



International  
Association for  
Volunteer  
Effort



# The UN Sustainable Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities for Corporate Volunteering

The UN's 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have proven to be educational, inspirational and aspirational but rarely truly and fully operational in corporate volunteering.

# Major Takeaways

- ▶ The primary and most direct corporate response to the SDGs is through their core business functions and practices.
- ▶ Some of the companies studied in this research are working to adapt existing volunteering to better align with the SDGs and/or are developing new programs to address them. However, the majority categorize their existing volunteering into the SDGs at the Goal level, do little to adapt their activities to directly address the Goals and do not reach to the Target level.
- ▶ It is much easier to demonstrate “contribution to” than “impact on” the SDGs. This reflects the complexity of the SDG structure as well as the overall lack of cost-effective ways of measuring the impact of volunteering.
- ▶ If companies can rise to the policy and operational challenges outlined in this chapter, then they will maximize the contribution they can make through their volunteering to achieving the SDGs.







Bank of America, North America

# Sustainable Development for Everyone Everywhere

When the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in September 2015 at an historic United Nations Summit they brought the message that they are for everyone everywhere, that, as they “universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.”

While governments have been expected “to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals,” it is broadly recognized that achievement of the Goals in the targeted time frame must have acceptance that it can only come through shared responsibility by all sectors of society, reflective of the spirit of Goal #17 – Partnerships for the Goals.



Iberdrola, Europe

# Corporate Volunteering for the Sustainable Development Goals

There should be no debate about the absolute necessity of responding to the SDGs with sustained action. They address the most critical challenges confronting “everyone everywhere.” For corporate volunteering, here is the challenging agenda for action.

1

**Increase the level of commitment.** Focus on increasing measurable impact, not just contributing to the SDGs. Make this the highest priority for volunteering and commit to sustaining the company’s investment through this decade.

**Move beyond categorizing current volunteering so it appears to connect to the Goals.** Instead, develop new initiatives and recast current programs so they specifically address actionable Targets within the Goals.

2

3

**Create broad, inclusive and substantive educational efforts about the substance of the Goals.** Enroll everyone related to the company – employees, families, customers, business partners – in collaborative efforts to learn, plan and act together in new volunteer initiatives.

**Develop meaningful partnerships.** Seek out global, national and local leadership organizations for volunteering. This will help to strengthen their capacity to serve companies and the volunteer community more effectively. Provide the expertise and resources needed to build their capacity and the tools needed for worldwide volunteer mobilization focused on the SDGs.

4

5

**Publicly announce operational goals and targets for SDG-related volunteering.** Document and publicize the scope, nature and outcomes of the resulting work.



# The Corporate Response

For the business community, the SDGs conceptually fit with their ongoing commitments to sustainability and social responsibility. Indeed, the UN Global Compact (UNGC), founded in 2000 and now with over 12,000 participating companies in 160 countries, has developed a “multi-year global strategy...to drive business awareness and action in support of achieving the SDGs by 2030.”

**The primary and most direct corporate response to the SDGs is through their core business functions and practices.**

Through their core business operations and controllable resource allocations, companies can best define specific operational goals and commit the resources required to directly and measurably contribute to select SDGs.

This point is well made in the 2019 CEO study on sustainability by UNGC and Accenture Strategy: “Given the large number of targets across the goals (169), CEOs say they focus their strategy on the areas that most align with the company’s core business and the impact on its community.”

This reality is reflected in the annual sustainability reports that companies now routinely issue. Typically, these identify the SDGs to which they are giving priority attention. They may quantify the scope of their contribution and often offer some equivalent measures of impact.

Importantly, however, many of those reports also reflect the contributions companies are making through their community engagement, philanthropic and volunteering activities. Here are two visible examples by companies participating in this research.



**Iberdrola** in Spain has made a significant institutional commitment to the SDGs. They publicly express their *direct* contributions in three ways:

- ▶ “We are driving the green economy and employment through SDGs 7, 9, 13 and 15.
- ▶ “We are protecting people's health and safety through SDGs 3, 6 and 17.
- ▶ “We support compliance with the SDGs.”

