

How to use marketing tools to encourage business to be involved in social activities based on the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

A survey of community foundations in Poland shows that while most see a connection between their work and the SDGs they do not tend to utilise the SDG framework in marketing or building relationships with businesses. The application of programme design and marketing tools - Brand DNA, Problem Fit Solution, are used to demonstrate how the SDGs can be incorporated, in order to raise awareness and to build a common language and thus to exploit the potential of cooperation with businesses and for fundraising or the implementation of joint activities.

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Summary

Community Foundations (CFs) **use the SDGs** for their day-to-day operations, although most **do not identify them by that name**. Incorporating them into their marketing communications does not require much effort. What is needed, however, is to raise **awareness of the SDGs** and show **how this global idea guides local projects** and ventures, and how it directly affects each of us, each community foundation or business. Unlike business, CFs, who often do not have much capacity or financial resources, will not play much of a role in promoting the idea. Instead, they have a lot of clout to galvanise the entire ecosystem into action, strengthening existing partnerships and generating new ones, as well as supporting and promoting initiatives that could operate on the basis of the SDGs.

The key, however, is to **develop a common language** that is equally understood in non-government, business or government circles. The survey and my observations show that Polish community foundations usually have the support and understanding of all sectors at the local level, and that local leaders get involved. That's why it's so important now that we view the Sustainable Development Goals in the same way. Then it will be much easier for us to adopt them and systematically implement them in our philosophy, mission and any strategic activities implemented for the benefit of local communities. This will also allow us to cooperate more effectively with business and jointly solve social problems directly related to the SDGs.

When business and NGOs are facing a challenge right now not only because of the pandemic, but also because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the threats it brings. The world has changed not only in economic terms, but also has further social consequences:

- the impact of inflation on the material situation of Poles, their daily life and business;
- social isolation, which contributed to a terrible mental state among many people, numerous depressions among children and youth, their parents and seniors, who have a growing problem to cope with everyday functioning;
- Ukrainians leaving and seeking refuge in Poland and other European countries that do not have an effective migration policy;
- lack of developed methods of solving social conflicts related to the influx of migrants, related to multiculturalism;
- a huge need for psychological, medical support;
- low educational standards due to distance learning and poor school compliance;
- optimism, social empathy and the unbelievable willingness to help, which was activated in many Poles at the beginning of the pandemic or the war, begins to decline and causes more and more indifference, jealousy, but also envy.

All above points directly relate to different SDGs such as no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, good quality work, decent work and economic growth and sustainable cities and communities. So the questions for now are:

1. How to achieve those Goals in the currently existing situation in Poland and other countries?
2. How to strengthen relations with business to build and improve a better world in economic, social and environmental dimensions?

Is there a single simple solution to encourage business to be involved in social activities based on SDGs? Everything depends on cultural and regional context, and communication challenges that we are facing. If we think in a long term strategy we should focus on **systemic approach, planned, complex activities and local networks of support**. Implementation of the above-mentioned goal based on SDGs will strengthen our relations, mobilize us and business to act for common good, and solve social problems that regard each of us.

Based on my experience and observations, as well as the results of the surveys, by far the most effective method is **local networking**. It can be developed during a **meeting and direct contact with the person or business representative** we want to target. Most of those surveyed indicated charitable **events, trainings, webinars** presenting good practices implemented in Poland and other parts of the world will also play an important role.

A starting point could be for community foundations to incorporate SDGs in their programme design and marketing - for example using tools such as Brand DNA, Problem Fit Solution. This not only helps raise awareness of the SDGs but builds a connection between the Global Goal and the local activity and starts to bring the 'common language' into use.

