

ShowCase

EcoTeams

Topic:

Sustainability

Organisation:

Global Action Plan

Location:

Communities across the UK

Dates:

2005 to 2008 (with further funding until 2011)

Website:

www.ecoteams.org.uk

Contact:

Clare Whiting

Email:

clare.whiting@globalactionplan.org.uk

Telephone:

020 7420 4447



Global Action Plan
EcoTeams

Overview

EcoTeams originated in the Netherlands in the 1990s and since then over 150,000 people have participated worldwide. This case study examines EcoTeams' development in the UK between 2005 and 2008, which tested three models of delivery: standalone, semi-facilitated and fully-facilitated.

An EcoTeam is a group of householders who get together once a month over a five- to six-month period to follow a step-by-step process of manageable actions on sustainable living. Team members measure their household's environmental impact, share their experiences and agree together on practical lasting changes.

Results

Households who participated in semi-facilitated EcoTeams:

- Reduced their waste by an average of 20 per cent
- Increased their recycling (proportion of total waste) by an average of 5.1 per cent
- Reduced their electricity consumption by an average of 7 per cent
- Reduced their gas/heating energy consumption by an average of 20.8 per cent
- Reduced their direct CO₂ emissions by an average of 16.6 per cent
- Reduced their water use by an average of 14.9 per cent
- Made average savings of £148 per year on their energy and water bills



The core EcoTeams process was developed by environmental charity Global Action Plan in the Netherlands in 1990 and ran very successfully with a large proportion of the Dutch population through the 1990s.

At around the same time, Global Action Plan in the UK had begun experimenting with the 'Small Change' programme, a team-based initiative aimed at promoting pro-environmental behaviour through community development among less advantaged communities in London and the North West. However, lack of funding for the Small Change initiative drove Global Action Plan towards a more mainstream social marketing approach called 'Action at Home', which was used by local authorities (LAs) to support their LA 21 initiatives (local agendas for sustainable living into the 21st century).

Following a fairly critical review of the outcomes and rationale for the Action at Home programme, Global Action Plan returned to the idea of achieving change through small teams of people. As part of this review, it looked to the efforts of its sister organisation in the Netherlands, and specifically their work with EcoTeams.

The outcome of this critical self-examination and refocusing period was the renewed commitment to using team-based approaches across all of Global Action Plan's activities and programmes, and the subsequent roll-out of the EcoTeams programme with households in the UK.

The first stage of this roll-out was to modify the EcoTeams programme into something that would work better in the UK context by reducing it from a nine-month process to a five-

month process. EcoTeams was first introduced to the UK in Nottingham, where it has been running since 2000.

The next stage of development was to try to find ways of making EcoTeams more cost-effective to deliver to large numbers of participants. This led, in 2002, to pilot projects with a number of organisations, which tested three different delivery models: 'fully-facilitated', 'semi-facilitated' and 'standalone'.

The third stage of development was to test the relative effectiveness of delivering EcoTeams in different community groups. Global Action Plan received funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra's) Environmental Action Fund (EAF) to support EcoTeams' development between 2005 and 2008.



Behavioural goals

The strategic aims of the third stage of the programme were to:

- Make EcoTeams more accessible to a wide range of communities by refining its materials and processes
- Recruit and work with 15 partner organisations to reach households in 5 diverse communities and test the relative effectiveness of these channels for targeting households

- Undertake an extensive independent evaluation of EcoTeams to assess its environmental, social and financial impact
- Disseminate the results and use them to inform a national expansion of the project

At an operational level, EcoTeams is guided by a clear behavioural objective to:

- Encourage and enable small groups of households to adopt greener lifestyles
- By making small but significant improvements across a wide range of consumption activities (energy use, transport, water, waste and shopping)
- Over a period of approximately five months

Target audience

Five community groups were identified for testing the relative effectiveness of delivering EcoTeams:

1. Low income communities, including housing associations
2. Communities of employees (LAs and companies)
3. Communities of interest (non-governmental organisations and faith groups)
4. Communities of influence (journalists)
5. Geographical communities (LAs)

As part of the EcoTeams model, groups of community-based individuals meet to discuss their own lives and the barriers or motivations they have to adopting more environmentally-sound behaviours. Based on this understanding of individuals' lives and contexts, a programme of small changes is designed, which meets specific needs and maximises existing opportunities for change. In addition, regular EcoTeam meetings allow participants to voice their concerns, difficulties or triumphs, ensuring that the 'customer's' voice is always heard and used to guide the team.

Research

In formalising the EcoTeams model, research was undertaken to assess the experience of

EcoTeams participants in order to sustain and improve future delivery.

