

To learn and understand the SDGs in order to be able to communicate the idea of the SDGs and their benefits to FFL members and develop guidelines for including the SDG in the day-to-day activities of FFL and its members.

Iwona Olkowicz
Federation of Community Foundations, Poland

A paper supported by ECFI -
European Community Foundation Initiative,
in the context of the Learning Lab 2022

2022
LEARNING LAB FOR
CHANGEMAKERS



Abstract

Awareness of the SDGs in Poland is low. It is recognised however that community foundations can contribute to the realisation of the Goals through their work in advocacy and policy development and in their support for local organisations. Interviews with leaders from support organisations elsewhere in Europe highlighted how the SDGs have been helpful in community foundation development and how they feature in day-to-day work. The role that support organisations play educating, building awareness and implementing the SDGs among community foundations is crucial.

Contents

- 1. IDEA OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SDGs BY COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS**
- 2. HOW SDGs CAN BE HELPFUL IN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT**
- 3. ACTIONS FOR INCLUDING THE SDGs IN DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS**
- 4. THE ROLE OF A NETWORK IN HELPING COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ENGAGE WITH THE SDGs**

1. IDEA OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SDGs BY COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

The effectiveness of social change begins with small, everyday actions that we can change in small steps and contribute to global goals that can protect humanity from a climate catastrophe. Even though UN member states have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the awareness of the SDGs among citizens is quite low, and in the public discussion in Poland it is almost imperceptible. Therefore, actions implemented at the local level are important.

Community foundations play a fundamental role in the implementation of sustainable development goals. The SDGs are a set of 17 global goals that aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Community foundations are organisations that are dedicated to improving the lives of people in their local communities and to be the changemakers. By working together at the local level, community foundations can help achieve the SDGs and create a better future for everyone.

Community foundations use a variety of tools to promote the application of the SDGs in practice to educate local communities and connect local action to global goals. Community foundations can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs through their grant programs and support (and educate) their beneficiaries in activities/projects that align with the SDGs.

In addition to providing funding, community foundations can also play a role in advocacy and policy development. Community foundations have a unique perspective on the needs of their communities and can use their voice to advocate for policies that support the SDGs. This can include policies related to climate change, poverty reduction, and gender equality.

Another way that community foundations can support the SDGs is by promoting partnerships and cross sectoral cooperation. Community foundations can bring together different organisations, businesses, and individuals to work towards common goals. By fostering partnerships, community foundations can help create a more coordinated and effective approach to achieving the SDGs.

Finally, community foundations can also play a role in education and awareness-raising. Many people are not aware of the SDGs and the impact that they can have on their lives. Community foundations can help raise awareness about the SDGs and educate people about the actions they can take to support them. This can include public events, workshops, and educational resources.

Community foundations have a unique opportunity to support the implementation of the SDGs. By using their expertise in grantmaking, advocacy, partnerships, and education, community foundations can help create a more sustainable and equitable future for everyone. Community Foundation Support Organisations (CFSOs) can play an extremely important role in supporting Community foundations. More information about this can be found in the last part of the report.

SDGs IN PRACTICE

A survey conducted in fall 2022 among members of the Federation of Community Foundations in Poland shows (11 responses out of 15 member organisations) that 90% of Polish community foundation leaders know what the SDGs are. Only one organisation indicated a negative answer.

The level of knowledge about the SDGs is rather low - on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 5 means a high level, 1 the lowest), seven organisations indicated a medium level (rating 3), and two each indicated a fairly high level (rating 4) and a fairly low level (rating 2).

Community foundation leaders were also asked to rate the overall level of knowledge about the SDGs in their local community, and here the indications were even lower: more than half (6 organisations) rated the level as quite low (rating 2), three organisations indicated a medium level (rating 3), and two indicated a very low level (rating 1).

When asked about the source of knowledge about the SDGs, the most frequently indicated is the community of social organisations, followed by business, then the media and the "Global challenges, local solutions" program run by the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland, which directly addresses the SDGs in its principles.