They also recognize the value of their significant employee volunteering efforts. “Iberdrola makes an indirect contribution to all the other Sustainable Development Goals. For example, its international corporate volunteer program is in line with the 17 goals, although it mainly focuses on SDGs 7, 13, 3, 4 (quality education) and 10 (reduction of inequalities).”

Operationally, Iberdrola has incorporated the SDGs into their volunteering portal so that when an employee chooses a volunteer activity, they see which Indicator is involved. They also can see which skills or competencies they are developing with the volunteer activity and can download a certificate specifying their contribution to the SDGs and the skills involved. This was a collaborative effort between their CSR and training departments with the goal of making volunteering skills part of overall employee development.

In its FY20 Social Impact Report, **Dell Technologies** clearly stated its commitment to the SDGs: “We believe technology will play a key role in many of these 17 ambitious, interrelated goals, and we see opportunities aligned with our own commitments to create a positive social impact. While further work is required to better understand how our own *Progress Made Real 2030* goals might contribute to specific targets, we see the potential to contribute to the SDGs...” They group their potential contribution in three areas: advancing sustainability (SDGs 6, 7, 8, 12, 13); cultivating inclusion (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 16); and transforming lives (SDGs 3, 4, 8, 17).

The company has set a significant goal for employee participation: “Each year through 2030, 75% of our employees will participate in giving or volunteerism in their communities.”

Volunteer efforts in support of the SDGs are tracked within the company's social impact community. As team members log volunteer hours or create an event, they select an SDG from a drop-down menu that aligns with that event. This allows Dell Technologies to get a good sense of the nature and focus of employees' volunteer engagement. Over time, this will help them make program decisions based on data. It also serves as a teaching tool for employees who may not be familiar with the SDGs or want to learn more about them and how their local volunteer efforts are contributing to a global priority.



# The Volunteering Response

By its very nature, the vast majority of corporate volunteering fits comfortably into the 17 Goals of the SDGs, particularly in the areas where corporate volunteering traditionally occurs – education at the elementary and secondary levels, the environment, hunger relief, housing, health care, emotional support for those in need, disaster response, strengthening NGOs and public sector entities, etc.

While the SDGs are on the “radar screens” of the community engagement teams at almost all of the 80 companies examined for this study, the nature and level of involvement with them varies widely:

- ▶ A small handful appear to give lip service at best to the SDGs, noting their knowledge of them but indicating that they are not meaningfully incorporated into their volunteering.
- ▶ The majority categorize their existing volunteering into the SDGs at the Goal level, do little to adapt their activities to directly address the Goals and do not reach to the Target level.
- ▶ Some adapt existing volunteering to better align with the Goals and/or are developing new programs to address them.
- ▶ A few have made the SDGs a high priority, launching innovations that increase the potential for long-term impact by combining education, advocacy and action, often driven by employees themselves.

By categorizing their volunteering into the relevant Goals, most companies can demonstrate a tie to the SDGs. They can measure their inputs (number of volunteers, number of hours volunteered, type of work done, etc.) and their outputs (number of activities completed, number of people, organizations or communities served, etc.) and can estimate the economic value of that work.

But, as discussed in the Impact Measurement chapter it remains difficult to document the impact their most important resource, their employees, are making on the world through their volunteering. **It is much easier to demonstrate “contribution to” than “impact on” the SDGs.**

The reality is that the fundamental issues addressed by the SDGs require sustained long-term action. Now, coming out of the disruption of the pandemic is the time to recognize the opportunity companies have to renew their commitment to the SDGs. By focusing on them with a long-term perspective, companies can both reenergize and expand their commitment to being SDG champions, not only through their volunteering but also through the actions they can stimulate within their communities, through their global networks and in close collaboration with the companies with which they do business.



