacy and guide their regard of the material and immaterial in terms of value (i.e. intrinsic vs extrinsic) and not price/cost.*

There are always people on our doorstep less well-off than we are. So quite a lot of activity is focused at the meso level (things we do that impact on your neighbourhood or your local environment). Several participants donate to or support local groups, or have raised money for charities in the past: *I try to share/donate to local groups that work with people in vulnerable situations whenever I can.* Several others work directly with poor people through the schools that they work in: *I educate socially deprived communities to enable social mobility.*

At the macro level (things we do that impact regionally, nationally or internationally), several participants donate to charities and NGOs that are working to relieve poverty: *I make small but regular donations to 'Practical Action' (NGO working for a better world for all) and I contribute to various charities that are helping in countries impacted by conflict, Covid-19, drought and famine. I make regular donations to WaterAid and British Red Cross.*

One respondent highlighted the fact that one of the ways we can influence at a national level is to vote for a Government whose policies attend to the less well-off members of society: *I exercise my civic duty and vote for a government that takes this issue seriously – especially when it comes to our Pacific neighbours.*

One participant had engaged in voluntary work in less developed countries: *I've contributed voluntary work in Malawi and South Africa – experiencing quite different forms of poverty there.*

## **SDG #2 Zero Hunger / GLG Eating better**

18/21 participants provided examples of how they had engaged with SDG#2 and there is much overlap with participants' responses to SDG#1 No Poverty and Responsible Consumption, part of SDG#3.

At the micro level, the focus is on becoming more conscious of healthy eating habits, responsible consumption – buying less and trying not to waste food, and teaching our children or, if we are a teacher – teaching our students the value of a healthy diet. Some typical comments are: *I am more keenly aware of buying locally sourced foods and seasonal foods. I think about where the carbon footprint of the foods that we have become used to (wherever we are in the world).*

*I need to be more conscious of what I am buying and eating and try not to waste food.*

*[I] buy seasonal and local produce (that hasn't accumulated hundreds of air miles) as far as possible. I put all food waste into a garden composter.*

Some participants describe changes they have made: *As an experiment, in 2016 we attempted to eat only UK produce. It was eye-opening and there were unexpected trade-offs to be made! One adds, Last year I consulted a nutritionist to get some guidance on how to eat better and help my migraine situation which was getting worse. This helped me a lot and made myself much more conscious regarding my diet and my health.*

Vegetarian and vegan diets are mentioned: *I am a vegetarian and always ensure when asked why to answer in terms of health and scientific research findings.*

*I eat mostly plant based, buy more organic food (if I can afford it) and try to eat diverse. I care much more about what I eat than I did before and try to eat healthy. With the time I get more knowledge about healthy food and try to implement this often in my routine.*

As parents we have a role to play in teaching our children the value of food and of healthy eating e.g. *[I] teach my kids about good nutrition and not to waste food.*

Some participants grow some of their own food: *We have a salad patch & chickens and ducks but we want to grow more of our own food.*

One participant noted the connection to food security concerns for which had motivated her research: *I think this SDG also relates to food security, not just eating better. Being from the Caribbean I am aware of how susceptible regions like small island developing states can be. Food security is linked there to food importation due to inability to produce food at a scale which is sustainable. This was one of the motivations for my doctorate.*

At the meso level, where what we do influences our immediate neighbourhood, community or environment, a number of participants are supporting local foodbanks for people who struggle to buy the food they need with their income: *I make regular food contributions to my local foodbank TESCO Express (which provides food to the local community)*

*[I] donated to food bank via the supermarket collection Future: donate more regularly i.e. monthly to the foodbank at the supermarket*

Teachers highlight the way in which their work as educators can involve their communities: *My school shares food and helps some communities that need help every year. Those communities help immigrants, vulnerable mothers and young people.*

*[1] educate socially deprived communities to enable social mobility*

*Campaigning at school to be careful about not wasting food. Promote knowledge about the different types of food, those that have many sugars and those that are more natural and healthy for our body.*

*One participant had worked with a community to grow food for the town: I've worked with permaculture principles, supported the founding of an 'incredible edible' town and recognise the need for diverse, local growing networks. We hope to buy and steward some land soon and have more options for growing.*

*At the macro level one person highlighted the importance of exercising their democratic right to vote for a Government that had policies that were sympathetic to this issue: I exercise my civic duty and vote for a government that takes this issue seriously – especially when it comes to our Pacific neighbours.*

## **SDG GROUP B, SOCIAL/ECONOMIC**

Group B comprises 4 distinct, but interrelated, SDGs: #3 Good Health and Wellbeing, #6 Clean Water and Sanitation, #7 Affordable and Clean Energy and #12 Responsible Consumption (responsible production is dealt with in Group D). Action towards the SDGs which comprise this group are, by definition, focused on the micro level. There is common practice around the globe on the forms of activity respondents are engaged in, and heightened awareness of environmental issues is also evident. There is a recurrent sense of failure to do enough, sometimes due to inaction but also for practical reasons, where environmental choices are financially or practically impossible. A small number of respondents are taking steps to extend their action to the local community or workplace.

Overall, attitudes are positive and personal actions promise collective impact.

