

SDG1 in Europe: Micro-grants, Poverty, and the Big-Picture Future of Sustainable Development in a Post-pandemic World



Julia Bello-Bravo , María Ángeles Rodríguez-Domenech ,
and Barry R. Pittendrigh

Abstract Impacts from COVID-19 have shown that efforts to expand economic inclusion for refugees are more relevant than ever. While facilitating such economic inclusion enables refugees to enter the labor market and provide for their own socio-economic needs, the challenges raised by COVID-19 allow international donors to reconsider more sustainable, local, innovative, and creative ways to support this. This chapter examines the discourse of one of the most sustainable new techniques to emerge over the last two decades: microfinance. Addressing Sustainable Development Goal 1 (End Poverty) in EU28, especially for immigrants experiencing economic precarity, this paper reviews theoretical, conceptual, and empirical contributions on the phenomenon of poverty in Europe to propose *micro-grants* as a more sustainable approach for refugee integration and meeting SDG1 to achieve SDG1.

Keywords Sustainable development · Micro-grants · COVID-19 · Digital communication

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically altered what geography and experiences of it can mean (Aalbers et al. 2020; Wolman 2020). While the spread of the Internet gradually involved a majority of people across the globe—regionally at different times from 2015 to 2017—accessing digital information primarily using mobile phones

J. Bello-Bravo · B. R. Pittendrigh
Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA
e-mail: mbellobr@purdue.edu

B. R. Pittendrigh
e-mail: pittendr@purdue.edu
URL: <https://loop.frontiersin.org/people/1264427/overview>

M. Á. Rodríguez-Domenech (✉)
Faculty of Education, University of Castilla La Mancha, 13002 Ciudad Real, Spain
e-mail: mangeles.rodriguez@uclm.es

(Bello-Bravo et al. 2021), COVID-19 has forced a much more pressing and immediate use of the Internet on virtually everyone. This situation has moved the notion of the “video conference call” from a relatively unfamiliar form of human interaction, limited more or less to boardrooms and specialists, to a virtually foundational experience under COVID-19. Zoom, WhatsApp, and other digital platforms have become household words. As Wolman (2020) noted, “The coronavirus crisis is forcing us to reconsider physical space and our place within it.” For this chapter and achieving SDG1, the capacities of digital means to link together otherwise disparate places open up new possibilities for action and new affective connections far away.

In particular, an author of this chapter experienced this directly through a chance connection (on a social media platform) with a member of an oppressed minority in a South Asian country (anonymized to protect her identity). As a marginalized community, her people were excluded from national-level efforts to mitigate COVID-19—specifically, anti-COVID-19 materials were not made (and were not going to be made) available in her mother tongue. Thanks to this chance encounter, it was possible to produce anti-COVID-19 video materials in the woman’s mother tongue, which she could then distribute among her people. Being able to accomplish this hinged not only on a readiness and capacity to help produce this material for her but also monies to pay the labor to produce it. Conservatively, it cost approximately USD\$300 to do so. This process exemplifies what we mean by micro-granting in this chapter. As a matter of principle, and in view of the good that can be accomplished by providing marginalized people such life-saving information during a global pandemic, one might very well simply offer to pay out of pocket. However, neither is this reasonable to ask of everyone for all such cases, nor is it fair to ask those who did the labor to volunteer their labor. Given that donor organizations have tens of millions, if not billions, in funds, that this kind of good for a marginalized community during a global pandemic might go not done because bureaucratic or other processes preclude disbursing USD\$300 becomes embarrassing. As proposed in this chapter, micro-grants describe one such potentially new formal-informal channel for ensuring that opportunities for such positive benefits and outcomes are not missed.

These opportunities are everywhere. While poverty in Europe is a hard-to-measure phenomenon (Vergnat and d’Ambrosio 2021), recognizable swaths of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion persist, even in the most well-developed countries. Many places had not recovered from the 2008 recession before the COVID-19 pandemic negatively increased poverty and inequality. By 2020, 96.5 million people in the EU (21.9%) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Among these were 428,945 new asylum seekers (first-time applicants) who applied for international protection; nearly one-third of applicants (134,800) were children, 13,550 unaccompanied (Aura et al. 2020) (Fig. 1).

