

EngageSDG

Annual Review (March 2025)

DISCLAIMER:

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Introduction

EngageSDG is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the field of higher Education project. Capacity-building Projects are transnational cooperation projects based on multilateral partnerships, primarily between higher education institutions (HEIs) from Programme and eligible Partner Countries. They can also involve non-academic partners to strengthen the links with society and business and to reinforce the systemic impact of the projects.

Entry into force and duration

Project number:	101129394
Date of entry into force:	1/12 (December)/2023
End of the eligibility period:	30/ 11 (November)/2026
Duration:	36 months

General Objective of EngageSDG

Generally, the EngageSDG project aims to build capacity in SADC universities to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in their local environments through the use of participatory approaches.

Specific Objectives

SO1. Developing a Report on the State of Play

- Dissemination: Use targeted communication channels to disseminate the report widely among stakeholders in the SADC region and beyond. This includes academic publications, project websites, social media, and newsletters.
- Awareness Campaigns: Launch awareness campaigns highlighting the report's findings and their implications for achieving the SDGs through higher education, using infographics, webinars, and press releases.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Engage with policymakers, educational leaders, and the broader academic community through roundtable discussions, conferences, and forums to discuss the report's findings and implications.

SO2. Developing a Conceptual Framework and Digital Ecosystem

- Promotional content: Create and distribute promotional content that highlights the benefits and features of the digital ecosystem and conceptual framework, including tutorials, feature articles, and demo videos.
- Training and webinars: Host training sessions and webinars for academic staff and administrators on utilizing the digital ecosystem for decision-making, capacity development, and collaboration.
- Feedback channels: Establish channels for feedback on the digital ecosystem, encouraging users to contribute ideas for improvement and share their success stories.

SO3. Capacity development in higher education institutions

- Capacity building programmes and pilots: Promote capacity-building programmes through direct communication with universities and via academic networks and associations, emphasizing the benefits of adopting PAs for local engagement.
- Success stories: Share success stories and case studies from pilot projects in South Africa, Mauritius, and Zambia to illustrate the impact of these initiatives and encourage adoption by other institutions.

- Resource sharing: Develop and share resources, such as guides, best practices, and toolkits, to support the capacity development of higher education institutions in the SADC region.

SO4. Creating a sustainable community of practice

- Community building: Use social media, online forums, and dedicated platforms to facilitate the creation of a community of practice, encouraging regular interaction, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among regional higher education institutions.
- Events and networking: Organise virtual and in-person events, such as workshops, conferences, and meetups, to strengthen the community of practice and foster networking and collaboration.
- Continuous learning: Offer ongoing learning opportunities, including online courses, webinars, and collaborative research projects, to keep the community engaged and support continuous improvement.
- Communication with Project Partners and Beneficiaries
- Regular updates: Provide regular updates to project partners and beneficiaries through newsletters, email communications, and project meetings to keep all parties informed and engaged.
- Tailored communication: Develop tailored communication strategies for different groups of beneficiaries (e.g., academic staff, students, community members) to ensure relevance and maximize impact.
- Visibility and branding: Ensure consistent branding and visibility for the EngageSDG project across all communications, enhancing recognition and credibility.