### **SDG #3 Good Health and Wellbeing / GLG Stay healthy**

18/21 personal statements comment on SDG #3, with some linking it to others, e.g. SDG #1 (No poverty) and #2 (Zero Hunger). Action to address health is predominantly micro and focuses on keeping physically healthy through regular practice of yoga, walking, gardening and various other activities, and being mindful and attending to mental health and a healthy diet, with positive efforts to reduce the consumption of meat and dairy food. This is summarised by one person as SANE: *4 components of everyday lifestyle: Sleep, Attitude, Nutrition, Exercise.*

There is, nevertheless, a widespread sense of having to force such action, and reference to guilt: *As I read more about the SDGs I felt a sense of guilt or failure: I fail regularly; I know I can do better.* One person does record success in achieving change: *I have happily changed the way I live as an individual over the last two years.*

It is not only personal health that features in these responses: there is a deep concern with that of loved ones of all generations, and one person observes that *the government's inadequacy made me think more about the importance of community.*

This moves towards the meso level, where some respondents are also active. For instance, they are promoting healthy eating at school and working in charitable enterprises to improve personal wellbeing: *I have been working with one of my students on a project about food poverty and malnutrition in the UK. Food poverty and malnutrition is generally not thought about much in relation to countries like the UK, EU and US, but it applies to all parts of the world.*

One respondent is heavily engaged in trying to reduce substance abuse in their country because *In the Czech Republic, alcohol is very cheap, it is easy to see 'fallen-drunken' bodies in parts of the major cities.*

## **SDG #6 Clean Water and Sanitation / GLG Save water**

Again, 18/21 personal statements included comment on this SDG, and these are mostly actions at the micro level. There are positive attempts to save water e.g. by recycling, collecting rain, or limiting the amount used for a shower. For instance, one person explains: *I have a good habit: I always have my sand clock when I take a shower, it runs just 4 minutes, so as soon as it ends, I finish my shower. I also collect the water that falls while the tub heats up to reuse it.*

Some respondents have learnt from an early age to value this resource since they live in parts of the world where water is scarce: *This is an important one for me. Australia is essentially a desert and water is scarce. Yet on average, we use far too much water per household. I have learned to hate the sound of people cleaning their teeth (with tap running) and try to find ways for more thoughtful use of water at home. I am looking forward to experimenting more.*

Many, though, express guilt: *Could do better; Guilty of not saving enough water; We need to work harder in this ODS*, and chastise themselves for indulging in showers or bubble baths: *Guilty of not saving enough water as we let the kids indulge in a bubble bath once a week.*

Straddling the micro and meso levels is the reference to donation to bodies such as WaterAid and Oxfam: *WaterAid is an essential source of help for those in need. It is a scandal that so many suffer from lack of clean drinking water, so I regularly donate. I grew up in a city where water couldn't be taken for granted and am in the habit of conserving it as a precious resource. I never use the bathtub. Quick showers and efficient use all round.* There are links made here to SDGs #9, #11 and #12.

Other actions include changing school practice through use of water bottles and engagement in research for policy-making: *One of the most important activities in our classroom is the water bottle. They fill their water bottles and don't leave the water faucet running. They have also given up the habit of drinking water by hands. If the water is not drinkable, they pour water into a container. Then we use it for washing and other things that do not require drinking water.*

## **SDG #7 Affordable and Clean Energy / GLG Use clean energy**

16/21 personal statements have comments on SDG #7, predominantly on the micro scale. Actions range from turning off lights, seeking alternative sources and suppliers of power, replacing petrol cars to being more aware of consumption e.g. *Be more conscious about the ways we are consuming energy and try to reduce demand Turn off lights left on and electrical plugs at wall (a battleground with my family); look into feasibility of alternative energy supply - perhaps solar panels*

There are personal, financial and institutional obstacles to achieving aspirations, as expressed in remarks such as *Guilty of not using clean energy as we are unable to install solar panels (...) in Singapore; The costs are pretty high for clean energy and my income is not; Conflict – I am miserable if cold, so keep temperatures up and I find the technical details of Energy hard to handle.*

A few actions are occurring at the meso level, such as using solar energy at school and encouraging car-pooling for staff. The Czech Republic is quoted as an example of nuclear power: *In the Czech Republic, nuclear power is a significant producer of electricity. This causes me some long-term concern but back in the 1960s we were told that thanks to nuclear energy we would be paying very, very little for electricity. Solar power is also possible here and wind rotor fields are emerging.*

Meanwhile Iceland illustrates how geothermal energy can be harnessed: *I visited Iceland in 2019 and was amazed at how they use their geothermal energy and the respect for the environment.*

One person has conducted some scoping work which has progressed to formal research.

## **SDG #12 Responsible Consumption / GLG Live better**

Of the 21 personal statements, 17 refer to SDG #12, which is also explicitly linked to others, including those in Group A. Micro actions are shared by most: renewing and recycling, purchasing clothing judiciously, avoiding waste of food by buying only what is necessary, avoiding packaged goods and making informed choices. Typically, *Currently I recycle just about everything (am perhaps a bit of too proud to say I've been doing this for 40 years). I want to take stock of what I have and need. I want to experiment here by playing closer attention to, and learning about, my purchasing habits with a view to make more considered choices, and Encourage and buy slow fashion products, give clothes another chance, make garage sales, use less plastic, and know the way of production used by the companies that make the things we buy.*

One person is growing their own herbs: *Planted some herbs and spices this summer. Will make a concerted effort with those around me to uphold the goals that I have set and become part of a more sustainable society. Will continue to plant what I could for consumption and freezing for the winters. Curb unnecessary spending. Eat less – live better,* whilst another does not possess many gadgets: *I don't own many gadgets or tech tools, and don't upgrade my phone unless I have to (ie it doesn't work!). I cook only what I know will be eaten, and don't overstock to avoid spoilage and waste.*

Still, there persists a sense of inadequacy: *feel it's having little impact beyond our household; I would like to make better use of my practical abilities to make and repair more of my own items, and help others do the same.*

The limited amount of action at the meso level relates to school campaigns to raise awareness of buying options when choosing clothes, and to supporting local businesses e.g. *I try to support local businesses as much as I can. I've noticed that I have also reduced my consumption on clothing, trying to make better use of what I already have.*

Actions can be summarised as:

- Being conscious of our buying habits and buying less.
- Trying to buy local produce to support the local economy
- Buying things that have already been used and owned
- Avoiding products with large amounts of packaging
- Eating less and being less wasteful
- Reuse and recycling
- Being resourceful
- Giving something up
- Sharing and gifting things to others

## **SDG GROUP C, ENVIRONMENTAL/POLITICAL**

Group C comprises 4 distinct, but interrelated, SDGs: #4 Quality Education, #5 Gender Equality, #10 Reducing Inequality and #16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The overwhelming response to the SDGs in cluster C is one of respecting and supporting the objectives, but feeling that more could, and should, be done. There is some failure among participants to appreciate how much they, as individuals, are actually doing. This activity is largely personal and professional, with few having opportunities to take action at the macro level. Where this *is* happening, it tends to be voluntary work. This all suggests that there is much good will that could be harnessed, and that individuals need to be encouraged to appreciate the efforts they are already making to address these SDGs.

### **SDG #4 Quality Education / GLG Learn and teach**

Given the background of most participants, it is not surprising that 18/21 statements addressed this SDG. The majority of activities were at the meso level, consistent with professional roles, but a few were personal and family-oriented. The importance of being a role model for younger generations is apparent e.g. *As a parent, I try to role model the leadership traits I wish to impart to my children.*

A recurrent theme is the need to *work hard* to keep abreast of the SDGs: *working hard to keep up with COP26 and the areas in which I have some expertise and learning about the Emissions Reduction Framework for NZ.* Conversely, one participant observes: *This is the area in which I've made the greatest impact – in the past and now.* This is partly due to being employed in education, which links to the meso level.

At this professional level, there is a broad range of action, including teaching, being a school governor, university lecturer, head teacher and lifewide learner. For example, *I think one of the solutions to end poverty is education. I work directly with very low-income people and find that the cause of many of their financial poverty is a lack of skills and abilities. Through education programs, we could support them to develop skills and abilities. For example, they can be more efficient in managing their financial problems by helping them develop skills such as financial literacy.*

Several respondents say that this has been their life's work, the thing they are most proud of, and they give examples of the dimensions to which they are contributing, e.g. students' mental health, gender equality and social mobility: *this is integrated in to my professional life as a HE manager and teacher. There are values here that I will actively promote in my work with my team and with my students. Future: I have recently taught a taster session on mentoring and coaching for a more diverse audience than the normal 'education professionals.'* *One of my plans is to offer more such free two hour tasters on a number of themes as the people found it really valuable.*

A few respondents are able to extend their actions to the macro level by working outside their immediate environment with overseas agencies such as UNESCO and other universities: *member Pestalozzi programme of European Council, teaching re human rights.*

*(I) have been highlighting and talking about Education for Sustainable Development from a QAA perspective with colleagues and working with another colleague to develop UN Academic Impact activities focused on the SGDs across subject areas.*

This work appears to be voluntary.

## **SDG #5 Gender Equality / GLG Treat everyone equal**

Some responses acknowledge that SDG #5 is integrated with others e.g. SDG #10, Reducing Inequality, but all 21 statements include evidence of action here. As with education, most activities in this domain are at the meso level, though some recognise it as *part of my entire life*. Work includes encouraging women into traditionally male careers, e.g. engineering, management, finance: *(I work as a) researcher, teacher, mentor on leadership to ensure women's full participation*.

Funding is sought for some initiatives: *(I am) putting together a Lottery bid to create a self-assessment tool for gender equality working with Women in Urbanism. Linked to SDG4 keep up to speed with gender equality campaigns. Mentor and support young women profs were possible*.

The difference between cultural contexts presents unique challenges, but there is a clear determination to confront these: *I'm raising a generation that could act stronger than me*.

*At Marymount, the School I work at, we believe in women leadership and empowerment, we give them all the tools and opportunities for them to believe in themselves and be agents of transformation in their communities*.

At the personal level, some respondents again express difficulty in keeping abreast of change, using acceptable language and needing to do more. One respondent confesses *I try, and sometimes fail, to practise compassion towards all living things; to see God in all things. I hope I am failing forward daily*. Another is hesitant: *On a personal and professional level, I believe this is something I do. However, I know it is an area where I am continually learning through the stories of others*.

Some, though, are more positive, for example one person says, *I find it difficult not to engage in conversations with family and friends about gender equality (...) I find it hugely important to call out "micro-machismos"*.

There is some indication of working towards the macro level, extending what has been successful locally to broader fields, e.g. UN women in leadership. This is still described as being a *potential* area of action by one respondent, whilst another advises that we should *address individual person, not group*.

## **SDG #10 Reducing Inequality / GLG Be fair**

19/21 statements show action related to SDG #10, mostly clustered at the meso level. Respondents cross-reference their views and actions with SDGs #3 and #4.

Once again, there is a sense of being inadequate: *I try and sometimes fail; this is another area I'm interested to learn more about*. One person describes their action as *constant in a pathetically small range of impact*. Conversely, another respondent states, *I am fortunate to have learned what it is to grow up in a colourful society. I don't ever remember thinking about race or religion negatively*.

Professional (meso) activity includes teaching individuals according to their own needs, promoting fairness, conducting research and training staff to understand differences (cultural, intellectual and so on). Some examples are: *Continue to promote Te Whaihanga training to better equip professionals to work with Māori values*.

*Carnival is one of those events that reminds me of that history... the sad part is that new generations don't know this history well enough and carnival has become a street party... for me keeping traditional knowledge and traditions alive is important. Oral histories are important*.



One respondent has used their experience of being victimised to write about it, informing others, whilst another explains some of the forms of discrimination still extant in their part of the world: *We generate decent or formal jobs for the people who work for us in a context that doesn't do that, with good salaries, respecting schedules, with respectful treatment and wellbeing conditions. In Colombia 94% of the people in domestic jobs don't have legal conditions.*

Yet another person describes how they work with their team to ensure parity: *promote fairness in work and home, review agreements.*

There is a small, tentative, step towards the macro level, through working with the UN.