1. Participant feedback

The EcoTeams programme was tested with various community groups. This enabled programme developers to refine the delivery model, based on user feedback, and to develop a body of data regarding effective community engagement tools.

2. Participant survey

A participant survey was developed to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of the EcoTeams programme on a participant's motivation, behaviour and lifestyle. The aim was to refine previous surveys and produce a record that can be used for future EcoTeams projects and possibly other Global Action Plan projects as a measure of effectiveness. In total 400 surveys were sent out to participants who had completed EcoTeams from 2005 onwards. 159 participants responded to the survey:

- 99 per cent of survey respondents reported that taking personal responsibility for environmental action was 'very important' or 'fairly important'
- 96 per cent of respondents reported that being given practical advice about ways to reduce their environmental impact was 'very important' or 'fairly important'

The surveys identified the following perceived barriers to more sustainable living:

- **There's no point in me just me doing it on my own** – Addressed through being part of a team, which provides both support and social pressure
- **What's the point? Small changes won't make any big difference** – Addressed through weighing and measuring waste and energy consumption, illustrating the connection between everyday actions and tangible impacts

- **I like my life the way it is and won't change the way I live and I'm so busy, I just do not have the time** – Addressed through making small changes that fit with a pre-existing lifestyle and so are more likely to be sustained long term

Benefits to being part of an EcoTeam include:

- Building confidence and self-efficacy through facilitated, peer group learning
- Building social capital and getting to know others in the community with similar green values
- Obtaining trustworthy information on how to reduce environmental impact
- Fulfilling prior green intentions



3. *In-depth interviews with EcoTeams Participants*

Working with the University of East Anglia (UEA), 49 in-depth interviews and 4 focus groups were conducted with past EcoTeams participants, analysing how the process works to assess the longevity of its impact.

Two primary questions guided the research inquiry: First, 'How can individuals and households be encouraged to change their behaviour to reduce their level of waste production, recycle more of their remaining waste and reduce their energy consumption?' Second, 'How can such changes in domestic routines be sustained beyond the life of an action project?'

Results included:

- Of those participants interviewed, most fell into Defra segments 1 to 3 ('positive greens', 'concerned consumers' and 'waste watchers')
- The process of weighing and measuring plays a crucial role in helping participants to connect their daily routines to waste output and energy consumption, which in turn connects environmental impact to everyday activities
- There are important linkages between group-based support and local information exchange, which when combined with personalised feedback from the weighing and measuring, lead to new 'joined-up thinking' regarding everyday behaviour and a personalisation of environmental impact
- A key part of joined-up thinking is a wholesale examination of everyday routines and practices for evidence of bad habits. Doing so encourages participants to look for small but significant changes within their existing routines that will add up to a more sustainable lifestyle
- Behaviour changes that fit easily with what the individual is already doing are more likely to become habitual and routine, and are therefore more likely to be sustained long term
- EcoTeams looks at how bundles of green routines can be made 'mutually sustaining' through adopting a generally greener lifestyle. This more joined-up thinking about the impacts of lifestyle leads to durable behaviour change

4. *Quantitative data*

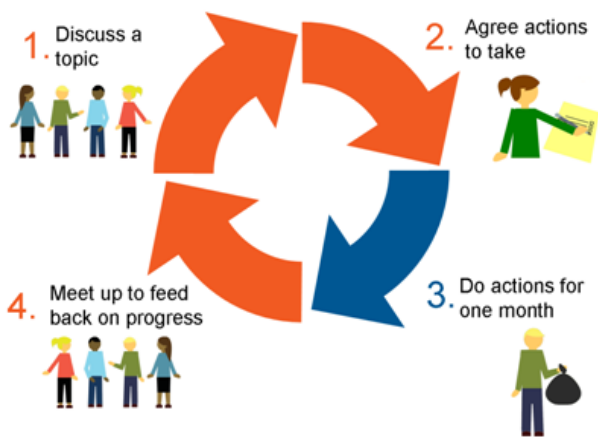
The EcoTeams web database was also analysed and showed how successful EcoTeams can be at helping households reduce their environmental impact, as well as areas for improvement.



The EcoTeams model used in the UK was based on the programme used in the Netherlands.

EcoTeams are groups formed of approximately six people who each represent their household. They meet once a month for five to six months and are provided with a set of resources to enable them to carry out topic meetings where they address the issues of rubbish, shopping, energy, travel and water.

With the help of these materials and their facilitators, participants discuss the issues and map out practical actions they can make to reduce their environmental impact in each area.



