

Roundtable on Optimising philanthropy's potential to fast-track the SDGs

Friday, 25 September 2015 | 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Hosted by the Ford Foundation, 320 E. 43rd Street, New York

Summary note

Background

The high level roundtable convened by the OECD Development Centre's Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD) and hosted by the Ford Foundation on 25th September brought together more than 40 **philanthropists, donors, private sector and government representatives**. Speakers included senior philanthropists from the Ford Foundation, Shell Foundation, Children Investment Fund Foundation, Novartis Foundation, Stars Foundation and the Foundation Center, together with representatives from the Netherlands, Mexico, Colombia and Canada.

As the global community was gathered in New York to endorse the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the roundtable provided an opportunity to discuss the **challenges and opportunities for philanthropy to accelerate progress and impact towards the post-2015** agenda by engaging in **multi-stakeholder partnerships**. Discussions focused on how foundations can do that as part of the **Accelerating Impact 2030** initiative, which is based on efforts led by netFWD and some of its members.

Main messages

The following trends and lessons learned based on the existing dialogue and cooperation between foundations and governments have been identified:

- **Governments increasingly admit that philanthropy can and must play a critical role in the SDGs.** The Financing for Development Conference held in Addis Ababa has already marked a significant evolution in focus from the Millennium Development Goals / Monterrey era, as its final outcome document recognises philanthropy beyond its funding capacity, as source of expertise and knowledge. This value added was reiterated. It lies in their flexibility, ability to take risks, be disconnected from the political cycle while being able to leverage funding through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Several governments (Mexico, Colombia, the Netherlands) shared examples of ongoing efforts to increasingly engage with foundations domestically.
- On their end, **philanthropists recognise the need to include governments and SDGs more deliberately into their theories of change and the power of partnerships.** Indeed, governments set the policy environments in which foundations and their partners operate, and the SDGs are likely to have a significant influence on the environment in which foundations operate. Governments remain best placed to ensure long term stability and scale of the foundations' efforts and they can also tackle market failures / create enabling environments required for high-potential development solutions to scale.

- **Both foundations and governments agree**, that leveraging the combined skills, assets, technologies, and resources of the public and private sectors in a more effective way can deliver far greater development outcomes and is the only option to achieve the SDGs (given the systemic nature of the major challenges confronted in the SDGs).

Nevertheless, **devising partnerships that are impactful and enduring remains a tall order for both foundations and governments:**

- **While foundations are already engaged in strategies of their own**, the SDGs – with their broad 17 goals and 169 targets - are bound to resonate with many foundations’ existing interests. **However**, most **foundations still lack clarity** on how exactly to refine their existing strategies and areas of work to **re-wire them to the post-2015 agenda**.
- While the SDGs will eventually provide foundations (and other actors) with some performance/effectiveness indicators (at least in some measurable/traceable areas of work), **the ability to generate data, measure progress, and track impact remain a key challenge in the philanthropic sector**. Philanthropic efforts in health provide a promising example because of their positive bias towards measurement and evaluation (randomised control trials).
- The SDGs are also seen as a useful framework to help development actors better coordinate their actions. Nevertheless, **coordination efforts should not come at the expense of foundations’ main comparative advantages**, such as autonomy, flexibility and appetite for risk and innovation. Philanthropy needs to build on those specific assets, while engaging in partnerships, and see where it fits and may create a difference. **Foundations may thus contribute to the SDGs in a variety of ways: as funders, innovators, conveners, risk mitigators, facilitators for market-based development solution**. All those contributions will be needed in the SDGs’ implementation.

The OECD netFWD’s role in brokering dialogue and cooperation between foundations and governments was recognised and praised:

- The development of the **Guidelines for Effective Philanthropic Engagement** (and their current piloting in Mexico, Myanmar, India and soon to be in South Africa) was cited and acknowledged as an important tool to help foundations and governments further their dialogues and partnerships.
- The newly introduced **“Accelerating Impact 2030”** initiative led by netFWD was welcomed as an additional step in furthering to bring together foundations, governments and other committed partners to pool their collective expertise and share knowledge to achieve greater impact at scale, with the potential to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.
- Selected catalytic foundations – and netFWD members – shared their existing experience in **developing frameworks to scale up and accelerate impact through deliberate collective action around clearly identified focus areas** in specific countries. Several other foundations specifically expressed support for the Initiative’s potential in creating a space where foundations can explore the relevance of such collaborative models and enhance institutional capacity to engage in impactful and sustainable partnerships.

Next steps

netFWD will develop and share a detailed proposal for the “Accelerating Impact 2030”, around the following main pillars:

1. **High-Impact Philanthropy Compass:** netFWD will develop guidance and good practices on how foundations can accelerate their impact individually and collectively by partnering with other development actors.
2. **Learning space:** netFWD will create a space where foundations can use the High-Impact Philanthropy Compass, explore the relevance of the collaborative models and enhance institutional capacity to engage in impactful and enduring partnerships.
3. **Evidence and data:** netFWD will create a bridge towards existing joint efforts targeting complex challenges in selected countries (in-country consortia) and develop a methodology to capture lessons and develop metrics to measure success (impact, quality of partnerships, acceleration potential for the SDGs). netFWD will then codify and help share transferable knowledge with foundations participating in the learning space and in the initiative at large.