Project Partners

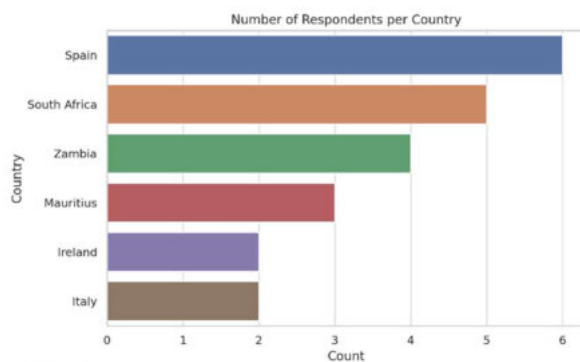
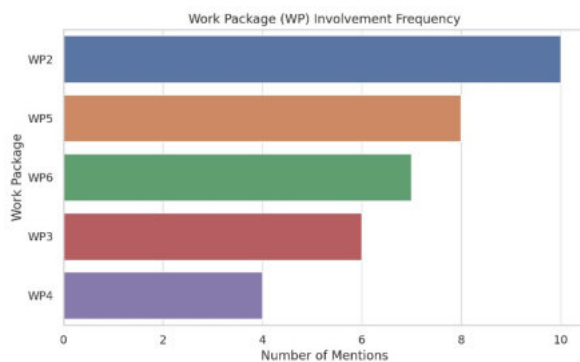
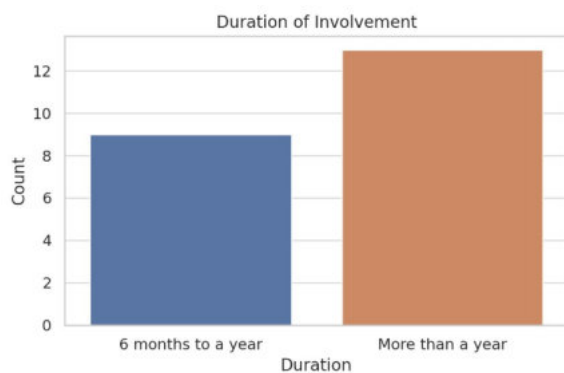
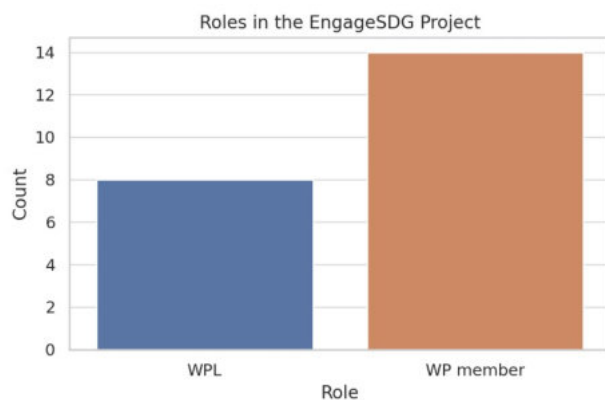
P001 – SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION
P002 – UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
P003 – NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
P004 – UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA
P004 – UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA
P005 – UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS
P006 – UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY MAURITIUS
P007 – ASOCIACION OBSERVATORIO DE LAS RELACIONES UNION EUROPEA-AMERICA LATINA(OBREAL)
P008 – UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA
P009 – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK - NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, CORK
P010 – ALMA MATER STUDIORUM - UNIVERSITA DI BOLOGNA
P012 – TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITAT DORTMUND
P013 – VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL

Review approach

This is the internal review conducted among the Consortium members. The external review is conducted by the two appointed reviewers who will deliver three reports through the duration of the project.

The review was conducted using a survey instrument. The survey was anonymous. The questions are discussed below with the demographics provided first.