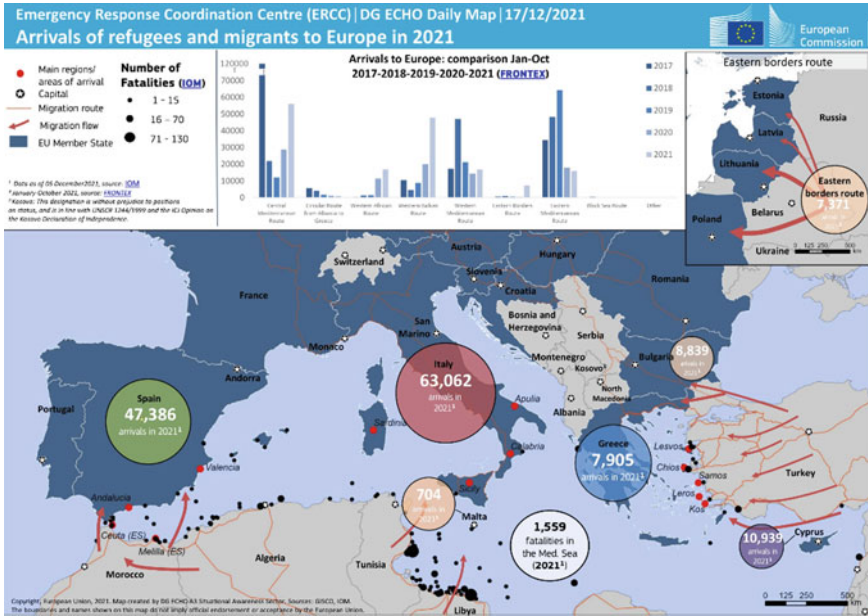


Fig. 1 Arrivals of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2021. Source ERCC (2021)

Performance of European Countries Against the SDGs 1: End of Poverty

According to Eurostat’s definition, people living below 60% of their country’s median disposable income rate are at risk for monetary poverty. Severe material deprivation means a person cannot meet four out of nine specific expenditures (e.g., having color television, heating, a washing machine). Finally, a household with very low labor intensity is one in which the working-age adults have worked less than 20% of the year. Over the whole of EU28, 3.2% of the population reflects at risk or severe material deprivation (see Fig. 2).

Both of these indicators are crucial for the assessment of poverty. Their differences reflect how some households may have saved or bought durable goods in the past, providing a decent material standard of living now despite low income. At the same time, other households may have an income above the poverty line without enabling them to meet all household needs. Both definitions give different pictures of poverty, so both are needed to adequately understand the extent of poverty in Europe. However, neither measure captures the intensity of poverty, i.e., how poor the poor are. Consequently, Eurostat also measures the relative-median-poverty-risk gap and the depth of material deprivation.

Risk of poverty or social exclusion affected 24% of the EU population in 2011, resulting from a combination of 17% of the population at risk, 9% facing severe