However, these are just marketing tools and promotional activities that can support us in educating and raising awareness of what the SDGs are and why they are worth implementing in our daily operations. The key, however, is **social trust, openness and commitment**, which can encourage business to participate in society and implement projects based on common goods. Without this, our marketing tools will be of no use. That is why it is so important to know how to strengthen ties, communicate with the community and build cross-sector partnerships. We need a framework based on common values and SDGs that are understood by all in the same way and a long term strategy. However, it requires time, effort, patience and dedication. But If we know how to do this, there is a huge possibility that local business, as well as other sectors, will play to one goal with us.

Community Foundations - definition and standards in Poland

The community foundation (CF) model can be very flexible and adapted to different cultures and geography, despite differences in history of the third sector and citizen engagement in any particular area. There are specific rules which determine the community foundation as an entity and regards organisational, management, financial or legislative issues. If we attempt to define the model or pattern of the community foundation, we have to concentrate on each country separately. Local circumstances determine economic and social situations which are different in every part of the world. The organisation that brings together and supports CFs in Poland is [The Federation of Community Foundations in Poland \(FCF\)](#). It associates 15 community foundations from 11 voivodeships, co-operates with many NGOs in Poland and abroad. Its mission is to promote local philanthropy, strengthen member organisations and connect people who take care of local community needs. Its general provisions are:

- **Dialogue and sense of community:** to create an open space where members respect each other, support and learn from each other;
- **Social and business partnerships:** to built social and business partnerships based on common goals, vision, values and foundations for positive changes taking place in local communities;
- **Collective impact:** to involve members and partners in order to create an effective support system for new and effective ways of solving social problems;
- **Potential and resources:** to use potential and resources of each member organisation, strengthen the effectiveness of implemented activities;
- **Sustainable Development Goals:** to implement activities based on the goals of sustainable development in the economic, economic and social dimensions, taking into account the needs of future generations.

At the end of 2022 **The Federation of Community Foundations in Poland**, as a result of analyzes and evaluation of good documents practices of Polish and foreign organisations, surveys and workshops conducted among FCF members developed [The Standards of Operation of Community Foundations](#). This document (available in English) defines what a CF is and it is intended to provide quality, consistency and credibility in the eyes of partners, donors, and those involved in activities. It also helps to set the right direction for new member organisations that want to be called a CF. The document consists of five parts concerning general provisions, organisational and legal acts, financial management, activities of member organisations and cooperation within the FCF.

The key guidelines specifying Community Foundations are:

Legal and organisational acts describe CFs as:

- an independent, apolitical, non-profit philanthropic organisation
- an organisation that operates in the legal form: foundation, association or non-profit company
- an organisation caring for the transparency and openness of its activities publishing reports on activities containing organisational and financial information
- an organisation guided by the principles of impartiality, openness, diversity of courses of action and public responsibility.
- An organisation that works with at least 3 partners, including e.g local government, public institutions, business, other non-governmental organisations

Finance management

- Has at least three different sources of financing
- Should have or strive to create endowment capital
- Has developed methods of co-operation with donors
- It should strive to build financial stability in the long term

Activities

- Promotes local philanthropy and supports the process of building a civil society
- Implements and supports activities to improve the quality of life of the local community living in the geographical area specified in the statute of the organisation
- Recognises the problems and needs of the local community and carries out activities aimed at solving these problems
- Supports other organisations, civic groups through grant or scholarship programmes
- Implements its statutory goals by developing its own projects
- Offers support for a wide range of initiatives targeted at various social groups, including minorities

Sustainable Development Goals - how they are perceived and understood by CFs in Poland

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global plan of action developed by the United Nations to build a better world economically, socially and environmentally. Their idea is to achieve prosperity and to care for future generations. In caring for them, national governments, international organisations, local governments, NGO's, the scientific and business sectors, but also citizens themselves should act in a sustainable way, with respect for the environment and act as a catalyst for social changes that positively affect our daily lives.