# From Awareness to Action and Advocacy: Two Examples

The SDGs offer an unprecedented opportunity for companies to educate themselves and their employees about critical global challenges and to use that knowledge to determine how best they can respond through action.

**Telefónica Foundation** and **Fujitsu Global Services** are extraordinarily strong examples of collaborative processes to achieve that, each with direct impact on their volunteer efforts. Not only do they utilize social media, but they are also led by employees who volunteer to do so out of their personal passion around SDG-related issues. Their efforts are supported by a central team, giving them the potential to move from education to idea to action.

For the **Telefónica Foundation**, which has responsibility for the company's volunteer efforts, the SDGs are inspirational, reflecting an underlying spirit of strengthened citizenship and responsibility, calling on all of society to participate. Their externally focused response has been massive awareness-raising activities that mobilize many people to a new level of commitment toward transforming society.

For example, since 2019 they have been focusing on UN-established "world days" (for example, World Environment Day in June), as opportunities to build awareness, educate and call people to action. This has become a key part of their overall strategy for educating employees and the public about the SDGs. They

consider December 5, *International Volunteer Day*, "the largest solidarity party in the world."

Telefónica Foundation continues to actively promote among its employees what it has termed "**self-volunteering**," described as "actions that promote the autonomy of the volunteer, are replicable and allow reaching a greater number of beneficiaries." The company sees it as an approach that is more sensitizing, raising awareness and stimulating individual action. It is built on the belief that everyone, even with a small action, can contribute in a very large way to transforming society.

This initiative was developed by the Telefónica Foundation team in Brazil to build citizen awareness and promote online micro actions that many people could join. It is based on a belief that everyone can contribute in some way and that new technologies can help them make that contribution. Now it is operational throughout the company.

Telefónica Foundation supports this philosophy with its partner Games for Good, an interactive and collaborative online tool. It includes more than 100 digital volunteering "missions" based on the SDGs. Volunteer collaborators can suggest and create missions, as the platform allows the process of co-creation, thus generating involvement in the cause as well as engagement. The tool changes somewhat the vision of what social networks mean and of the



power of volunteers, focusing on their roles as connectors and multipliers of information. The resulting actions promote the autonomy of the volunteer, are replicable and allow for reaching a greater number of beneficiaries.

Central to this approach is the concept of "solidarity influencers," individuals who, through their social networks, share information, sensitizing and motivating many people online. "With solidarity influencers, there is a 'click,' but thousands of clicks have a lot of transforming power for society, launching this massive, sensitizing volunteerism that motivates a lot of people."

The Foundation strives to be as open as possible, sharing everything they are doing. There is a potential multiplier factor in all their work when they approach programs with a spirit of transparency, open about what works and what doesn't, seeking to learn and grow with others.

**Fujitsu Global Services Business Group (GSBG)** is the largest, youngest and most diverse group of employees, in terms of culture and gender, within Fujitsu.

Online Fujitsu SDG Communities 絆 represent the centerpiece of their SDG response. The kanji character in the project title (kizuna) means strong bonds or long-lasting connection, representative of the intent of the Communities project. The goal is to enable and encourage employees to bring their personal passions related to the SDGs into the workplace, driving engagement, productivity and innovation. This then will help drive the Fujitsu Group Purpose "to make the world more sustainable by building trust in society through innovation."

The SDG Communities enable employees to collaboratively build their knowledge and understanding of the SDGs and the global



*Telefónica Foundation, Europe*



*Fujitsu, Costa Rica*

challenges they represent and to develop and execute actions in response. Employees across the world can join virtual discussion groups, using Yammer, a social networking service used for private communication within organizations. There are 17 groups, one for each of the SDGs. By connecting with people who share their interests and passions, they can learn from each other, share what is happening in their region, create collaborative learning activities, engage in discussions about potential actions and, ideally, move those ideas forward.

