

### Summary of activities from the first year of the project - January 2010

#### The Challenge:

Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) working on sustainable development projects need more than traditional indicators like the number of trees planted. If their project empowers a community, establishes a trusting work environment, or improves social and economic justice, *how would they know? Which of these values-based indicators are important to capture? Which values contribute to sustainable development outcomes?*

If CSOs knew the answers to these questions, they could plan their activities better, optimizing outcomes from their limited funding. But CSOs need specialized researchers to help crystallize these issues; researchers who are familiar with current academic knowledge and committed to co-developing the knowledge localized in the CSO domain. The aim: an embryonic set of values-based indicators for direct use by CSOs.



#### Project aim:

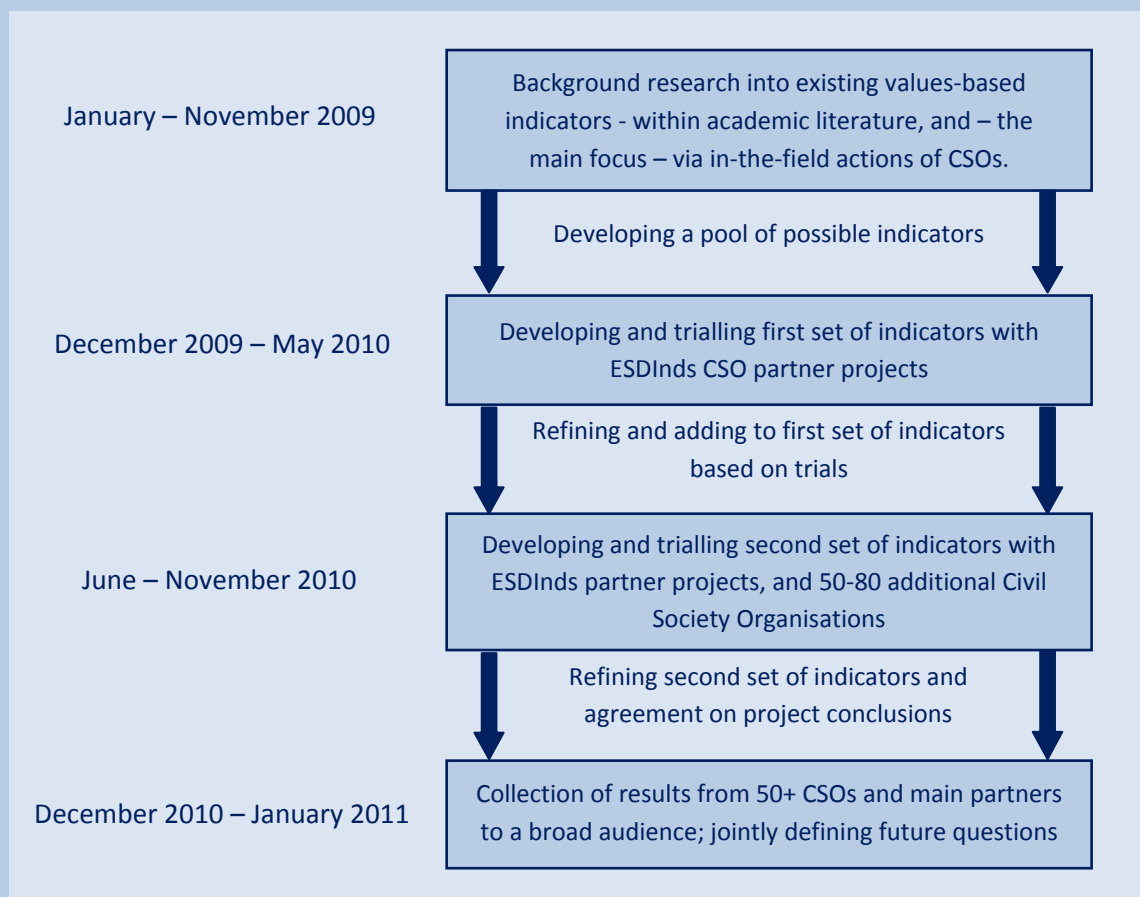
The aim of the ESDinds project is to explore useful indicators which can measure values components of CSO sustainable development projects. These values-based indicators will be designed for use at the project level, and will overlap heavily with organisational values and those of the communities served.

If useful indicators can be identified and co-developed with academic researchers, then it will be possible to develop toolkits and processes useful to diverse groups of CSOs, and a further aim of ESDinds is to involve a further 50+ CSOs with these, to form a new Community of Interest.

## Work Plan

The ESDinds project is characterised by CSOs and academia working in partnership to produce practical and useful indicators. The CSO partners involved in the ESDinds project engage with many sectors of the community – education, businesses, faith groups, and community development organisations. This project has intentionally brought together a diverse group of CSOs with a shared interest in values and ethics in order to identify indicators useful across a spectrum of institutional, social and cultural diversity.

The research design involves an iterative, participatory approach to the development of indicators and assessment tools. The research will be conducted in four phases:



### Expected Final Results

The primary expected outcome of the ESDinds initiative is the development of a framework of values-based indicators, applicable in a wide range of national, cultural and organizational contexts. However, we think there will be several other results which we explain below.

