



# Measuring what is hard to count: WWF's tool for evaluating behaviour change

by Andrew Ross, freelance journalist writing for WWF-UK

**Andrew Ross describes the community engagement and sustainable development (CESD) tool created by WWF-UK and CAG Consultants. He explains how the tool can be used to determine how effective projects have been - by helping funders, policy makers and project leads to understand why and how participants change their behaviour.**



WWF-UK, with CAG Consultants, has created a groundbreaking behaviour change tool for environmental projects. Four years ago both organisations identified that a number of tools existed to help measure hard outcomes from projects, such as reductions in carbon emissions and so on.

However, none helped funders, policy makers and project leads to answer questions about why project participants changed their behaviour, if indeed they did.

Since then WWF has funded the development of the CESD tool. It has been piloted with more than 30 environment projects across the country, and is now being picked up by other organisations as the first tool of its kind to help them understand what behaviour changes participants have made and why. Although this information is crucial for influencing people's decisions to live more sustainably, WWF found that it had been previously overlooked as either being 'too easy' or conversely 'too difficult' to capture.

Crucially, WWF and CAG took the decision to adopt an action research methodology so that the tool could be informed by how (and if) behaviour change actually happened in communities, rather than what outsiders wanted to happen. Rod Sterne, Head of Cities and Communities at WWF, says that 'so often we don't use practitioners to develop the thinking because they are out there practising. What I love about this tool is that it has been developed by and with practitioners for practitioners.'

Peter Capener, Principal for Communities and Climate Change at NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts), an independent organisation that promotes innovation, is impressed with what the CESD tool can reveal. He argues that 'there are ways of monitoring carbon reduction but not any mechanism for measuring change around behaviour. And yet behaviour and lifestyle changes are the things that are going to make the difference to whether or not we have reduced carbon emissions to the level that is required... [CESD] fills an important gap'.

## Easy to use

The CESD tool is a set of worksheets and questionnaires that participants in an environmental project can complete independently of any other quantitative measuring.

The process is simple: people answer the same set of questions before they participate in a project, and at the end. While the project is likely to be something specific – community gardening, energy efficiency and so on – the questions cover an individual's behaviour across a number of different settings including 'getting about', 'in the home', 'in the garden', 'in the community' and 'in the shops'. The answers that participants provide in the first survey are the baseline against which any behaviour changes are measured further on.

On each topic area participants choose from a range of different responses. This breadth of options was important to the creators of the tool. On 'getting about', for example, Niamh Carey, CESD project lead for WWF's Change Team, says that 'we wanted to have a set of statements that travelled from "I'm not going to change" right the way through to "I've actually reduced how much I drive and it's important to me."'



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## Tool 'adds value'

One organisation that is midway through using the tool is BTCV, which is trialling it as an 'add-on' to 15 of its local projects nationally. Mick Denness, Head of Healthy and Sustainable Communities at BTCV, says that 'people do change their behaviours when volunteering with us but they do it almost by osmosis – without prompting they make changes in the home.' The value of using the CESD tool is that it can help BTCV to capture this connection between what volunteers do and how that influences their behaviours elsewhere. This enables BTCV to identify 'added value' and demonstrate that the reach of its projects extends beyond canals and disused railway sidings to influencing people's behaviour in their front rooms and kitchens as well.

Denness believes that – unlike some other tools – the information CESD gathers is an accurate reflection of what has actually happened for the individuals involved: 'A lot of the programmes out there are about pledging – I promise you I will drive less miles every year – when in fact through CESD hopefully people will be much more honest and say "this is what I actually have done" rather than "this is my aspiration".'

## Setting the agenda

WWF/CAG have set the agenda for developing a behaviour change tool, and demand for the CESD tool is now brisk.

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Public organisations and private companies are realising that without an understanding of what drives behaviour the underlying factors that in-

fluence successful community campaigns and projects will remain a mystery. And it will become increasingly difficult for organisations to justify the differences they claim to be making if they can't explain how the work they do helps to change behaviour. Emma Cranidge argues that 'there are lots of ways out there of measuring who turned up to what and what a happy time they had when they were there – but that's not really your impact. I think CESD does demonstrate what your impact is.'

Organisations such as NESTA and BTCV seem to agree. Nesta is in discussions with WWF/CAG about funding the development of a more user-friendly version of the tool. And Mick Denness says that BTCV is using the tool 'as a cornerstone of our behaviour change work'. The organisation is embarking on a significant expansion of the use of the tool in partnership with WWF and CAG.

These opportunities to expand the reach of what is already an influential tool means that more organisations – both large and small – will have the opportunity to measure something that until now has been elusive: what behaviour changes do people make and why.

**Andrew Ross has worked as a local authority planner, policy officer, researcher, lecturer, editor and taxi driver. In 2001 he set up the consultancy, Final Draft, to write and edit in the areas he continues to be interested in: local sustainability, urban planning and public health. One of his clients is WWF-UK. For more information on their engagement work see:**

[http://www.wwf.org.uk/what we do/working with local authorities/engaging communities/](http://www.wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/working_with_local_authorities/engaging_communities/)