“Enablers” are the facilitators of the conversations in the Communities, the person relied upon to continually share new information and create a sense of unity and identity. There are three enablers for each SDG. They are allowed a specific number of hours they can dedicate to this role as part of their job. Being an enabler is seen as part of “junior talent development” so “early career employees” are targeted for the role. They are provided with a “learning pathway,” a specifically curated set of online courses that cover topics like project management, remote team management, communication skills, and storytelling skills.

The SDG Communities complement Fujitsu’s broader structure of what they have branded Global Delivery Responsible Business Program (GRiP) Teams at the global and national levels. GRiP Teams are the Responsible Business teams across GSBG who implement Fujitsu’s responsible business strategy locally. The goal is for the two to interact along with their global team, identifying and developing ideas to move into action, particularly when there is a group of people passionate about and willing to drive it.

The program will be rolled out to the entire Fujitsu group of companies in March 2022. There is no requirement for participation, no directive from management. Rather it is intended to be a bottom-up effort led by the interests and passions of the employees. The goal is 20% active participation in each country. They also are tracking their increase in reach and number of followers on social media as a result of sharing information directly related to the SDGs.

*“The power of our responsible business program is actually in the people, not in the management. So what the SDG Communities do is create an environment for people to collaborate. But the actual benefit is in the collaboration activities underneath that. We’ve got sponsors for each of the SDGs, across the Global Delivery teams, and it’s bringing communities together from Russia to Malaysia, from Costa Rica to India... to talk about a common theme, but to do so in a way that actually says, ‘How can I make a difference? How can I connect with you to make a difference on a global basis?’... What we’ve done has created an environment for people to have that voice and to connect and collaborate.”*

**Tim White, Corporate Executive Officer,  
Executive Vice President, Fujitsu Global**



# For Every Company Everywhere

Just as the SDGs are for “everyone everywhere,” the commitment to meaningfully address them can come from every size company in every industry from anywhere in the world. Here are several examples of that.

In South Africa, both **Discovery** and **FirstRand Ltd.** cite the greatest external influences on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies generally and their volunteering initiatives specifically as the SDGs and the country’s national development plan. This pattern repeats in other African countries.

For **Safaricom**, the largest telecommunications provider in Kenya, the SDGs are a key driver as they develop their CSR strategies. Their internal consultation processes, where employees and management consult before community engagement and philanthropic decisions are made, has led to greater ownership of their CSR initiatives. Employee volunteering activities range from single-day events like tree planting under their environment portfolio to longer term engagement under their youth mentorship program. The company has given each employee four leave days to enable them to engage in volunteering work or some other community outreach program. The result is about 82% employee participation.

The **NCBA Group** operates banks across East African countries and Ivory Coast. Their CSR initiatives are built around five primary pillars: education, youth empowerment, financial inclusion and innovation, health and the environment. The choice of these pillars was

informed by SDGs and especially by those areas of greatest need where the bank felt it could make the most impact sustainably. Volunteer activities differ from country to country based on local needs and priorities. They range from employee mentorship of students and youth, incubation of innovations and raising funds for maternal health and cancer research through participation in marathons or other sports like white water rafting.

From its base in Lima, Peru, **Belcorp** manages a network of almost 1 million consultants in direct sales of its beauty products in 15 countries in Latin America and the United States. It has a strong ongoing commitment to aligning sustainability strategies for all its activities and draws on global initiatives that set related guidelines to inspire plans and actions. Belcorp’s direct sales channel represents a model of income generation and banking for women in emerging sectors who have little chance of entry or development in the labor market.

*Voluntarios BELCORP* began in 2006 with celebration and infrastructure activities designed to provide opportunity to awaken the passion of “solidarity work” for the benefit of the community among its employees. In 2019, the company carried out a diagnostic study to develop a volunteer program with greater social impact, engaging program staff and employee volunteers from throughout the company in the process of change.





Belcorp, Latin America

In recent years, the program has begun to develop skills-based volunteer activities to support young men and young women entrepreneurs, particularly women. The first beneficiaries have been its independent "beauty consultants." Mentoring this population has been very helpful for the beneficiaries and for the volunteers.