Respondent demographics

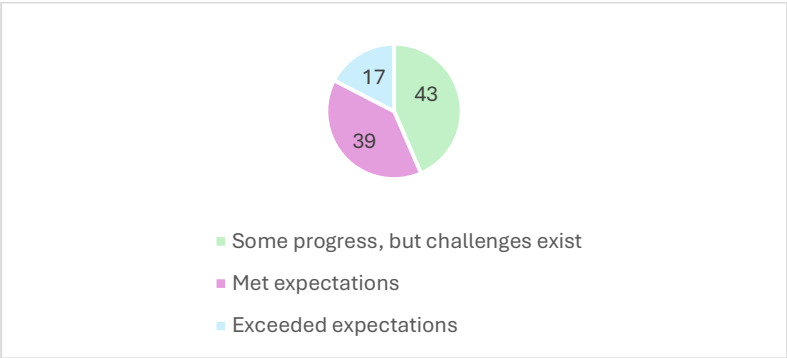




The survey received responses from 22 individuals across six countries, with the highest representation from Spain (6 respondents), followed by South Africa (5) and Zambia (4). Other participating countries included Mauritius (3), Ireland (2), and Italy (2). In terms of project roles, the majority of respondents (14) identified as Work Package (WP) members, while 8 reported serving as Work Package Leaders (WPLs). This highlights a strong balance of leadership and collaborative participation within the project. When asked about the duration of their involvement, most participants (13) had been active in the project for more than a year, while the remaining 9 had been involved for 6 months to a year, suggesting consistent engagement across the team. Respondents were involved in a range of Work Packages, with many engaged in multiple areas. WP2 emerged as the most frequently cited WP, followed closely by WP5, WP6, and WP3. No WP1 or WP7 members participated.

This distribution reflects a diverse and interconnected team structure working across different project components.

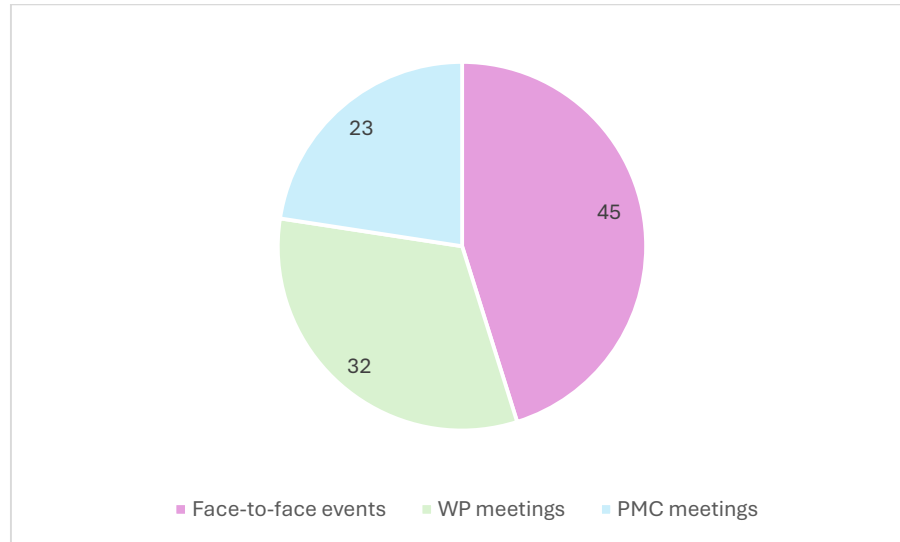
Question 1: How would you rate the overall progress of the Engage SDG project in Year 1?



Most participants felt that expectations were met or exceeded.

Question 2: Which project activities have been most impactful in the past year?

(Multiple selections allowed – e.g., WP meetings, Face-to-face events, PMC meetings. Participants were allowed to select multiple impactful activities):



Face-to-face events were considered the most impactful. This highlights the importance of interpersonal engagement and structured collaboration in progressing participatory work.

Question 3: What have been the biggest challenges in implementing participatory approaches (PAs) for SDG engagement in Year 1?

(Open-ended responses)

Funding and budget clarity

- Delays and confusion over budget allocations
- Lack of guidance on permissible use of funds

Coordination & collaboration

- Scheduling difficulties
- Misalignment of expectations and roles within WPs
- Intercultural communication issues