### **SDG #16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions / GLG Make peace**

The pattern of responses to SDG #16 is different: only 12/21 people included evidence here, and most comments were at the micro level. The repetition of the verb 'try' is striking, with efforts to establish personal, inner peace, interact positively with their family, show compassion and create environments conducive to peace and justice. Some typical responses are:

*On a personal level I try to be diplomatic, look after my family (as best I can through distance), and have tried to keep the peace in different ways. I think this SDG is linked to fairness and equality. It is another one I need to consider more closely for the future.*

*I think listening is a key part of this. I know that I have been looking again at Nancy Kline's Thinking Environment space and thinking (I'm afraid) that there are things I sometimes need to work on. I rush myself at times, I am rushed, I rush other people. (I also interrupt at times too). Future: to introduce thinking environment spaces within my teaching of education professionals.*

*My current tools are meditation and a course in nonviolent communication. In the future I also would like to help others have more compassion, when I help building communities.*

There is a repeated aspiration to keep abreast of issues in order to be more proactive e.g. *Inner peace is a strong foundation for outer peace. Work in progress...*

Professional actions include acting as role models and educating explicitly about ethical and political issues, advocacy, such as being a harassment advisor. Comments include: *I actively and mindfully try to give the best example I can to my students, nieces, nephews on how to communicate with empathy and respect. I also try to educate myself on these topics.*

*Lead with ethics, reflect about politics, with a critical point of view. support peace initiatives, where violence won't finish with more violence. We encourage our students and do ourselves to act correctly, with honesty and safeguarding the weaker ones.*

Professional work has led one respondent towards a macro level advising on policy, management and staff development in an overseas university: *working as advisor to UoC on policy and staff development.* As before, such work is voluntary and unpaid.

## SDG GROUP D, ECONOMIC/SOCIAL/POLITICAL

Group D is comprised of SDGs #8 Decent Work & Economic Growth, #9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities and #12 Responsible Production.

### SDG #08 Decent Work and Economic Growth / GLG Do good work

17/21 participants responded to this prompt. One participant tried to explore what this might mean at a personal level: *We need some interpretation here: what is 'good/ decent' work? I perceive it as work with a strong moral purpose that doesn't harm others or the environment and is beneficial in some way.*

Implicit in the prompt is the development proposition that economic growth is a good thing. Given that our obsession with economic growth in the last 50 years is what has brought us to the brink of planetary collapse there is an inherent tension that was expressed by one participant in these words: *Regarding economic growth, I don't believe we should or can have infinite economic growth based on our planet's finite resources. In the affluent world we think of luxuries as necessities. I am against mindless consumerism, waste and sending things to landfill as all this is harming our environment and causing climate change*

Some participants personalised this SDG in terms of the work they were doing or would like to do e.g. *occasional free taxi for elderly folk;*

*Provide opportunities for voluntary work*

*Do my best as co-worker and as leader to help my team and co-workers have the best place and ethos to thrive through meaningful jobs*

*I will over the coming years continue to try to find ways to work more in partnership with colleagues in schools and colleges, possibly on a voluntary basis*

One participant felt that there was a mismatch between the work they did and the aspiration for good work contained in the prompts: *This is a challenge for me as I'm not working completely in-line with my values. In the short-term, it' can be difficult to have this misalignment between my profession and my values. I'm very interested in our perceptions of and relationships with the working world – I think this can be transformed radically for social and environmental good: where work is positive and a pursuit of passion per se.*

Some participants interpreted this SDG to mean what they could do to support or provide for others: *Provide more opportunities for my grandchildren to learn the value of work.*

*Pledged to subcontract at above the living wage and provide opportunities for growth.*

*Promote healthy working relations through chairing meetings – modelling, sharing, mentoring the next generation of leaders*

*At Marymount [school] we are responsible and completely legal with our workers, giving them all the benefits we can, to make*

Educators highlighted their role in supporting the employability of young people: *indirectly contribute through educating young people, preparing them for their future working lives*

*I mentor and coach my students to achieve their academic and professional goals, in order that they can then go out and do good work themselves.*

*Being in teacher education and working a lot on courses that are focused on continuing professional development... I am supporting people who have an impact on students and on the sector in which they work.*

*Through my day job leading in employability I seek to impact on the lives of others, specifically students in Higher Education.*

*In role modelling this for students I talk about the carbon footprint of food and fashion choices.*

*I am currently involved in research concerned with opening up meaningful employment opportunities for young people with intellectual disabilities.*

These actions all related to the micro and meso levels. At the macro level, one participant highlighted their involvement politically: *Involvement in local and national campaigns that are fighting for the rights of casual workers.*

### **SDG #09 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure / GLG Make smart choices**

13/21 participants responded to #09. Most people identified with the Good Life Goal of making smart choices – smart being connected to their understanding of sustainability. One participant signalled we have to be careful in assuming that what seems smart may actually turn out to be not so smart and that we may not have the ability to make a smart choice if we cannot afford it: *Today's smart choices may be tomorrow's bad ones e.g. buying diesel cars. Financial constraints also dictate some 'choices.'*

On the whole, participants feel they know enough to be able to make informed and principled choice that takes into consideration the social and environmental consequences e.g. *Beginning to be more discerning in what we subscribe to and buy;*

*Make good buy choices (ecological respectful with the environment and with the people that make the products) and promote industries that do so. Check at least the food origins weekly to make sure we are vouching for good industries (may be more expensive but necessary)*

*I am in a share club so all the decisions we make as a group are made taking into account social and environmental and governance considerations*