The company has identified nine SDGs which it can influence, with three directly tied to their volunteer program: SDG 4, Quality Education; SDG 5, Gender Equality; and SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth. "Mujeres Sin Límites," the most important mentoring program for women, focuses on SDGs 5 and 8.

For young people, they have the "i3 Challenge," which is a contest where Belcorp volunteers design initiatives to face social problems and compete to obtain funds to make these initiatives a reality. In 2019, one of the winning projects focused on providing workshops on self-esteem, vocational guidance and entrepreneurship for 50 public high school teenagers, plus talks for their parents.

**PIMCO**, an investment management firm based in California, has some 3,000 employees and a global reach, with offices in the Americas, Europe and Asia. The company has a strong and focused commitment to the SDGs.

The firm took a methodical approach to engagement using it as an opportunity to evaluate and restructure existing volunteer programs as well as to define its commitment to the SDGs. Employee focus groups were conducted in each office around the world and interviews held with senior management. This approach resulted in decisions to focus on SDG 2, Zero Hunger, and SDG 5, Gender Equality. The company made a long-term commitment with meaningful employee engagement, naming the overall framework *Purpose at PIMCO* and created the PIMCO Acts pillar for implementation.

PIMCO works to leverage its core competencies to create high-quality volunteer experiences for employees. To support its commitment to SDG 2, Zero Hunger, PIMCO developed a partnership with the Global Food Banking Network (GFN), active in more than 44 countries, principally in emerging markets. GFN offers expertise, resources and connections to assist food banks in procuring surplus food and serving food insecure communities. When developing the partnership, PIMCO ensured they leverage GFN's extensive network to connect with food banks in communities where PIMCO has offices.

Employees conduct food drives and sort and pack food in food bank warehouses and provide

pro bono service to advance the mission of GFN and help alleviate food insecurity. Together the PIMCO volunteers and local GFN members track and measure the outcomes of their work.

Most recently PIMCO sponsored an innovative multi-company pro bono project benefiting GFN, run by PYXERA Global. The project is leveraged the unique skill sets of PIMCO, Bayer, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and Western Digital to “Reimagine Green(er) Solutions to Hunger.” The goal: to develop a multi-prong strategy for minimizing food banks’ environmental impact, while increasing service delivery to communities experiencing food insecurity.

As part of a broad initiative to call attention to and address Gender Equality (SDG 5), PIMCO has committed to one global partner, the Nomi Network, to provide economic opportunities for survivors and women at risk of human trafficking. Similar to GFN, they deploy an “all-in approach” dedicating resources, employee expertise and volunteerism to support Nomi’s mission. For example, PIMCO employee volunteers work with girls to deliver financial literacy workshops.

**Fattal**, family-owned and operated for four generations, is a Lebanese distributor of premium brand products – including food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, medical and office equipment, perfumes and cosmetics, electronics and home appliances. The company operates in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria and UAE, and also in France and Cyprus. In 2022, Fattal will celebrate its 150th anniversary. As proclaimed on the company website, its mission is to “Improve the daily lives of millions of families.”

One of their public commitments is “empowerment to community” which they



## Other Examples

At **Bank of America**, planning began with determining, from a business perspective, which SDGs to target and then “backward map” to where volunteering could contribute to them. Now, the bank is able to report how much volunteering aligns with those SDGs. For example, in 2019, almost 25,000 employees volunteered over 155,000 hours related to SDG 2, Zero Hunger.

**AB-InBev** has a global strategy within which their companies in each country analyze and select the SDGs that will affect their local situation. Overall, they are working to build awareness of the SDGs and of the contributions being made by volunteers. The SDGs are taken into account to develop volunteer activities that are closely aligned with the business. For example, in health and well-being, the theme of responsible consumption is very strong, and they campaign with volunteers to avoid the abuse of alcoholic beverages. In the environmental goal, the issue of water is very important, so they are generating activities that will enable each person to know whether they may be impacting positively or negatively on the environment through their daily actions.

describe as “a platform for us to share our knowledge, expertise and care with our local community beyond the ordinary financial contributions. It is also an opportunity for us to engage our own employees in thinking about the main challenges faced by our community starting from the basic need for food, lack of awareness about health issues, difficulties in accessing education and other issues.”