Conceptual understanding

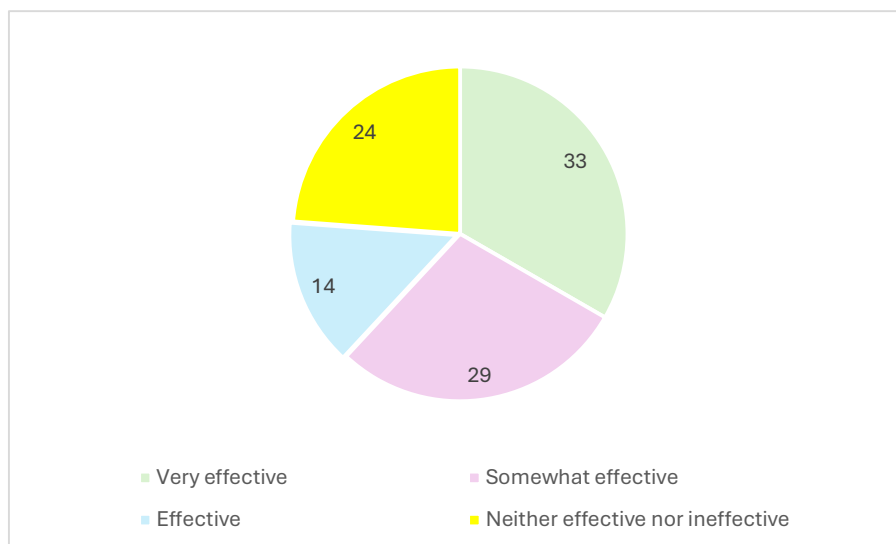
- Struggles with interpreting and applying Participatory Approaches (PAs)
- Adapting methodologies to local university contexts

Engagement & participation

- Uneven involvement from team members
- Expectations of leadership not being met
- Hierarchical vs. collaborative working culture tensions

Question 4: How effective has the project been in addressing these challenges?

(e.g., "Very effective", "Somewhat effective", "Neither effective nor ineffective")



The project has dealt with challenges effectively (76%).

Some quotes

"Not knowing the final budget allocation... we are feeling the strain."

"Significant cultural differences exist among partners... we have ended up carrying most of the workload."

"Implementation is a time-consuming process... bringing everyone on board seemed to be a challenge sometimes."

"Training and common ground on PA... clear guidance on roles and responsibilities."

Question 5: What key lessons have been learnt from the first year of implementation?

- **Communication:** Most respondents emphasized the importance of clear, ongoing communication within and across work packages (WPS).
- **Planning and coordination:** Regular meetings, clarity in objectives, and effective planning processes were highlighted.
- **Engagement issues:** Some pointed out that not all partners are actively contributing, which impacts project flow.
- **Importance of face-to-face interaction:** In-person meetings were noted as helpful for ownership and engagement.



Question 6: How effective were the project review meetings in facilitating discussion and decision-making?

Mixed effectiveness. Many respondents found meetings productive, especially when regular and well-structured. A few cited issues such as lack of follow-through, poor preparation, or limited participation.

Question 7: Did the project meetings provide clear action points and follow-ups?

The majority confirmed that meetings produced clear action points. However, a few indicated only partial clarity or inconsistent follow-up.

Question 8: What improvements would you suggest for future review meetings?

- Better preparation: Assigning pre-meeting tasks and encouraging preparation.
- More participation: Especially from WP leaders and inactive partners.
- Structured follow-up: Clearer documentation, structured processes, and reminders (via email/MS Teams).
- In-person meetings: Encouraged for better collaboration and understanding.

Question 9: How confident are you that the project is on track to achieve its three-year objectives?

Most participants were optimistic about achieving three-year objectives. A few expressed uncertainties, mainly due to internal challenges and lack of participation from some teams. Language barriers play a significant role in the multi-cultural teams.

Question 10: Which areas require more focus in Year 2 to ensure project success? (Select up to three most important)

Top three frequently mentioned areas: Capacity-building and training programs; Communication and stakeholder involvement; Research and knowledge production.

Question 11: What additional support or resources are needed for better implementation in Year 2?

Human resources: Requests for additional personnel for specific tasks (e.g., prototype development).

Structured tools: Suggestions for improved tools for task distribution and collaboration.

Funding & penalties: One respondent proposed penalizing non-participants and reallocating funds to active contributors.