We also asked community foundation leaders whether the community foundation mission takes the SDGs into account. More than half (6 organisations) answered in the affirmative, while 2 indicated a "don't know" response. Three organisations responded in the negative, meaning that the CF mission does not address the SDGs.

The above data shows that the level of knowledge and practical reference of community foundation activities to the SDGs is at a low level in Poland. From interviews with community foundation leaders, it appears that they do not have such a need, a necessity to communicate about the SDGs, the exception being the ARFP program "Global challenges, local solutions," which enforces in its procedures the indication of the specific goal to which the project submitted in the competition

refers. This is perhaps the only motivator for individual community foundations to communicate about the SDGs.

The level of awareness of the SDGs and practical implementation of them in their operations in European countries varies. Interviews with leaders and community foundation practitioners show that in countries such as Spain, UK, Germany, Italy, the understanding, and level of implementation of the goals by community foundations is high. The example of activities from Spain, where awareness of the essence of the SDGs is already being built in schools, shows that a huge role is played in this by policies at the national level (not only requirements for large companies, but also educational programs and building civic awareness of the issue).

For the report, I interviewed support organisation leaders from Romania, Serbia and Italy to learn about their motivations and how they are implementing the process of educating community foundations about the SDGs.

In Romania, the process of education about SDG has started some time ago, and - as Stefan Cibian says - "they are rather at the beginning of the process". There is a fairly high level of awareness of the SDGs in Romania. For some community foundations, the motivator was the GCLS program. When asked why start such a process, he replied "to support the community and be sustainable." In addition, Stefan emphasized that a meeting or workshop devoted to the SDGs is a good opportunity to talk about the long-term vision, because few people think about it, in the hustle and bustle of daily affairs we sometimes forget the long-term vision of changes".

In Italy, the second approach to implementing the SDGs was successful (after the first failed in 2016, where an attempt was made to talk about a completely new, unknown concept) when it was implemented as a strategic agenda. In 2019, when the process began, awareness of the SDGs was already high, and it was very helpful. Assifero, the Italian association of foundations, worked in two tracks - it conducted awareness-building activities at the national level and worked individually with community foundations to implement a systemic approach to the specific community at local level.

The situation is slightly different in Serbia, where the level of interest in the SDGs among community foundations is quite low, the SDGs are considered a somewhat artificial concept, with a complicated way of measuring impact. Lack of short-term benefits to implement SDGs and difficult tools how to measure them can be the barriers for CFs and other NGOs.

All the interviewees emphasized that the SDGs are a strategic framework, a coherent framework, a direction for programming social projects. SDGs is a strategic approach

to community development (Marija Mitrovic), it is a philosophy of community foundations operation in a long-term perspective (Stefan Cibian), it is a strategic framework for community focused organisation (Francesca Mereta). SDGs help to be connected to the global movement.

In each of these countries, an important role was played by an organisation supporting community foundations - meetings, workshops (also with the participation of ECFI) were held, also with the participation of students (e.g. in Romania, the Global Diplomacy Lab was organised - a broad discussion on how to bring SDGs as a core of community foundations), meetings with UN Global Compact representatives were organised (as for example in Serbia), or a series of open workshops for foundations (not only community foundations) related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was organised in Italy (how to implement the 2030 Agenda into the community foundations mission), as well as call for opportunity for community foundations to publish reports on SDGs.

2. HOW SDGs CAN BE HELPFUL IN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

From interviews with experts and leaders of organisations supporting community foundations in Romania, Serbia and Italy, it appears that the SDGs provide a coherent and broad framework that helps to look strategically at community development. They are a “good excuse” for a broad discussion of a long-term approach when there is not enough time to do so in the flurry of daily affairs. It is also a good opportunity to educate entire teams - not only the Board of Directors, but also community foundations councils, teams and volunteers.

Above all, the implementation of the SDGs by community foundations is also a way to introduce innovation to local communities, to educate local activists benefiting from community foundation support in the field of SDGs, and to focus grant programs on those goals that are driven by community needs and at the same time contribute to building stable, ethical local communities.