### Outcomes after one year

In the first year of the project, researchers worked together with CSO partners to develop a 'pool' of relevant values based indicators. The approach to developing the indicators involved case studies and interviews with CSO partners and their projects, and a review of academic literature relating to specific values. A 'pool' of values of most relevance to the CSOs were identified and t=possible indicators, reflecting how these values might be expressed, were developed.

What is exciting is that, although the partner CSOs work in very different areas including business, education for sustainable development, education, and faith groups, it has been possible to identify several value 'clusters' that were important to all of them. Of these, six were selected for further detailed investigation in the field with affiliated indicators to be considered; these are:

- Empowerment
- Justice
- Integrity
- Trust
- Unity in Diversity
- Care & respect



These indicators are now being trialled and refined by the CSO and academic partners through field-based research with specific CSO projects. . Proposed indicators affiliated with these values are now be considered in diverse types of CSO projects in Germany, Italy, Sierra Leone and Mexico.

## Unexpected Results

An unexpected result is that the **process** co-developed to help crystallise the CSOs' own values has proven useful and attractive to the CSOs – and to businesses. It seems likely that a simple tool will emerge that CSOs or businesses can use– possibly even be available for self-use online.

The 'ESDinds Process' has also been adopted by participating organisations to change their 'mission statement' to reflect what they have learned about themselves.

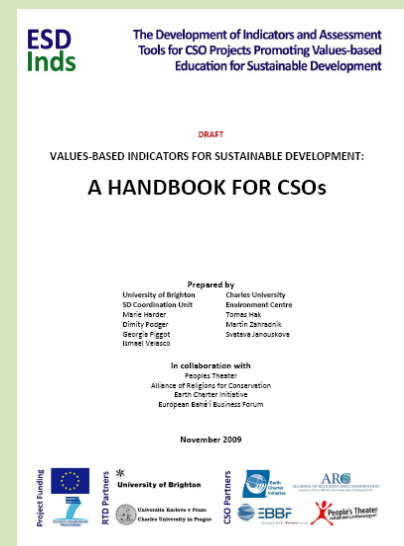
## Early and Unscheduled Outcomes

An early outcome of the project has been the drafting of a Handbook for potential use by future CSOs in the field, going through ways to develop and improve indicators. Although this outcome was not scheduled, it will be invaluable when completed to allow other CSOs to develop indicators on their own, in their own context.

The ESDinds project has an specific commitment to involve 50-80 further CSOs in the last phase of the work. It was decided that the best way to do this effectively was to develop a Handbook that would provide everything these CSOs needed. Even though such a Handbook would not even be used until the last phase, the ESDinds team decided to use it as an interim goal to focus their work; it was possible to have full feedback to be gathered from the four partner CSOs. This approach has proved highly useful as an opportunity to see if the academic researchers and CSOs were communicating effectively with each other; so far it has worked well.

ESDinds has attracted significant attention due to its project design and it is likely that it will contribute important lessons about research designs involving collaborative inquiry between CSOs and universities. It is unique in FP7 projects in giving final decision making to the CSOs. Prof. Harder was invited to speak about the ESDinds design at the EU Sustainable Development Conference in Brussels in May 2009:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index\\_en.cfm?pg=session&section=ps14&sess=14](http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index_en.cfm?pg=session&section=ps14&sess=14)



### The activities needed to get this far...

This project is fundamentally about co-science – where academic researchers and CSOs develop ideas together, from inception and through every stage to final outcomes. So the activities needed to make any progress at all included a lot of careful preliminary meetings, and explorations of CSO and academic vocabularies and expectations. Furthermore, this project involves science areas which cross many discipline boundaries, including environmental science, social science, psychology and business. Thus, the academic specialists involved had to put a lot of time and patience into developing common vocabularies and understanding expectations. This element of the work was complex involving reviews of literature in more than five discipline areas.

The researchers introduced the CSOs to key academic concepts associated with indicators, and the CSOs spent considerable time introducing the researchers to the details of their organisations and projects. The CSOs then directed the researchers in preliminary work to develop a 'pool' of indicators. The researchers devised a systematic approach, mapping out 'clusters' of values found, and preparing lists of potential indicators for the CSOs to consider. At a full consortium meeting a final set of key values and associated indicators were chosen to be further trialled with CSO projects; these 'trials' are now underway.

### Expected further results and impacts

By linking the ESDinds findings about the significance of ethical values in sustainability to the academic and policy literature on sustainable development, the project will contribute to a deeper conceptualization of the process of social transformation towards sustainability.

Furthermore, by linking the value-based indicators and assessment tools developed through ESDinds to the academic literature on measuring values, it may be possible to project wider social, organizational and individual impacts linked to the values we will have examined.



### For more information about the ESDinds project:

Visit the ESDinds website: [www.esdinds.eu](http://www.esdinds.eu)

Contact the project team via skype: [eshdinds.brighton](https://www.skype.com/join/eshdinds), or email: [sdecu@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:sdecu@brighton.ac.uk)