*Make well calculated choices about products, the businesses that promote fair trade, and uphold high economic principles*

To make smart choices requires knowledge to make decisions and some participants are more cautious about the knowledge they have on which to base their decisions:

*I think about these things, but I don't think I engage more than that. I am learning more about circular economy and everyday can see that industries are making efforts to transform their supply chain, their products and innovation to reduce waste. Learning more about these things makes me more mindful for the choices I make.*

*[I] make ethical decisions about what I buy. I buy vegan products i.e. shoes but whether that is 'better' I am not sure. I look at the origin of products. I try to buy mostly from local greengrocers*

Educators also have a role to play in developing learners' awareness of the choices they can make: *We study innovation and participate with Medellin's industry, solving with the students the challenges they have, to create opportunities and bring the industry closer to education.*

*In developing student employability and career learning I encourage students to ask questions about the ethical values and actions of any sectors and employers they aspire to work in.*

At the political (macro) level one participant highlighted the role of brokers and agents who can influence policy, writing *Through Greenpeace I petition government and industry.*

### **SDG #11 Sustainable Cities / GLG Love where you live**

13/21 participants explicitly addressed SDG#11. It is understandable why the emphasis of this SDG is on cities where most people live but to be inclusive it could usefully offer a broader concept of where people live which could include towns, villages, neighbourhoods and communities. This was hinted at in some of the responses.

The essential things people do to contribute to this SDG is maintain their own property and garden and participate in recycling schemes as their rubbish is collected: *[I] take personal responsibility for how I treat the local environment and maintain my own property.*

Unsaid, but also true, is the idea that we contribute to the maintenance and improvement of our local environment and the services it provides through the local taxes we pay. In this respect, the votes we cast in local elections can be used to support politicians who support a sustainability agenda. One respondent observes: *We have a coming election, and I will review the candidates' written proposals and programmes.*

Several participants engaged in this SDG through their professional or voluntary work e.g. *In the run up to WUF11 in Poland in 2022, aim to collect examples of how researchers working in academia and outside are delivering on SDG11 in particular with their cities.*

*Continue to work with Waka Kotahi on their innovating streets programme as opportunities arise to promote cities4all (link with SDG13 and SDG5*

*[I am] part of the chamber of commerce for better community development.*

*I am embedded in the local community as a volunteer and supporter of causes such as St Albans Climate Action Network.*

*Teaching brings me into close contact with the families of our students, so strong community links.*

Teachers also contribute to the development of their students' knowledge about their city, town and region. One example is: *At School one of our projects is to get to know our city and country, with its history, social situations, natural resources and community, to promote awareness among students of our country and city reality, to take care of it and be part of the solution.*

This is clearly an aspect of the SDGs where many participants feel they could do more: *I need to get more involved in our local community; I want to try to get out more and know more about my environment; I don't think I do enough on this.*

### **SDG #12 Responsible production / GLG Live better**

16/21 participants explicitly addressed SDG#12, Responsible production (Responsible consumption is dealt with in Group B, above). Activities are overwhelmingly at the personal micro level. There is a sense of growing awareness of the importance of being more mindful of our habits of consumption in order, where possible, to reduce it: *I want to take stock of what I have and need. I want to experiment here by playing closer attention to, and learning about, my purchasing habits with a view to make more considered choices.*

Linked to this, with increasing knowledge of the way goods and services are produced, some participants are seeking out businesses that are trying to be more sustainable: *Make informed choices and actively engage with companies re sustainability, building on my learning from the sustainable fashion project in 2020.*

*I did not pay attention before to how products were produced. Now I do much more. I buy more natural and sustainable products, like natural cosmetics and sustainable packaging and when I have a bit more income I would like to buy mostly sustainable products. I am optimistic that there will be more choice in the future.*

Another aspect of responsible production is what we are able to produce ourselves through our own efforts and resources, as we noted in Group B: *Planted some herbs and spices this summer. Will continue to plant what I could for consumption and freezing for the winters.*

As in all the SDGs, education has an important role to play in societal change, hence: *We have campaigns at school to think twice when buying new clothes or thinking if we really need what we want to buy.*

*I am against mindless consumerism, waste and sending things to landfill as all this is harming our environment and causing climate change. And surveys show that happiness and general wellbeing (GWB) are not equated with GDP. When we humans have enough to sustain ourselves well, beyond that we might actually be unhappy and suffer from surplus. In role modelling this for students I talk about the carbon footprint of food and fashion choices.*

As one participant pointed out, we can also call for and demand that business pay more attention to the effects of its practices: *Through Greenpeace I petition government and industry.*

## **SDG GROUP E, SOCIAL/CULTURAL/POLITICAL**

This group contains the environmental SDGs #13 Climate Action, #14 Life Below Water and #15 Life On Land.

### **SDG #13 Climate Action / GLG Act on climate**

12/21 participants explicitly addressed SDG#13 implying that it is one of the more challenging goals to address at a personal level. Perhaps one participant captured what many thought: *My concern and engagement with environmental and climate change issues dates back a long way, however, perhaps I doubted that I could directly affect and contribute and switched my efforts towards more immediately accessible causes and goals through the organisations I was employed within.*

One person suggested that *if we are doing our part to look after the planet we are in some way contributing to climate action.* A similar thought was expressed by another participant: *[I] view this SD Goal as the culmination of all the actions across the other Goals.*

At the micro level, individuals offered a range of personal solutions – eat less meat and dairy, drive less, fly less, offset carbon footprints if needing to fly, planting more trees, increasing use of solar and alternative energy, undertaking a household carbon footprint assessment, cycling and walking more.