SDGs are global in nature, but their achievement also depends on actions at national and local levels. In Poland, one can observe organisations that are trying to function based on these goals. However, many of these organisations are not aware that they are operating with reference to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or do not feel the need to include them in their strategic and marketing activities. Mainly because knowledge of the SDGs is really low and their potential is underestimated. This applies to both the government, business and NGO sectors. That's why it's so important to educate wisely and practically in this area, and to show good practices that will inspire organisations to implement the SDGs into their mission, vision, implemented programmes, activities, and build cross-sector partnerships that strengthen their image in the community.

Every entrepreneur, local government representative or NGO reaching out to their audience can significantly influence the spread of the idea of SDGs. This also applies to community foundations. CFs are aware of local realities and needs, they know how to build trust and combine know-how with the experience of local residents. Local networks can be a great platform for exchanging information, organising meetings or implementing projects based on the SDGs. They can be a model example of bottom-up activities based on global ideas guiding institutions around the world in the same way.

For the purpose of this work, a survey was conducted among representatives of Polish community foundations affiliated with the Federation. Its purpose was to find out opinions on:

- the level of awareness and scale of activities taking into account SDGs and implemented by NGOs,
- methods of cooperation with business,
- the use of marketing tools to induce business to become more involved in the implementation of the SDGs together with NGOs,

Of 15 community foundations affiliated with the Federation, 11 organisations took part in the survey. The questions were mainly answered by the Presidents of the

Foundation, the Board Committee or programme coordinators.

Awareness of the SDGs

Of all those surveyed, only one organisation did not know what the SDGs were. The vast majority rated their overall level of knowledge at 3 (scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being minimum, 5 being maximum). Most CFs see a connection between the SDGs and the activities they implement.

According to those surveyed, information on the **SDGs** is most often conveyed by the **NGO and business communities**. Local governments, the academic community and the government fared the worst. Especially in the case of the latter, it is very difficult to see initiatives that would refer to the SDGs. On the contrary, local businesses are gradually trying to emphasise activities dedicated to the subject.

Virtually the majority of respondents believe that individual initiatives involving residents of a community can influence the realisation of the SDGs albeit their level of knowledge on the subject is very low.

Regarding the **mission** of CFs, half of the respondents indicated that they take the SDGs into account. The others do not take it into account or are not quite sure.

Relations with the environment

All CFs cooperate with other NGOs. The vast majority also implement projects with business, but only half describe these relationships as good. For the rest of those surveyed, they are poor or very poor.

Marketing activities

The vast majority of marketing activities carried out by CFs are aimed at the NGO community and the media. For business, only 6 local funds conduct them. This is an interesting result, since practically the majority of CFs believe that such activities are definitely needed and affect the effectiveness of cooperation and building of productive functioning partnerships.

Almost half of those surveyed are unlikely to include the SDGs in their marketing efforts. One quarter try to present them, and the remaining group is not quite sure how to do it, because they lack the knowledge of how to incorporate the SDGs into everyday marketing communications.

A key argument for starting or increasing CFs activities that take the SDGs into account is obtaining more funding, e.g., **receiving grants**, and **improving the organisation's image**.

Cooperation with business based on the SDGs

All respondents agreed that the activities of companies should take into account the achievement of the SDGs. When asked what arguments could convince business representatives to engage with NGOs in the joint implementation of activities that take into account the SDGs, the following responses received the most votes:

- improving the image among the local community,
- making CSR activities more attractive,
- improving relations with the institutional environment.

For CFs, the most effective form of communication in the process of acquiring business partners is **direct marketing and online marketing**. Activities using TV and radio channels received the least number of votes. The marketing tool that was most popular among respondents is **charity events, Facebook activities and the website**. This was followed by brochures, online and radio advertising. Zero votes were received by telemarketing, Instagram and Tik Tok.

Despite CFs openness to cooperation with business and willingness to implement joint activities, with the exception of one organisation, none has a dedicated offer aimed at businesses. Three quarters of organisations believed that even if they had the readiness to create one they would not know how to prepare it.