Throughout the project, participants are asked to weigh their household rubbish and recycling output and measure their energy and water consumption. This data is entered into a database on the EcoTeams website. At the end of the programme, this data is used to create personalised household feedback reports that show seasonally-adjusted energy consumption, waste, water and recycling levels over the course of the programme, and demonstrate improvements in these areas.

A final EcoTeams meeting is held to celebrate the collective achievements of the group and to discuss potential next steps or future actions the participants may wish to take in their communities.

Delivery models

As part of this programme, three different delivery models for EcoTeams were developed and tested. These are:

1. **Fully-facilitated (high cost)** – These teams have a dedicated facilitator based in the local community. This person is a full-time Global Action Plan project officer and is responsible for recruiting the rest of the team, disseminating materials and delivering all of the topic meetings. The fully-facilitated teams are provided with resources, including EcoTeams handbooks and DVDs. In addition, household feedback reports are provided by Global Action Plan.
2. **Semi-facilitated (medium cost)** – These teams are run in partnership with other organisations who are responsible for recruiting 15 volunteers to lead EcoTeams of 6 to 8 individuals from within their organisation or locality. Global Action Plan provides a training workshop for the 15 volunteer facilitators (team leaders) to demonstrate how to deliver EcoTeams. Global Action Plan also provides EcoTeams handbooks, facilitator packs and EcoTeams DVDs, as well as the household feedback reports.
3. **Standalone (low cost)** – After one initial meeting, these teams are run solely and autonomously by partner organisations. These organisations are responsible for recruitment, dissemination of materials and delivery of the process with their participants. Materials are provided by Global Action Plan, including EcoTeams handbooks and facilitator packs. However, partner organisations are responsible for the actual management of the teams.

EverGreen process

Retrospective analysis of the types of people who participated in EcoTeams was conducted in 2006 and these were mapped against Defra's segmentation model:

- From work carried out in low and middle income 'areas' it is evident that the EcoTeams programme is very much geared towards middle income households
- EcoTeams tends typically to attract women who are financially comfortable, well established in their communities and careers, and who have sufficient time to engage in monthly meetings
- Team leaders, who have volunteered to run an EcoTeam, are likely to be those with prior green intentions (DEFRA segments 1 to 3)
- Team members, who are peer recruited by the volunteer team leaders, are likely to be less 'green' at the outset as they have social as well as environmental motives for joining
- The team-based approach of EcoTeams is vital in sharing best practice and ideas and can be a very effective way of mixing Defra segments 1 to 5 and encouraging further action
- However, the EcoTeams process is not ideal in accessing harder to reach communities (Defra segments 6 to 7)

EcoTeams thus faced the risk of being branded 'middle class' and alienating the traditionally harder to reach sectors of society. Even its standard method of data collection (weighing and measuring household waste and energy usage) is inappropriate for residents who live in sheltered or council-owned accommodation with communal facilities and no access to power meters.

In response to this identified need to develop a way to engage low-income communities, and in particular older people, the EverGreen process was developed in 2006/07 as a modified version of EcoTeams, designed to engage

harder to reach communities at Hanover Housing, a housing association in London.

EverGreen is a more flexible approach that allows for other environmental and social issues to be addressed and can be locally and issue specific. The EverGreen process is a much more intensive community development programme. A project officer works with the community, developing trust, creating pro-environmental participatory activities (such as allotment schemes and scrap workshops) and supporting installations (such as recycling facilities and energy efficient lighting).

On the back of this, EcoTeams-style workshops are run with the community, facilitated by Global Action Plan. In view of the shared living facilities of many participants, measurement focuses on recycling, rather than on waste and energy consumption, allowing individuals to monitor their own contributions.



The poster features a green and orange color scheme. At the top left, it says 'EcoTeams'. The main headline is 'Join a local EcoTeam!'. Below this is an illustration of a green house with a recycling bin, a water tap with a drop, and three people (one on a bicycle, one standing, one sitting). To the right of the illustration is a list of benefits: 'Meet new people in your community', 'Reduce your carbon footprint', and 'Save money on your household bills'. Below the list is the text 'Contact me now to find out more:' followed by a text input field. At the bottom left is the website 'www.ecoteams.org.uk' and 'A Global Action Plan initiative www.globalactionplan.org.uk'. At the bottom right is the 'Global Action Plan' logo with the tagline 'creating the climate for change'.