Stefan Cibian from Romania pointed out an important aspect of community foundation development - SDGs are good starting step to develop the mission of community foundation. This is a very good time to have a broad discussion with the entire community foundation team (council, board, team, volunteers) about what does sustainable community mean? How can we make our community more sustainable? What can we (as particular community foundations) do to improve it?

A similar approach to working on SDGs was presented by Marija Mitrovic from Serbia - SDGs and targets are the basis for updating the CFs' mission and its strategic approach to community development. Targets can be indications of what areas are still unmet, poorly supported, and important from the perspective of sustainable and stable development of the local community.

Italian community foundations integrate SDGs into the grantmaking process - they require their grantees to indicate which SDGs their projects fit into. This is an educational process that is a strong incentive for local activists receiving community foundation support to start thinking about the development of their local communities through the lens of the SDGs as well. As Francesca Mereta mentioned, Assifero, which supports CFs in Italy, is working with community foundations to encourage Italian community foundations to put Agenda 2030 into their missions and actions, while keeping in mind the financial aspects (sustainable investment). It's also important to include community foundations and council members in the strategic planning process, as they collectively make key decisions, including those about implementing the SDGs.

The SDGs can also help with the creation or revision of already existing procedures: grants, investment, management, so that the community foundation is an organisation that contributes in a real way to the realisation of the SDGs. The fact that community foundation is an organisation that has a strong influence on the way the community operates (conditions for applicants, partnerships with other entities, role as a promoter of innovative approaches) makes community foundations perfect organisations for educating and effectively implementing the SDGs at the local level.

3. ACTIONS FOR INCLUDING THE SDGs IN DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

SDGs can be not only a signpost for a long-term strategic approach to developing communities in a sustainable way, but also a pretext for changing procedures, everyday small actions that can contribute to global changes for the benefit of the planet and its sustainable development.

The following list of actions helps to implement the SDGs on many levels of community foundation operation:

- **Understand the SDGs and relevance for community foundations**

Before integrating the SDGs into your organisation's activities, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of them. Educate your team members, volunteers, and

decision-makers on what the SDGs are, what they stand for, and how they can be implemented in your community. Discussion on how you (as a group) understand the 17 goals and 169 targets.

Practices and experience from countries that work on SDGs implementation can be very helpful to work on your specific context and to avoid mistakes.

➤ **Verify your mission according the SDGs**

SDGs can help to revise or to create (for new community foundations) the mission of community foundation align with SDGs. The Goals can be helpful to identify what other areas in our community are unsatisfied, supported to a small extent, what SDGs we should put more emphasis on due to the specificity of our region and pressing problems of our community.

➤ **Integrate the SDGs into the community foundation strategy**

Organise a series of workshops with the team, decision-makers, and volunteers to work out the answers for the following questions:

What sustainable development means for your CF?

What can we do together to make our community develop in a sustainable way?

What will our community look like in 2030?

What actions should we make today so that in a few decades our community will be what we want it to be?

What SDGs address key needs or problems in our community and should be prioritised?

➤ **Create a list of “organisational habits” - approaches, small things that we can do every day to make our work more SDGs friendly.**

This part can include policies related to climate change, poverty reduction, and gender equality.

These actions can be in the dimension of small step policies, which we will also encourage to implement among our grantees or partners, such as environmentally friendly office procedures: saving energy or preferring forms of electronic workflow, purchasing from local suppliers/considering environmental aspects in purchases, preferring public transportation, supporting local entrepreneurship, or taking care of gender balance and minority representation in various bodies.

Many organisations already have appropriate procedures in place that can be adopted for your organisation and together with your team you can build a culture of a planet-friendly organisation that contributes to the SDGs.

➤ **Create and develop the “SDGs oriented” grant programs**

Community foundation can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs through their grant programs and support (and educate) their beneficiaries in activities/projects that align with the SDGs.

