EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CUADERNOS ORKESTRA
09/2022
ISSN 2340-7638

BENCHMARKING FOUNDATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Usue Lorenz Erice
Maddalen Alkorta
Patricia Canto-Farachala
Mercedes Oleaga
Eduardo Sisti

2022
Acknowledgements

This report is part of the research conducted for a project entitled ‘The contribution of foundations to smart specialisation strategies for sustainability (RIS4)’, undertaken by Orkestra and BBK.

The research team wishes to thank the Foundation for the support provided during the preparation of this report.
Executive summary

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the global expression of a transformational agenda in the economic, social and environmental spheres. The year 2020 marked the beginning of the *decade of action* in which the 2030 Agenda faces the challenge of implementing measures to achieve the goals set. Territorial and sectoral dimensions are especially important in this. Within the sectoral dimension, the private sector has emerged as a key sector in this decade for accelerating action-oriented efforts to achieve the 17 SDGs. The territorial dimension is also prominent because the major social challenges set out in the SDGs only make sense at the regional and local level (Wittmayer et al., 2014).

Among the constellation of actors that can contribute to addressing the 2030 Agenda, the European Union and the UN have identified foundations as being key actors. They are organisations that can make a contribution through funding and by using their potential to mobilise the actors involved. Although they are recognised as having a role in reaching the SDGs, there is little work on how these foundations can be stronger players in the attainment of these goals. This report identifies innovative practices implemented by a group of European foundations. The benchmarking exercise is based on: (i) the identification of a group of foundations that engage in innovative and/or differentiating practices in their SDG work; and (ii) a comparative analysis of these based on an analytical framework developed from the literature, publications, studies, and information on foundations that are available from various foundation associations. Good practices are distinctive practices of foundations in that they: (1) have greater learning potential for other foundations; and (2) are more relevant to the performance of SDG work. The figure below illustrates these grouped into four dimensions.

### Dimensions of good practice identified in the benchmarking exercise

Source: Developed by the authors
BENCHMARKING FOUNDATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Work linked to SDGs

1. This benchmarking exercise has highlighted two good practices for alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs:
   - **Strategic alignment with the SDGs**: Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo is the first Italian foundation with a background in banking to have implemented a strategic and operational alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by a process of internal restructuring in the field of human resources, the generation of new skills, and a more sustainable working environment that encourages gender equality and environmentally sustainable behaviours.
   - **Promotion of SDG-focused initiatives**: KIT Royal Tropical Institute (through SDG Amsterdam) and BBK (through BBK Kuna) showcase practices related to the promotion of specific innovative projects or initiatives within the institution to bring together and develop SDG-focused activities.

Partnership

2. The partnership strategy is one of the key dimensions for the development of SDG-related work, which takes place in the locally rooted context of these foundations. This rootedness is expressed in the involvement that these foundations have with their communities to address their social challenges in a collaborative way.

Four good practice models of partnership with the local community have been identified:
   - Cross-cutting collaboration based on the *quadruple helix approach* (BBK)
   - Promotion of partnerships with peers and similar entities (Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo FCSP and Fondazione di Comunità di Messina)
   - Playing an intermediary role between the local community and similar organisations (Foundation Scotland)
   - Boosting civic engagement (Hamburg Foundation).

3. Given the global nature of the SDGs, the global partnership strategy is also one of the key factors in the development of the SDG work of these foundations. Being part of these networks fosters the exchange of experiences and knowledge, and makes it possible to measure the cumulative impact of these foundations at a global level. In this respect, two practices of interest have been identified:
   - **Membership of the global community of community foundations**: Foundation Scotland, Fondazione di Comunità di Messina and Hamburg Foundation are part of the global community of community foundations.
   - **Connection with the SDG House network**: KIT Royal Tropical Institute has set up SDG House, which is part of a larger global network of SDG Houses.

Governance

4. The governance and decision-making system of these foundations is an organisational aspect that has implications for the SDG work they carry out.

The good practice identified was found in Fondazione di Comunità di Messina, Hamburg Foundation and BBK. The aim is to include citizens in the decision-making system of the
foundation and to integrate citizens' knowledge into strategic decisions through practices such as the creation of a neighbourhood advisory council (BBK), or the participation of experts from the community in an expert committee (BBK Kuna Institutoa in BBK Kuna; a scientific committee in the case of Fondazione di Comunità di Messina; or the board of trustees in the case of Hamburg Foundation).

Use of assets

5. This is the foundations' use of their assets for engaging in SDG-related work.

- **Use of local architectural heritage:** Buildings that have been re-purposed or refurbished are used as venues for foundations to perform activities linked to the implementation of the SDGs: sharing experiences, holding meetings, events, etc. Two ongoing examples are the BBK's KUNA building; and KIT Royal Tropical Institute's KIT Amsterdam.

- **Creation of innovative tools:** development of innovative tools to deploy the work related to promoting and fostering the SDGs: (i) the financial platform that includes a range of financial tools from the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo; and (ii) from the Fondazione di Comunità di Messina, which has an innovative approach to the promotion of the social and solidarity economy based on the creation of companies in key sectors in partnership with institutions and technological research centres.

The result of the benchmarking exercise is a series of innovative and differentiated practices regarding how foundations align with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs; the partnership strategy they put in place to contribute to the SDGs; their governance and decision-making systems; and the use they make of their assets. These results may also stimulate reflection by foundations seeking to improve their SDG-related work.