In total, EcoTeams was delivered and tested with 36 different organisations and communities (incorporating 3,602 households) across the country:

- **Nine fully-facilitated groups** – Broxtowe Borough; Broxtowe Estate; Dawlish Town; Hastings Borough; Lewes District; Nottingham City; Rushcliffe Borough; Thanet Borough; Tonbridge and Malling District
- **Twenty semi-facilitated groups** – Angus Council; Barbican City Housing Association; BBC; British Gas; Cambridge Women's Hour; Canterbury City Council; Carmarthenshire City Council; Christian Ecology Group; Community Radio Southall; Defra; Devon and Cornwall Housing Association; Gedling Borough; John Laing plc; Metro London Newspaper; National Federation of Womens' Institutes; Northumberland City Council; Reading Borough Council; Serene/CARE Blackerton/En-Form; Shropshire County Council, Quakers
- **Seven standalone groups** – Angus Council; Chris Gothergole; East Renfrewshire Council; FREDA+; St Helens Council; Stoke on Trent City Council; Surrey County Council

For the standalone delivery model, recruiting people from the community proved to be very time consuming and difficult for organisations, resulting in a poor participant take-up rate. In addition, many standalone EcoTeams required more support than anticipated to complete the project and few returned sufficient data for meaningful analysis.

Fully-facilitated teams showed good environmental improvements, but this method

was very cost-intensive and time consuming. This in turn reduced the number of households that could be engaged at any one time.



Semi-facilitated teams tended to have slightly better changes in environmental behaviour when compared to the fully-facilitated groups. It was hypothesised that this was because the semi-facilitated EcoTeams model reached elements of the community not already so inclined to make environmental lifestyle changes. Participants recruited to EcoTeams through the fully-facilitated model are volunteering to work directly with an environmental charity (and might therefore be expected to be 'already converted'), whereas semi-facilitated EcoTeam members are recruited by volunteers – their peers (like family members, colleagues and fellow club members). This latter group may have slightly different motivations for joining (social as well as environmental) and therefore not be as 'green' at the outset as the fully-facilitated EcoTeams volunteers. There is therefore more opportunity for improvements to be made by semi-facilitated EcoTeams participants.

While weighing household rubbish and recycling output and measuring energy and water consumption was particularly helpful in demonstrating the tangible impacts that participating could have, relying on the website for support and as a mechanism for inputting data had limitations.

“We had hoped that simply the website alone and all the tools on the website would be enough to pull everyone through the programme, but what we’ve realised is, actually everyone is busy in life and everyone needs motivation from outside, and there’s nothing like human touch.” (Clare Whiting, Global Action Plan)

Global Action Plan has since added regular telephone support to aid participants through the programme and to ensure they input their data.

“We do have the problem of teams not entering data and we’ve been tackling that in a number of different ways. So we’ve worked recently on making the website copy more clear. We’re also very lucky that we’ve got three members of staff who’ve come through the Future Jobs Fund and they are helping us be able to provide more support directly to the team leaders. It means we can be on the phone, communicate with them, support them and find out if they’re not entering measurements, why and how we can help.” (Clare Whiting, Global Action Plan)

In addition, the Global Action Plan has now added more interactive elements to the EcoTeams website, including polls and automated emails when participants have reached key stages in the programme, to help motivate participants to maintain their involvement with the programme.



Household measuring and monitoring

- 7 out of 10 households reduced their waste by an average of 33 per cent; overall the

- entire group of households reduced their waste by an average of 19 per cent
- 6 out of 10 households increased their recycling as a proportion of total waste by an average of 7 per cent; overall the increase was 4.7 per cent
- 6 out of 10 households reduced their electricity consumption by an average of 22 per cent; overall the reduction was 5 per cent
- 6 out of 10 households reduced their gas or heating energy consumption by an average 32 per cent; overall the reduction was 18 per cent (seasonally adjusted figures)
- 6 out of 10 households reduced their direct CO₂ emissions by an average of 26 per cent; overall the reduction was 14 per cent
- 6 out of 10 households reduced their water use by an average of 26 per cent; overall the reduction was 11 per cent

Participant survey

The New Economics Foundation helped Global Action Plan develop a ‘before’ and ‘after’ attitude and behaviour change survey for EcoTeams participants.

In total 400 surveys were sent out to participants who had completed EcoTeams from 2005 onwards. 159 participants responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 40 per cent:

- 94 per cent reported they were doing more to reduce environmental impact than before, and were likely or very likely to maintain the changes they implemented during EcoTeams
- 89 per cent rated their understanding of their household’s impact on the environment as ‘high’ or ‘very high’
- 83 per cent stated they felt confident talking to other people about environmental issues and 84 per cent would recommend EcoTeams to people they know
- 81 per cent rated the EcoTeams meetings as ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’ in

encouraging them to make small, but significant, changes in their lifestyle

Waste and recycling behaviour

45 to 58 per cent of respondents recycle and compost more through participation in EcoTeams.