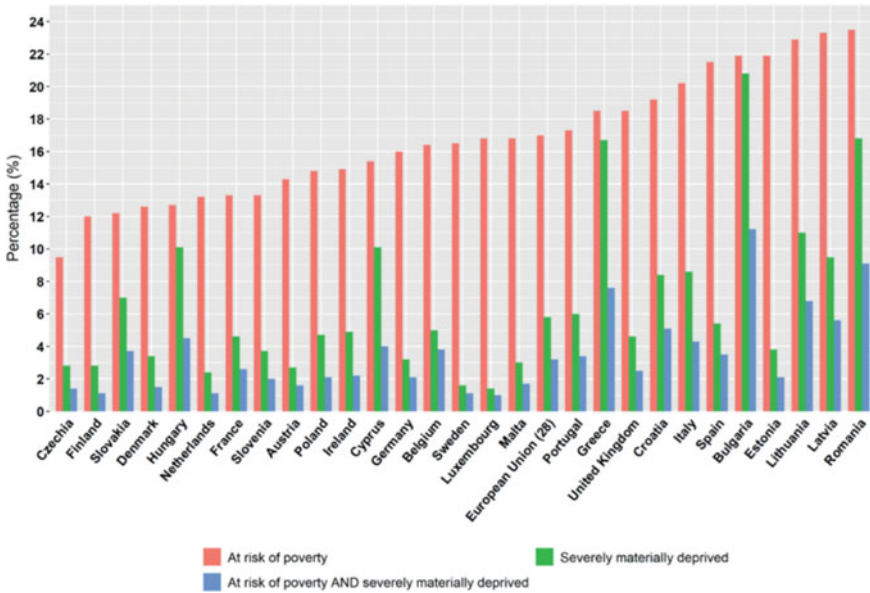


Fig. 2 At risk for poverty and severe material deprivation rates in Europe, 2018. *Source* IEB (2020, p 13)

material deprivation, and 10% living in low labor-intensity households. By 2018, the at-risk measure was unchanged (17%), with 5.9% facing material deprivation. Contrary to what is sometimes the conventional view, the rate of poverty and social exclusion in the EU remained essentially unchanged (stable) between 2007 and 2018.

This evolution masks markedly different trajectories by country (Fig. 3). While Europeans increasingly have access to goods and services for more adequate living conditions, the percentage of low-income individuals has tended also to increase (Vergnat and d’Ambrosio 2021, p. 12).

Because of its multidimensional nature, the measurement of poverty is complex and involves monetary and other aspects of living conditions; more precisely, its reliance on (usually materialist) measures as proxies for quality of life, social well-being (the second pillar of sustainability), and the like may not capture the actual qualities of life factors. That “man does not live by bread alone” (understanding “bread” also in its slang as “money”) underscores how economic frameworks for assessing poverty risk both mismeasuring it and incorrectly understanding how to ameliorate the quality of life impacts (Hanlon et al. 2012). Therefore, it is often necessary to use not just different indicators but different indicator frameworks to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of poverty and give a better understanding of what is behind the word “poor.”

Refugees living in low- and middle-income countries are especially vulnerable to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on data from eight hosting countries before COVID-19, we find that refugees are 60% more likely than host

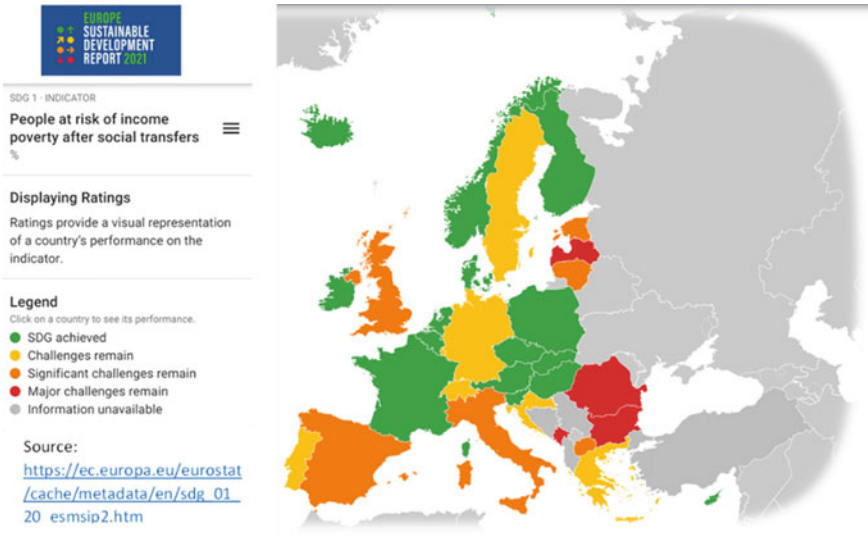


Fig. 3 Performance of European countries against the SDG1 (“End Poverty”). *Source* SDSN (2021)

populations to be working in highly impacted sectors, such as accommodation and food services, manufacturing, and retail. As a result, COVID-19 will likely lead to widespread loss of livelihoods and increased poverty among refugee populations (Siche 2020, p. 1).