Good Practice - The Snow Mountain Community Fund and project based on SDGs

Snow Mountain Community Fund (SMCF) was established in 1998. It operates in a region that has 45 000 inhabitants. Its mission is to change the mentality of people and convince them that everybody could be a changemaker. During 22 years it has:

- given 834 grants to local initiatives, and 1660 scholarships for poor and gifted students;
- set up 10 rehabilitation centers;
- established 14 memory funds helping people understand the idea of philanthropy;
- implemented more than 100 educational programmes for the elderly to children, the healthy and the sick, people from cities and villages - motivating them to act for common good;
- supported local projects in education, ecology, culture, health, sport, art, democracy, tolerance and cross-border cooperation.

Title of the project: Street law for women-vehicle for self-development.

Aim of the project: To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The leitmotif of the project was to strengthen women and girls by acquiring proper knowledge and skills, mainly in the field of interpersonal, personal and legal competences.

SDGs: gender equality, quality of education, health and wellbeing

Animation methods: workshops with particular programme, discussions with local society and social analysis

Design methods: Brand DNA, Problem Fit Solution

Project step by step

To be able to implement a project that will:

- make us act effectively and work based on common goals, vision and values,
- connect people who care about the needs of the local community;
- cooperate wisely and use our and our society mutual potential, knowhow and resources;
- build cross-sector partnerships maximizing the effects of our activities;
- raise the awareness of SDGs;
- build our brand in the long term process.

We should create a space that helps us to analyze social needs and at the same time

gives us new opportunities.

Before we move on we should ask ourselves whether we have a consistent organisational **image**, **operating philosophy**, **identification system** and **brand identity** reflected in the business and marketing activities undertaken. If it is:

- clear and transparent;
- consistent with the mission and professed values;
- understood and accepted by the Board members, employees, volunteers and members of the organisation;
- clearly communicated,.

There is a huge chance that our project will be carried out in an effective way, will help us to meet the results we set out to achieve, reach out to local society and arouse their involvement and sympathy. A very useful tool for organisations that presents the essence of our business identity and verifies the quality that we want to offer is **Brand DNA**. It helps to build the foundation of our brand and clearly shows how we can weave in our operating philosophy and key messages relating to the SDGs. If Brand DNA is coherent, if it shows what value we provide to the market we can move on with confidence and energy! An example of that model is shown below and it regards our project run for the SMCF.

BRAND DNA



With a strategy for the development of our organisation, consistent brand foundation reflected in our daily activities, it is much easier to reach our audience groups. However, there are situations when, despite a project idea, an action plan based on our brand DNA and tailored marketing efforts, there is low interest among the local community.

What is a common reason for this? Lack of verification of our audience's expectations and delving into their true desires. We often hypothesise what this might be, write into the application form a series of proposals and activities that seem appropriate to us, and during the project it turns out that this is not in line with the expectations of our audience. So what should be done? We should find out directly from our target audience what their real needs, dreams and ideas are.

A very helpful tool that shows our audience's perspective is the one-page **Problem Fit Solution model (PFS)**. It is a design thinking-approach, it not only does it help us find and understand the needs and problems of our target groups, but supports us in preparing solutions that we can provide to them. In addition, it allows us to look at the project holistically taking into account such areas as value proposition, communication channels, key metrics or costs. More information about Problem Fit Solution you can find [here](#). Below you can check an example based on the SMCF case study.

Workshops using PFS are definitely best conducted together with the people we want to target. In case of the SMCF project, we invited 15 ladies from different industries and sectors who were in different job positions to the meeting. It was a great occasion to talk about common problems and important issues. By introducing and explaining the key elements of the model to them, we worked together to find answers to the questions we had, and to think about how, through synergy, we could have a greater impact on social change. This allowed us to develop a proposal for activities that made it easier for us to launch the project. In addition, this meeting was a great opportunity to smuggle in the idea of the SDGs and their distinctive visual identity. According to the survey results and our experience, direct relations and contact with people, including business is a great way to promote the SDGs.