Their social responsibility efforts are led by a committee of volunteers from various departments, supported by professional staff. The SDGs are the basis for their activities which are organized around the “3 E s:” employee well-being, the environment and empowerment to the community. They are strong believers in achieving consistency in both purpose and action, believing that leads to constant improvement.

Because food distribution is a major part of their business, SDG 2, Zero Hunger, is of particular importance. Similarly, they are committed to SDG 3, Good Health, as a reflection of their interest in the well-being of their own employees and then extending that to their families and communities. By the very nature of its business, Fattal is a polluter, which leads to its commitment to SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production.

A long-term leadership goal is to make volunteering a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of the company. Currently almost 70% of employees are participating in CSR activities.

Fattal’s CSR program is “driven by a big heart.” So even if volunteering is objectively important, employees “should feel it” to be able to participate effectively. A first priority for the CSR team, then, has been to create an environment of volunteering for the employees by organizing activities related to “the employee well-being.” They believe that when the employees feel they are part of

the community, they will be encouraged to volunteer and help the community.

**EDP Group** began its commitment to the SDGs with a corporate-wide internal exercise to identify the SDGs to which the company wanted to make a commitment. After that, the same exercise was done with the volunteer program. That exercise, as well as sharing and learning with other companies, fostered an understanding of how EDP could demonstrate to both employees and external stakeholders how they are addressing key current global challenges.

EDP has a strong connection to the SDGs that are related to the energy business, but also to the SDGs that correspond to protection of biodiversity and concern for the environment. Since its business has a direct and significant impact in local communities, it also focuses on helping to develop sustainable cities and communities and to promote responsible consumption and production. These multiple commitments are reflected in SDGs 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 15.

In Portugal, EDP is working in partnership with Just a Change, an NGO addressing household poverty, to address the issue of energy poverty. They have activated a pool of electricians and other trained employees to build the knowledge and capacity of the organization to improve energy efficiency in homes of those they serve. The partnership began with hands-on volunteering and expanded to building the organization’s knowledge and capacity by training their management and volunteers on energy issues. It now includes a skills-based component where EDP volunteers do energy certification of assisted households, measuring the impact of their joint intervention. The partnership has naturally evolved from initial hands-on activities to become strategic, inclusive of pro bono and skills-based volunteering and with measurable impact.





AXA, Europe

## Other Examples

**InterCement**, headquartered in Brazil with operations in South America and Africa, has a unique approach to the SDGs: “The main focus at the moment is to widely share information about the SDGs. Therefore, we have encouraged volunteer groups to identify how their activity contributes to one or more of the SDGs. The activities are varied: strengthening education, empowering women, reducing inequalities, volunteering in sports and activities that address cultural diversity.”

**AXA**’s approach focuses on identifying the major possibilities for engagement based on the SDGs and supplemented by its in-house risk analysis expertise. “These potential commitments are then examined using a business filter that enables AXA to invest its efforts on subjects where the Group can make a real impact through its activities.” For example, AXA Hearts in Action volunteers provide financial education to people living in extreme poverty which responds to Targets 1 and 2 under SDG 1, No Poverty.

**Fosun**, a Chinese pharmaceutical company headquartered in Shanghai, working through the Fosun Foundation, has launched some 30 projects related to SDGs 1, 2, 3 and 4, addressing poverty, hunger, health and education. For example, in 2019, they reported on a collaboration of university-based experts and Fosun volunteers working with Family of Lymphoma to increase awareness of correct life choices, diagnosis and treatment, thus contributing to SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being.



Discovery, South Africa

# Corporate Volunteering for a Post-Pandemic World



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