Shopping behaviour

40 to 50 per cent are now buying seasonal and local produce, seeking to reduce packaging and plastic bag consumption.

Energy use behaviour

30 to 50 per cent of participants most commonly switch to energy saving light bulbs, increase diligence in switching off appliances and generally make more of an effort to use less energy.

Transport behaviour

Participants were encouraged to take a more holistic approach to car travel – combining journeys, using public transport more and reducing short car trips.

Water use behaviour

The majority of participants decided to stop using anti-bacterial cleaning products (66 per cent) and choose more environmentally-friendly alternatives. Many installed water saving devices to the cisterns of toilets (39 per cent) and some installed water butts (31 per cent) to collect and redistribute rainwater.

Behaviour change durability

Survey results strongly suggest that the behavioural changes adopted by EcoTeams participants are extremely durable and therefore sustainable. Proportionally, a greater number of actions have been adopted by EcoTeamers who finished in 2005 to 2006 compared to those who finished in 2006 to 2007.

Moreover, the results demonstrated that actions or changes that may be difficult to implement in the short term (such as getting a fuel efficient car or installing solar hot water heating) were subsequently introduced over the longer period.

All EcoTeamers reported they were still carrying out the pro-environmental actions started through EcoTeams over six months to two years since finishing the programme.

Qualitative evaluation

The UEA conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews to identify:

- The motivation of individuals and households to participate, including the extent to which the demographic profiles of EcoTeams participants conform to the general demographic profile of the neighbourhoods in which they live
- The relative behavioural contributions and importance of the different elements of the EcoTeams programme (social interaction and group deliberation, information provision and personalised feedback on waste and energy use behaviours)
- The types and extent of behaviour change achieved through the programme
- How and why pro-environmental behaviour changes are, or are not, sustained beyond the life of the programme

Insight was gathered on the drivers of durable change in waste and energy behaviour stemming from EcoTeams and how that behaviour change is produced in terms of the techniques and processes achieved via the programme.

Community types

There was little variation in results between the different types of communities used to host and recruit EcoTeams. This is perhaps unsurprising as the group categories were chosen fairly arbitrarily according to accessible audiences

Global Action Plan could reach with the EcoTeams process.

Delivery methods

- The standalone method was not effective at delivering environmental behaviour change
- The fully-facilitated method tended to recruit the 'already converted' and so while it delivered environmental behaviour change, there was less opportunity for improvements as participants already had largely 'green' lifestyles
- The semi-facilitated model delivered the greatest environmental behaviour change

For this reason it was decided that the semi-facilitated model would be used to market EcoTeams nationally.



Since the three EcoTeams models (fully-facilitated, semi-facilitated and standalone) were tested between 2005 and 2008, the semi-facilitated model has been rolled out nationally. EcoTeams has now reached over 4,000 households in the UK.

The EcoTeams model has now moved away from paper-based products towards web-based resources. The hard copy EcoTeams handbooks and DVDs have since been replaced by online resources (although paper versions are available for those who do not have access to the internet).



The EverGreen programme that was piloted with Hanover Housing Association in Hackney was deemed successful and has since been rolled out to other areas, including Greenwich, Tower Hamlets and Livingstone (Scotland).

Lessons learned

From the feedback regarding what respondents disliked about EcoTeams, there were two prominent themes:

1. The project was 'preaching to the converted'

This issue is perennial to EcoTeams. However, it is apparent that despite this contention, significant reductions have been made by 'the converted' in terms of waste and recycling production, and energy and water consumption. This strongly indicates that there is significant validity in the EcoTeams process and that further improvements can always be made, irrespective of how 'green' participants thought they already were.

Nonetheless, this does highlight Global Action Plan's ongoing challenge to recruit those groups not already committed to change. This is partly addressed by the use of the semi-facilitated approach and partly by the creation of the EverGreen process.

2. The lack of support and contact after EcoTeams ended

This issue is being addressed through further development of EcoTeams. Forums have been added to the website to help facilitate a virtual community of EcoTeamers. Other ideas for further developments include creating a repeat visitor section on the web database, so past participants can continue to measure, and developing an EcoTeams 'master class' for those that want next steps.

From testing the EcoTeams process with different LAs and organisations and testing the different delivery models, Global Action Plan has been able to develop a strategy for extending the reach of EcoTeams nationally. Delivery options have been developed that incorporate the needs of LAs and organisations in providing the right level of support in a cost-effective manner to reach as many households and community sectors as possible, using the semi-facilitated model.