At the macro level, a small number of participants indicated their support for groups that championed the cause of the environment and climate change e.g. *Have been supporting FoE and Greenpeace since uni days.* One participant drew attention to the responsibility we have as a citizen: *One of the best this I can do here is exercise my civic duty and vote for a government that takes this issue seriously – especially when it comes to our Pacific neighbours. I still enjoy a good protest march too, and rally when I am passionate about change.* Another participant was working professionally with a Government agency that was developing new transportation systems that indirectly tackled climate change.

Overall, there is a sense that we can and should do more and that we needed to think more about how we might make a difference in this SDG domain.

### **SDG #14 Life Below Water / GLG Clean the seas**

14/21 participants explicitly addressed SDG #14 but there is a sense in the responses that this is also difficult to act upon. We suspect that all participants would agree with this participant: *Wholeheartedly support the aim but feel little I can do personally.* The sense of helplessness featured in several responses: *Aside from not buying fish and not supporting trawling etc., I feel quite helpless in addressing this goal at the personal level.* Another participant got to the heart of the challenge posed by the way the things we buy are packaged; *I find this hard as so many things seem to be wrapped up in so much packaging. I reduce where I can i.e. I don't buy plastic food bags, I use brown paper bags and food covers.*

At the micro level personal solutions included not eating/buying fish or other sea food, wherever possible buying fish that was sustainably harvested, helping to clear litter from the beach, and avoiding plastics.

At the macro level one respondent makes donations to organisations that care for the seas and another buys clothes from a company that promises to look after the seas.

### **SDG #15 Life On Land / GLG Love nature**

13/21 participants explicitly addressed SDG #15. There is a great sense of appreciation and valuing of nature expressed in terms of words like respect, wonder, joy and love as the following examples demonstrate:

*I did not appreciate nature when I was younger. Now I see so much more beauty in it and love being surrounded by it. I love hiking. Nature is for me even more beautiful when I see wildlife. I find it so fascinating and it just makes me feel happy, relaxed and appreciated for this life.*

*[I] travel around the world experiencing its natural wonders, to create respect, awareness and astonishment towards natural resources, landscapes, ecosystems and living things.*

*I love being outdoors and taking walks in natural landscapes.*

*I certainly love nature! I find it a hard Goal to contribute to at the individual level (beyond loving and experiencing nature as much as possible.*

There is also a thirst for more knowledge, for example, *I'm interested to learn more about the re-wilding and reforestation initiatives" and "I want to try to get out more and know more about my environment.*

Some participants invest time and energy in their gardens or the places they care for: *I have a little garden where I grow some herbs and microgreens. That is my oasis.*

*[We] cultivate our own food... Promote and create places filled with nature.*

*Respect and care for the land I am responsible for. Help nature thrive...dig more ponds and plant more trees.*

There is a sense that the way we interact with the natural world is an important element of our wellbeing: *I have really focused on my garden during these times as I wanted to make it a beautiful space in all weathers.*

Things that people do include walking and travelling through nature, digging ponds and planting trees, growing food, creating places filled with nature, building a retirement home, socialising – meeting people outside going for walks together.

## SDG GROUP F, SOCIAL/EDUCATIONAL/POLITICAL

### SDG #17 Partnerships for Sustainable Development Goals / GLG Come together, get involved

SDG #17 highlights the importance of partnerships and collaborations to deliver the SDGs: *Without partnership, it is impossible to achieve any other SDG*

14/21 participants explicitly addressed SDG#17 indicating that it is one of the more challenging goals but most of the participants did not acknowledge that their involvement in this inquiry – to develop our individual and collective understandings of what the SDGs mean in everyday life – was a form of collaboration for the SDGs. One participant shared a thought that probably many of us think:

*On some days, I believe that the only world worth saving is the one you go home to. On other days, I believe I can play a meaningful role in a circle of thought leadership to make a tangible difference to the world. Today is such a day and this is such a circle.*

At the micro level two participants indicated their readiness and willingness to get involved in partnerships for action but recognised that there were often impediments: *Yes, ready to do that, but...; I think you can be agentive but we are all reliant on wider systems and industries than ourselves.*

Another participant made the point that we can form influential partnerships within our own familial network: *I actively and mindfully try to give the best example I can to my students, nieces, nephews on how to communicate with empathy and respect. I also try to educate myself on these topics.*

At the meso level participants form partnerships that can directly or indirectly engage with the SDGs. For example, a teacher with her pupils helping vulnerable members of their communities: *My school shares food and helps some communities that need help every year. Those communities help immigrants, vulnerable mothers and young people*

One educator has designed opportunities for students to engage in project work that specifically engages with the SDGs:

*As an educator, I include a capstone project for students to use digital technologies and platforms to carry out a largescale international project with the SDGs framing the project's research: what are students in other countries learning and doing? What is being done in their country to create sustainable development business models and social enterprises?*

A number of participants are involved in projects, groups and networks that encourage the sharing of knowledge and practice that directly or indirectly engage with SDGs:

*[I] continue to build and support Lifewide Education & Creative Academic Communities, Facilitate the development of knowledge about how people engage with the SDGs.*

*[I] assist a colleague in project on loneliness and tracking what has been done in other cities in particular amongst LGBTQ+ groups.*

*[I] established 2 organisations and work as advisor to charitable bodies and to University of Colombo. I contribute to knowledge sharing for science, technology and innovation*

Some participants are keen to get involved in partnerships and are actively searching for communities they can join: *I am very interested in being in communities who want to make changes. I will look for several projects where I can be part of in order to support the UN sustainable goals. I will expand connections to build a bigger network.*

## Discussion

### Areas of action in support of SDGs/GLGs

An interesting discovery is that most of the participants in the inquiry were able to interpret and relate to many of the 17 areas covered by the SDGs/GLGs. However, most participants expressed some hesitancy to make claims in some areas of the SDGs. The reasons for this include limited knowledge about an area, competing values e.g. principles may have to be compromised through factors such as limited financial resources, and, often, a misplaced guilt that they are not doing as much as they feel they should be.