This can include projects that focus on education, healthcare, gender equality, clean energy, and more. By supporting these projects, community foundations can help create a more sustainable and equitable future for their communities.

Grant programs may have procedures that require applicants to indicate which SDGs the project fits into - that is, education at a minimum level to start educational activities addressed to applicants in the simplest way.

Community foundations can also communicate community needs through the SDGs, identifying those Goals that are key in the community and prioritizing them in their grant programs. This approach can also be a good way to inform the community that their individual activities are not "just projects," but contribute to larger, global goals and are part of a process of social change.

➤ **Build partnerships with other organisations**

Identify partners with whom you will more effectively implement the SDGs and who can help promote the SDGs in local communities. Build cross-sector partnerships taking into account the social benefits for all parties in the alliance and for the community itself. Carola Carazzone notes another aspect here "building an ecosystem aiming at collective impact ¹".

Build relationships with representatives of diverse stakeholders, because such partnerships based on good relationships are sustainable and resilient to perturbations.

➤ **Include SDGs into investment strategy**

Review the investment trusts and ensure that your investment strategy includes sustainable development goals. Consider ESG compliance. Include ethical and ecological aspects in investment activities.

¹ „Applying the 4Cs reactively: everyone can be a changemaker” by Carola Carazzone, ECFI 2022

4. THE ROLE OF A NETWORK IN HELPING COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ENGAGE WITH THE SDGS

Community foundation support organisations can play fundamental role in education and promotion in embracing the SDGs by community foundations. Considering the previous experience of organisations supporting community foundations in Italy, Germany, Romania and the UK, collective educational activities in the field of understanding and implementing the SDGs are much more effective than those implemented by individual community foundations.

The survey published in April 2021, conducted by CSR Consulting and Bank BNP Paribas as part of the 17 Goals Campaign, shows that 51% of the population in Poland have not heard of the 2030 Agenda (and another 24% have heard this term, but do not know what it means), 19% of the population do not know what the SDGs are, and 22% know the concept, but do not know anything about it. These surveys suggest that NGOs should educate citizens about the SDGs. While at the national level there are organisations that reach out to citizens in large cities with information, at the local level community foundation and support organisations can and should take on such a role.

One more thing is clear from the above survey: among the factors that encourage people to act on the SDGs, concrete knowledge about what actions can be taken was listed first (36% of respondents), additional financial incentives (e.g., reimbursement for the installation of solar panels) were listed second (28%), in third place (16%) specific examples of activities were indicated as inspiration.

Both knowledge and inspiration/good practices can be promoted by networks supporting the development of community foundations.

CFSOs have a much greater potential to **implement educational campaigns** at the national level (such as is done by the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland within the program "Global challenges, local solutions"²), having a consistent message, greater reach and a larger potential audience. **Educational activities** carried out by supporting organisations from Italy, Serbia or Romania indicate greater effectiveness in the process of mutual learning. CFSOs also have greater access to experts from European countries who can **facilitate the educational process**. Joint training, workshops and working meetings (which can take place online or face-to-face) are much more effective and motivating than just community foundations meetings in their own group.

² <https://www.localsolutionsfund.org/knowledge-hub/learning-materials/>

The promotion of good practices (also thanks to the exchange of experiences carried out by ECFI) among community foundations is also an important success factor in the implementation of the SDGs. **Advisory support** tailored to the needs of individual community foundations, as shown by the Italian example, is also a valuable support from the CFSO for the effective implementation of the SDGs by community foundations in a given country.

The role of community foundations is also to **introduce innovations** at the local level. CFSOs combining the strengths of many local foundations can be an example of implementing innovative activities/approaches, such as educating local communities about the SDGs. Facilitation of such collective processes as the development of procedures (grants, office operation or investment policies) in accordance with the SDGs can not only be an excellent formula for CFSOs to support and mutually exchange community foundation experiences in implementing the SDGs, but also to support the local environment in which the community foundation operates.

As can be seen from the experience of several countries, the role of the CFSO in educating, building awareness and implementing the SDGs among community foundations is crucial.