

FĂGĂRAȘ COUNTRY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, YOUTHBANK, AND AGENDA 2030: STEPS TOWARD A MORE STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SDGS

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Introduction

In Făgăraș, Romania, the SDGs empower youth to think about their future. The Făgăraș Country Community Foundation¹ (FCCF) approached the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by connecting them with their youth program, YouthBank Făgăraș,² before streamlining the Goals at a strategic level.

FCCF aims to develop philanthropy, leadership, and civil society in the Făgăraș area, as well as its capacity as a sustainable foundation.³ FCCF's strategy emphasizes four areas of focus: natural and built environment, education, entrepreneurship and economic development, and arts, culture, and sports.

More about the Făgăraș Country Community Foundation

FCCF was established in 2013 when approximately twenty people from the local community and the Association for Community Relations joined forces to raise the necessary funds. The initial idea of the founding members was to support local people to organize themselves better so they would have a more significant impact on the local community. The first activities focused on education, health, and the environment and included:

- collecting funds for scholarships.
- buying bed linen for the pediatrics section of the Făgăraș Municipal Hospital.
- planting trees in the region.

Due to the above experiences, those involved in establishing the FCCF understood the importance of the community foundation mechanism for improving the quality of life in the region.⁴

¹ Fundația Comunitară Țara Făgărașului (FCTF) in Romanian.

² YouthBank Făgăraș, <https://fundatiactf.ro/youthbank-2/>

³ Făgăraș Country Community Foundation, <https://fundatiactf.ro/despre-noi/>

⁴ Emilia Ciurchea, interview by Edi Dragoș Beserman, June 2023.



FCCF's engagement with the SDGs

The Foundation is a local funder that supports ideas, initiatives, projects, NGOs, and the business environment in the Făgăraș Country. It identifies the needs and problems of the community and then finds resources to address them. To identify community assets, needs, and problems, the Foundation organizes “community cafes” on various topics, all core for the SDGs. For example, Emilia Ciurchea, the FCCF Executive Director, shared the story of one of their new donors interested in solving community educational needs. The Foundation gathered pupils, students, teachers, NGOs, authorities, and entrepreneurs for an open discussion on educational topics to identify and better understand such needs. Based on these discussions, FCCF wrote a report about local educational needs, problems, and assets and received funding from the donor.⁵

When speaking about the SDGs, the Foundation tries to focus on all SDGs by supporting different initiatives on topics covered by the Goals. For example, the Foundation had discussions with the business environment in Făgăraș Country to see how local entrepreneurs can integrate or rethink their business models by relating to the SDGs.⁶

Since 2019 FCCF connected the SDGs with YouthBank Făgăraș.⁷ The YouthBank team constitutes, promotes, and administers transparently a special fund for financing projects proposed by high school students. The program focuses on youth between 15 and 20 years of age. It aims to offer youth a framework to work for making decisions concerning their community. The program fosters behaviors like youth leadership, generosity, philanthropy, responsibility, and civic initiative. To encourage youth to think more holistically about their communities, the Foundation approached the SDGs. FCCF integrated the Goals into the program's structure.

The Foundation's earlier work on connecting the SDGs with the YouthBank Făgăraș program proved instrumental in scaling up engagement with the SDGs. A deeper integration of the Goals into the Foundation's practices occurred in 2022 when FCCF included the SDGs in their strategy.⁸

Further steps towards engaging more with the SDGs include integrating the Goals into other programs and their annual report and raising awareness about Goals. However, further SDG-related plans still need to be determined as only two persons from the foundation consider that SDGs should be prioritized.⁹ Thus, the problem of integrating SDGs into the Foundation's strategy is due to internal issues rather than the difficulty in understanding them. For Emilia Ciurchea, these issues relate to a need for consensus between members and awareness of the SDGs' possible impact and benefits. In her words, “[there is a] *lack of understanding about benefits or impact – what impact would it have on our community if we focus on the SDGs. Would we bring more donors? Would we bring more funds? Would we bring more partners?*”¹⁰

Conclusion

FCCF commenced its engagement with the SDGs at the level of a specific program – YouthBank Făgăraș. Currently, it is exploring the Goals' strategic implications for their region's sustainability and, implicitly, for the work of the Foundation. While connecting to and localizing the Goals is not an easy process, the SDGs triggered more robust thinking around the sustainability of local communities in FCCF's practice.

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ Ibidem

⁷ FCCF's engagement with the SDGs has been supported by the Global Challenges Local Solutions program of the Academy for Philanthropy in Poland.

⁸ FCCF took part in SDG-related discussions organized by the European Community Foundation Initiative and the Făgăraș Research Institute through its Global Diplomacy Lab at Făgăraș project.

⁹ Emilia Ciurchea, interview by Edi Dragoș Beserman

¹⁰ Ibidem