To illustrate the scale and extent of personal action, Table 1 collates the number of participants who report activity in respect of each of the 17 SDGs (each out of a total of 21 potential respondents). This enables us to identify at a glance the degree to which they feel able to address each goal.

**Table 2** Summary of actions by SDG for 21 SDG statements

1 UN Sustainable Development Goals	2 Good Life Goals	Actions n=21
(1) No Poverty	1 Help End Poverty	13
(2) Zero Hunger	2. Eat Better	18
(3) Good Health and Well-being	3. Stay Well	18
(4) Quality Education	4. Learn and Teach	18
(5) Gender Equality	5. Treat Everyone Equal	21
(6) Clean Water and Sanitation	6. Save Water	18
(7) Affordable and Clean Energy	7. Use Clean Energy	16
(8) Decent Work & Economic Growth	8. Do Good Work	17
(9) Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	9. Make Smart Choices	13
(10) Reducing Inequality	10. Be Fair	19
(11) Sustainable Cities and Communities	11. Love Where You Live	13
(12) Responsible Consumption & Production	12. Live Better	17/16
(13) Climate Action	13. Act on Climate	12
(14) Life Below Water	14. Clean the Seas	14
(15) Life On Land	15. Love Nature	13
(16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	16. Make Peace	12
(17) Partnerships for the Goals.	17. Come Together – get involved	14

The first observation is that treating people equally, irrespective of gender (SDG#5) or any other form of discrimination (SDG#10) is the goal that most people are actively involved in (scoring 21 and 19 respectively). This is significant as participants come from numerous countries, in each hemisphere, indicating that respect for others is widespread. One caveat must be noted, though: participants are all highly educated individuals, so not representative of societies as a whole. Nonetheless, it is clear that social interaction, whether at home or in the workplace, is an area over which they feel they have control and can take positive steps towards these SDGs.

When we consider the level of action in this respect, it is taking place at both micro and meso levels, with a small number of participants moving towards the macro level.

There is a large number of SDGs that score between 16 and 18, again suggesting that most people can make claims to be acting in ways that are consistent with their interpretation of the SDG. They focus on personal issues such as health and domestic consumption, but are also extended from the micro to the meso level through work and



charitable donation. They rely on making conscious, informed decisions, and these are areas where information appears to be assisting action by the individual.

In contrast, there are two SDGs which score 12 (#13, Climate action and #16, Peace and justice). These are followed closely by #9 (Industry), #11 (Sustainable cities), #15 (Life on land), #14 (Life below water) and #17 (Partnerships for the goals). We can infer from these scores that participants feel these objectives are remote to their immediate lives, belonging to the macro level, and that they, as individuals, are limited in the contribution they can make and the impact they can have. This is a misapprehension which can be challenged by reading the examples of micro and meso action that are provided in responses.

### Levels of action

The analysis grouped responses according to the level of individual actions: micro (personal), meso (work and local community or environment) or macro (wider community – national or international). Table 3 compares the levels of action for each of the SDGs. The turquoise shading indicates significant actions are cited; the yellow shading represents some action (though this is variable across SDGs), and the bland boxes are levels where no relevant action was shown. The colour coding confirms that most action is occurring at the micro level, is the level at which participants are most likely to be active.

**Table 2** Levels of action towards the SDGs

Legend  significant action  some action  no action

1 UN Sustainable Development Goals	2 Good Life Goals	Micro	Meso	Macro
(1) No Poverty	1 Help End Poverty			
(2) Zero Hunger	2. Eat Better			
(3) Good Health and Well-being	3. Stay Well			
(4) Quality Education	4. Learn and Teach			
(5) Gender Equality	5. Treat Everyone Equal			
(6) Clean Water and Sanitation	6. Save Water			
(7) Affordable and Clean Energy	7. Use Clean Energy			
(8) Decent Work & Economic Growth	8. Do Good Work			
(9) Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	9. Make Smart Choices			
(10) Reducing Inequality	10. Be Fair			
(11) Sustainable Cities and Communities	11. Love Where You Live			
(12) Responsible Consumption & Production	12. Live Better			
(13) Climate Action	13. Act on Climate			
(14) Life Below Water	14. Clean the Seas			
(15) Life On Land	15. Love Nature			
(16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	16. Make Peace			
(17) Partnerships for the Goals.	17. Come Together – get involved			

This analysis is unable to show the number of comments recorded in each cell, hence it is merely indicative of the emergent trends. This being the case, it does provide an immediate indicator of the areas where participants are inactive. These are predominantly at the macro level, but interestingly SDGs#14 and #15 have activity at the macro level but not at the interim, meso level. This may reflect a belief that action can be taken individually and beyond this, it requires the force of a wider, meso, structure.

When viewed from this perspective, SDG#1, Poverty, alone emerges as the area where participants feel they are taking action equally across all levels.

**Positive action**

The following are points of action which participants are taking, and which may serve as models for us. Some of the SDG(s) each addresses are shown in brackets.

