

Philanthropic foundations engaged in post-2015 development agenda

New York, 24 April 2013—The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) hosted on 23 April a special event with philanthropic foundations from around the world to generate new ideas for advancing the global development agenda beyond the 2015 target date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The one-day meeting, organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the OECD Global Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD) and the Worldwide Initiative for Grantmaker Support (WINGS), brought over 60 representatives from philanthropic organizations together with senior representatives from UN Member States.

The event is part of an ongoing effort to scale up innovative approaches to philanthropic engagement in development and to accelerate MDG implementation.

Purpose and discussions

The event provided an opportunity for ongoing dialogue with philanthropic foundations to examine what would motivate and facilitate their engagement in development cooperation post-2015. It also explored how successful partnerships between the foundations themselves, as well as with Governments, UN agencies, and international and local non-governmental organizations, could be scaled up and replicated.

“Private philanthropic foundations are becoming key actors in development, contributing thought leadership, expertise and financial support to realise tangible development outcomes,” said Sigrid Kaag, Assistant Secretary-General at UNDP.

Motivated by a focus on results and social impact, philanthropic organizations increasingly invest in anti-poverty projects that use new approaches and technologies, and support scientific research.

“Making strategic investments in people and their own initiatives is a priority,” said the Associate Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, Sundaa Bridgett-Jones. “We need to be thinking of new ways of doing business and how we can be supportive of opportunities from others who are thinking differently.”

A global e-discussion was facilitated by UNDP and WINGS prior to the event, allowing a broad range of stakeholders to contribute inputs.

“People expect and demand ownership of the agenda. So the voice of the people must be heard,” said the Executive Director of the Egypt-based Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, Gannat El Samalouty.

Today, at a separate ECOSOC Partnership Event, ECOSOC President Néstor Osorio reiterated the “great benefit in collecting and widely sharing, through ECOSOC, good practices of multi-stakeholder partnerships and information on the work of foundations.”

Philanthropic organizations and development partnerships post-2015

Many philanthropic organizations campaign for the MDGs and have entered into partnerships with other stakeholders to achieve them.

“As for all development partners, it is crucial to ensure that philanthropic organizations’ activities align with national development priorities,” said Thomas Stelzer, Assistant-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of UNDESA.

With the increasingly important role of private philanthropic foundations and other actors in supporting national development efforts, coordination at country level is emerging as a critical issue.

Background

Philanthropic organizations have become more engaged in shaping public policy and driving change on pressing issues at country level, including through targeted advocacy.

“Foundations are also keen to push forward innovative approaches to tackling development challenges, such as enterprise philanthropy,” says Bathylle Missika, Deputy Head of Division, Policy Dialogue, OECD Development Center. “This is one of the priorities for the 20+ members strong OECD network which brings together foundations interested in sharing knowledge and engaging in policy dialogue with Governments.”

The philanthropic sector has dramatically increased in size and evolved over the last decade. It now covers a broad spectrum of different philanthropic actors, who vary significantly in the way they are funded, their focus and approaches. Their activities in international development cooperation range from grant making to new forms of venture philanthropy. Many of them increasingly engage in partnerships with other actors.

Next steps

The key policy messages and outcomes of the event will feed into ongoing discussions and initiatives geared towards shaping development collaboration in the post-2015 setting, including:

- The Ethiopia High-Level Symposium in preparation for the 2014 Development Cooperation Forum (6-7 June 2013), focusing on a renewed global partnership for development in a post-2015 era.
- The High-Level Segment of the 2013 Substantive Session of the Economic and Social Council (July 2013).

- The Ministerial Meeting of the Busan Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation (October 2013).
- Discussions of the OECD Global Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD) and initiatives of other global and regional networks.

The event was attended by foundations from around the world, including the Mott Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation from the United States; Sawiris Foundation for Social Development from Egypt; Anti-AIDS Foundation from Ukraine; Wellcome Trust from the United Kingdom; and Princess Al-Anood Foundation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Vincenzo Pugliese, UNDP, Tel.: +1 212 906 5296, vincenzo.pugliese@undp.org

Paul Simon, UNDESA, Tel.: + 1 917 367 5027, simonp@un.org

Emilie Romon, netFWD, +(33-1) 45 24 81 98, emilie.romon@oecd.org

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