Question 12: In one sentence, describe the biggest achievement of the EngageSDG project in Year 1

- Progress in WPs: Completion of WP2 and progress in WP3 were highlighted.
- Increased awareness: The growing understanding of the SDGs in higher education.
- Inclusivity & collaboration: Some found improved collaboration and appreciation for the team's diversity and strengths.

Question 13. Do you have any suggestions for improving the project moving forward?

None

Project leadership must deal with those who do not engage

None

Having one project implemented across all member institutions

Short Case-studies Contribution from partners and external sources

SDSN Africa to showcase & upscale dissemination

Improving communication

I think we have to accept that the big challenge of the Project is the process, the complex and global relations. In my opinion, the learnings outputs will be the great outputs of the project. Perhaps we will not achieve all the big goals, but the most important, for me, are the learnings, competencies and strategies that all the members we will learn.

I'm uncertain, but perhaps an in-person meeting between myself and the problematic team could be arranged, as TEAMS does not seem to be effective for them—or they may be unwilling to complete this. We could perhaps encourage a cross-sector collaboration.

In addition to using MS Teams for project documentation and progress, it may be useful that WPLs (and members where relevant) use emails to notify of inputs needed by members concerned or the whole team.

I would suggest improving communication regarding specific tasks and responsibilities to ensure greater clarity and coordination. Establishing a more structured process for assigning and following up on tasks could enhance efficiency and engagement in future review meetings.

Regular meetings within WPs and between WPs

Conclusion

Overall, the Year 1 EngageSDG project survey paints a picture of engaged but challenged progress.

- Respondents appreciate face-to-face engagements and structured coordination.
- Conceptual and logistical barriers—especially around funding, participation, and intercultural collaboration—remain areas needing attention.
- The project is perceived as generally effective, though continued improvements in clarity, inclusion, and communication will be key in Year 2.

Steps taken by Consortium management

1. Consortium agreement. Several partners had issues with the agreement. This required individual meetings with partners, followed by the universities' internal processes towards affirmation before signing. This process took quite long. Agreement now signed.

2. TUDO withdrawal. Followed on the letter received from TUDO, several meetings were held to determine whether the matters could be resolved. Since TUDO had, from the outset, not participated in project activities, it was decided that their exit had no significant impact on the project. The EU was informed and the budget resubmitted and Part b with track changes resubmitted for approval.
3. Payment of tranches. Tranche payments were delayed by the SA exchange system due to the nature of the grant. This required several engagements with the SARUA bank. Additional documents had to be submitted to allow for tranche payments. This has been concluded.
4. Training on Financial management: Training was offered to partners on grant management at the physical launch of the project in Cape Town, in 2024. The details of the budget allocation were made available both on the EC Funding and Tenders Portal and the project's document repository tool – MS TEAMS was agreed as the project management tool to which all partners are granted access. Furthermore, the financial administration, schedule of payment and budget allocation has been detailed out in the CA, which was deliberated upon and signed by each partner.
5. Communication. The project office is compiling monthly newsletters for distribution. The WhatsApp group is becoming more active as more partners join. All project activities, meeting outcomes and documents are made available on MS Teams. Training was provided for partners on the use of the MS Teams for effective communication and exchange of information, documents and updates on the project. It is clear that face to face events impact positively on the project deliverables and teamwork. A project conference was hosted where information was presented and opportunities provided. The Management and Operations Plan was revised due to the exit of TUDO and to implement a more cooperative strategy.
6. The external reviewers have been appointed and have provided their review plan. This energises the consortium.
7. An early 2025 planning session was hosted to ensure that the planning is on track and a kanban method rolled out to provide updates.
8. To ensure effective communication within WPs, regular WP Meetings were scheduled by the project coordinator at the start of the project. This was later deemed challenging by partners due to the possibility of conflicting schedules. Hence, it was agreed WPs should organize their own internal meetings in accordance their work plan. It is clear that there are limitations in this approach as well. Therefore, to ensure effective communication within WPs, and particularly ensure WPLs are communicating with and involving WP Members effectively, it is important to revisit this decision.