- Use solar energy (7, 9, 11, 14, 15)
- Turn off lights (7, 12)
- Limit water usage (6, 7, 12)
- Buy less food (3, 12)
- Eat plant-based food (3, 12, 15)
- Avoid packaged goods (3, 12)
- Donate to foodbanks and charities (1, 2, 10)
- Buy locally (8, 9, 11, 12)
- Make informed choices of manufacturer (8, 10, 12)
- Buy fewer clothes (12)
- Re-cycle (12)
- Act as role model (5, 10, 16)
- Challenge prejudice (4, 5, 10)
- Environmental projects at school (4, 11, 16, 17)
- Working/volunteering in the community (11, 17)
- Educate for political awareness and participation (4, 16, 17)

**Sites for thinking and action in support of SDGs**

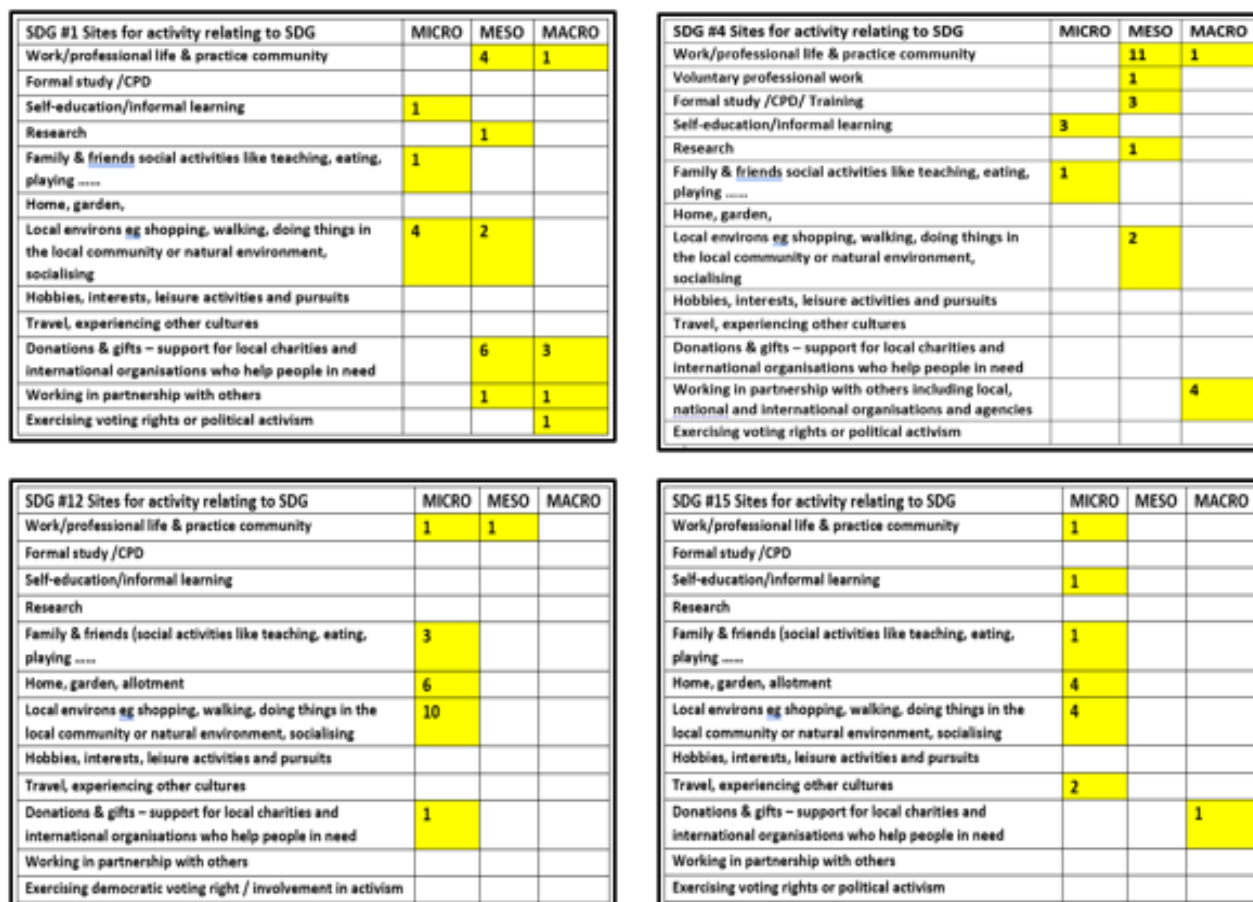
SDG affordances – opportunities for activities and actions that support a particular Sustainable Development Goal can be found in every aspect of life – it can be a lifewide enterprise. Table 3 identifies the common sites described in the SDG personal statements.

**Table 3 Potential sites for engaging with the SDGs in a person’s life – the lifewide dimension**

<b>Sites for SDG-related activity</b>	<b>MICRO</b>	<b>MESO</b>	<b>MACRO</b>
Work/professional life & practice community			
Voluntary work of a professional nature			
Formal study /CPD/ Training			
Self-education/informal learning			
Research			
Family & friends social activities like parenting, eating, playing .....			
Home & garden			
Local environs eg shopping, walking, doing things in the local community or natural environment, socialising			
Hobbies, interests, leisure activities and pursuits			
Travel - experiencing other cultures			
Donor support for local charities and international organisations (eg NGOs) who help people in need			
Working in partnership with others including local, national and international organisations and agencies			
Exercising democratic right to vote / political activism			

We tested whether the patterns of sites varied according to the SDG and Figure 4 summarises the most important sites for activity relating to SDG#1 No Poverty, #4 Quality education #12 Responsible consumption and #15 Life on Earth. Within this group of SDGs and the group of 21 participants the number of activity sites varied between 4 and 8.

**Figure 4** Different patterns in the sites for activity relating to 4 SDGs – SDG#1 No Poverty, #4 Quality education #12 Responsible consumption and #15 Life on Earth



### Concluding thoughts

The use of a simple tool to help people reflect on the ways in which they interpreted and acted upon the SDGs has been a useful exercise. We could extend the exploration further by inviting participants to select a single SDG and over time framework in Table 4 mapping how it was interpreted and acted upon across all the affordances in the individual's life.

### Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the 21 members of the lifewide learning research and development group who participated in the inquiry. This is a preliminary analysis of the synthesis of personal SDG statements prepared for the final meeting of the inquiry on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. We will undertake further analysis and we welcome comments and suggestions for improving it. Please email [jienny@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jienny@blueyonder.co.uk) if you wish to add any.