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SDGs and Vital Signs - a powerful combination to shape a leadership role (North Milan Greater Area Foundation)

*Through using the SDG framework linked to Vital Signs North Milan Greater Area Foundation has positioned itself as a centre of knowledge and a community leader. **Daniele Giudici** describes how they brought the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to life, connecting them to their work, their engagement with others, and to the day to day work of local organisations. It connected local to global, helped identify indicators, provided a focus for action, and has provided the basis for the development of a common agenda among a range of stakeholders.*



The North Milan Greater Area Foundation (NMGAF) has been thinking since 2014 about how to define programmes that support NPOs in better and more effective ways to meet the needs in the community as well as to try to understand and fill gaps. With the University of Milan-Bicocca the foundation collected a set of data beyond a statistical survey, and listened to the voices of the community associations, delivering all the process of the international Vital Signs “method” - being the first community foundation in Italy to do so. Through this the NMGAF achieved significant goals:

- improved general engagement;
- informing other organisations that could be impacted by the focus group and data collection;
- announced to the broader community the foundation’s vision;
- and “opened the door”, providing an on-going information keeping the conversation moving for a greater alignment with other donors’ funds and programmes.

Unanimously, the NMGAF is now recognised by the community as being the ideal and real place where all NPOs and public / state welfare organisations can co-operate and discuss together the community (real) data, needs and new/unknown gaps.

Acting as a community leader, the NMGAF also introduced the SDGs on the table in order to foster the reality of a local and global perspective in philanthropy and in the whole third sector. This was not easy given that the UN goals were perceived as being something for others, at a higher level and somewhat far away from the reality their own work. The Vital Signs focus groups and activities (more than 15 meetings between

2015 and 2017) enabled the community foundation to show a real and an effective connection between the “17 Goals”, and the day-by-day NPO activities. The NMGAF started to match all the data and indicators of the community with the UN goals (as quoted in the first [Vital Signs report 2017/2018](#)). The community and the local NPOs started to see the 17 goals as representing their work and not anything theoretical. Moreover, in the second year of the Vital Signs activity (Comunità Vitali 2018-2019) the Foundation led 6 focus groups (targeting 3 with specific thematic social focus and additional 3 with open/general focus on the “State of the Community”), engaging more than 25 NPOs (acting in the community and serving an average of more than 950 people annually) and Governmental Organisations/Municipalities (serving around 250,000 people). This activity helped the community foundation to get a set of indicators of “what is” North Milan discussing them with the community/NPOs. The [2019 Vital Signs report](#) shows this process and the voices and quotes from the North Milan communities.

The NMGAF shows its commitment to SDGs matching the local data, suggestions and evidence reported in the focus groups as part of the global action to improve the quality of life for all communities around the world. This activity was based on 4 main areas:

1. Vulnerability (poor people, fragile situations in families, youth, care of the elderly, economic difficulties of unemployed people) with Goals 1, 2, 8, 10, 11.
2. People with disabilities (quality of life and independence in everyday activities) with Goals 3, 4, 10, 11, 16.
3. Education and school (NEET, students and areas with low level of education access/system) with Goals 3, 4, 10, 11, 16.
4. The welfare state and the status of the community (wellbeing inside community, community welfare, social links, the role of philanthropic organizations) with Goals 11 and 17.

Finally, the NMGAF established the first steps towards building a common agenda in partnership with public, private and governmental agencies and organisations, engaging community leaders in an ongoing discussion and plan for the next Vital Signs activity.

Daniele P. Giudici
Vice Chair

<http://www.fondazioneordmilano.org/comunita-vitali-english-version/>