This model is made up of 9 parts:

Customer segments:

Women of the SMCF region: representatives of business, NGOs, public institutions, media, initiative groups

The problem and its source:

The stereotype of a woman especially in small local communities is to sit at home

taking care of children, cleaning and cooking. She doesn't have much space to develop her passion and create her own initiatives. What is the reason for this?

- women are often ashamed to get involved in public and come up with their own initiatives, preferring to isolate themselves instead of taking matters into their own hands and taking care of themselves. This is also often due to low self-esteem and lack of confidence in their sense of empowerment,
- they lack practical knowledge and opportunities to develop practical skills,
- It is difficult to find worthwhile and substantive training in small communities, and those that are online are often too expensive.

Existing alternatives:

- sitting idly at home and not pursuing needs and dreams,
- taking part in local initiatives usually organised by community centers,
- following online events, podcasts or webinars to expand knowledge,
- some of the women on behalf of the institutions where they work (e.g., community centers, libraries, schools, local NGOs) implement the Act Locally grant programmes that we administer.

Our solution:

Creating a space for women who want to create and seek opportunities for the development of their prosocial and business activities. By sharing their knowledge and skills with others, they educate, inspire, support and empower each other. The solution will be a series of development workshops and a two-day free of charge conference combined with interactive activities. The event will be preceded by a contest in which every resident of the Sniezník Massif region will be able to submit a woman from their region who deserves to be recognised and appreciated. And so daughters submitted their mothers and grandmothers, students submitted their teachers, employees submitted their bosses or colleagues, residents submitted social activists or NGO representatives etc.

→ this solution will also be a great space to promote the 17 SDGs and raise awareness of how they accompany us in our daily social and business activities.

Key Metrics:

- there will be a dedicated website and a discussion group on FB for women looking for personal and professional development and willing to share their skills.
- the project will give courage to 100 women and make them feel important, needed, and appreciated.
- number of newly established partnerships between women

Unique Value Proposition:

The only venture of its kind in our region:

- connecting women from the business sector, public administration and NGOs,
- making each woman feel important and needed, taking care of each other and supporting each other in individual and professional development,
- giving a sense of empowerment and strengthening the potential that translates into increased activity of women in the local community,

Unfair Advantages:

It is something that cannot be easily copied or bought. In our case it was:

- well-known and recognisable brand that is the SMCF,
- efficient, well-liked and well-energised organisers of the entire event,
- integration of women's community from one region, united by similar goals, needs and dreams,
- the first such initiative in the region, which will initiate a unique women's movement of active representatives of business, NGO, public administration and media

Channels:

Online: Website set up on splashthat.com and evenea.pl where women will register to organised workshops and events, websites of our partners, Facebook (our profile and discussion group (at the moment there are more than 170 active women)

Offline: buzz and direct marketing, media relations, outdoor campaign

Cost Structure:

Conferences and workshops: venue, catering, fee for trainers, promotional materials (FYI. website splashthat.com and [evenea](http://evenea.pl) are tools free of charge)

Benefits (in original version of model this part is called revenue streams):

Our Organisation:

- strengthen the image of our organisation in the local environment,
- establishing relationships with a new target group and strengthening relationships with existing partners,
- acquiring potential donors who will support our organisation and donate their 1% from the tax base

Local society:

- self-confidence translating into bold planning of one's future, implementation of ideas for personal and professional development,

- greater involvement of women in local activities,
- fruitful partnerships linking representatives of NGOs, business, public administration and the media

Such models as Brand DNA and Problem Fit Solution are just two of the suggestions that can be used when creating projects to effectively reach out to audiences, build relationships with the environment including business and make the local community aware of what the SDGs are. In the case of our organisation, they worked very well and additionally ensure the sustainability of the initiative we implemented. The movement we initiated continues to this day.