

How the SDGs can help unlock the mystery of community foundation impact



What do the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainable grant-making practices have in common? Both represent a long-term commitment to supporting the people, places, and communities that we are all part of. Below, Rosemary MacDonald, Chief Executive, UK Community Foundations (UKCF), sets out the connection between sustainable funding and the Sustainable Development Goals

Rosemary Macdonald, CEO, UKCF

‘In recent years there have been growing calls for philanthropic giving to local charities to become more financially sustainable. What this means in practice is a move away from short-term funding towards supporting everyday running costs and investing in capacity building. Underpinning all these eminently sensible calls is a recognition of the huge impact of local charities and community organisations.

What does sustainable funding look like on the ground?

- In Bristol, Quartet Community Foundation’s Funding the Future programme supported anchor organisations, such as Community Centres, to adapt to the changing fundraising environment and find new ways of generating income.
- The Heart of England Community Foundation’s Doing Things Differently Fund supported 167 charities across the West Midlands to increase their digital capacity to deliver services online.
- The Building Effectiveness Programme run by the Hertfordshire Community Foundation supports local charities by offering a nine-month intensive development programme tailored to make their organisations stronger, more effective, and sustainable.

Allowing local charities to move away from a hand-to-mouth model of fundraising, to adapt and futureproof, and to focus on improving the service they deliver to vulnerable people should be at the forefront of philanthropic thinking. If you ever needed any convincing as to the value of local charities, all you need to do is look at their response to Covid-19. Without their efforts, millions of people would have been left without access to food distribution networks, mental health support, wellbeing activities and much more. Philanthropy helped make this happen.

As in all walks of life - communication is key. I’ve worked in the charity sector for the past 14 years. I don’t need any persuasion as to the value of our work. But for those that are less familiar with what we do, the cacophony of different impact measurements, evaluations, and reporting shrouds our sector in mystery.



If we want more funding in the sector to plug the well-documented shortfalls, we need to speak in a language that is commonly understood by the donors we want to give. The SDGs provide an off-the-shelf framework for us to do just that. For instance, a 2019 survey found that of the 250 world's largest global companies surveyed, 82 per cent have reported on the SDGs. The 17 interconnected Goals, from No Poverty (Goal 1) to Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10), are broad enough to align with the huge variety of causes that the UK's 170,000 charities support.

When philanthropic giving is framed within the SDG mantra of securing 'a better and more sustainable future for all', funding sustainability makes perfect sense. The 2030 Agenda wasn't intended to be achieved overnight. Its success is contingent on a long-term approach. The only effective way to do this is through a place-based model that is defined by funding sustainability.

Working with our network of community foundations we see how local partnerships benefit the people and places they operate in. By aligning with the SDGs, donors can use the scope of the Goals to focus on the issues that matter most to them. As one donor to the County Durham Community Foundation puts it: 'The SDGs have enabled us to identify themes that are broad enough to allow diversity of choice, and yet keep us aligned with our long-term vision.'

We believe local charities have a key role to play in meeting the Goals. There are no quick fixes for the climate crisis, deep-seated inequalities, and regional disparities. Using the SDGs, we can sew a golden thread through philanthropy. We can build trust and understanding between different sectors, open up new avenues for partnership, and start building the capacity of our incredible local organisations.

It doesn't matter whether you are a philanthropist, funder, local charity, or company. We all have a stake in seeing a fairer and more sustainable world, and we all have a role to play in making it happen.

If you are interested in finding out more about community foundations and our work with the Sustainable Development Goals, please [read our latest report](#)'

Rosemary MacDonald

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