In this context of addressing Sustainable Development Goal 1 (End Poverty), one of the most sustainable new techniques to emerge over the last two decades has been microfinance, understood as the provision of financial services (loans, savings, insurance, or transfer services) to low-income households (Parker 2001). This chapter proposes *micro-grants* as a novel form of sustainable international development able to help achieve SDG1 in EU28, especially for immigrants experiencing economic precarity. COVID-19 has shown that efforts to expand economic inclusion for refugees are more relevant than ever. Facilitating greater economic inclusion will enable refugees to enter the labor market and provide for their own socio-economic needs (Siche 2020).

Micro-grants: Sustainable Approaches Through Local Innovation and Creativity

In general, grant processes involve vetting applicants for the bona fides to produce some new knowledge that otherwise would not have occurred without the grant (Taylor et al. 2017); this also includes affirming their capacity to service the grant and produce the grant’s deliverables. Usually, these processes occur on a fixed

cycle. Accordingly, we motivate micro-grants below by “informalizing” these typical granting elements to become more sustainably accessible, especially at scales faced by small groups of people or individual persons.

Vetting Grant Applicants

A commonplace in grant funding involves ensuring that would-be projects align with the donor’s goals and objectives and that the applicant has the bona fides for successfully managing and completing the grant (Reif-Lehrer and Adler 1995). Rational as this might seem, considerable research documents inequalities in these processes, e.g., unequal assessments of bona fides in qualified female grant applicants (Bornmann et al. 2007; Jerrim and Vries 2020; Steinþórsdóttir et al. 2020). Further, Sanya (2017) demonstrates how situations involving discretionary judgment subject a petitioner’s application to an assessment of its alignment not only with *administratively* expected but also *culturally* expected norms, with those petitions exhibiting fewer markers of the culturally expected norms less often having their petition administratively validated and accepted.

This can, and frequently has, served racial and gendered inequality agendas on large and small scales across numerous discretionary contexts (Keiser et al. 2004; Nanda 2011; Yang 2015). However, it also operates in the absence of such agendas because the administrative expectations themselves are already culturally marked (Sanya 2017). Accordingly, grant petitioners must navigate a donor bureaucracy’s culture to secure a grant (Reif-Lehrer and Adler 1995). The sheer volume of “how-to” studies and books for writing grants specific to various sub-specialties testifies to the uniqueness of the cultures and the requirements in various sub-fields (Chung and Shauver 2008; Gholipour et al. 2014).

Plainly enough, to expect organizations to accommodate everyone’s needs is untenable (Reif-Lehrer and Adler 1995). However, we should count it a seriously lost opportunity when a locally great idea or potentially game-changing endeavor languishes for want of adequate support. All the more so if that support gets withheld because a local effort missed an international grant deadline, filled out the forms incompletely or incorrectly (or incoherently, given little facility with the grant funder’s language), or in some other way failed to match the bona fides expected by the funder.

Intermediaries for Linking Providers and Recipients

A mechanism or pathway is needed to bring locally worthy causes to the attention of global funders. Often, an experienced grant writer is one such pathway (Wedding 1997). However, while such grant-writing intermediaries can afford meeting and

linking both the administrative and cultural expectations of a funder, cost and availability will often be prohibitive for poorer people. Additional varieties of intermediary are needed.

Micro-grants envision a formally designated pool of resources that vetted grantees access informally. This resonates with one of the earliest articulations of micro-grants by Pfaff (1973), who proposed them explicitly through a critique of conventional large-scale granting processes. While this mandates proposals for templates or protocols for implementing such informal vetting processes for formally earmarked resources in a way that is efficient, fair, and not subject to dominant forms of abuse (Mom and Sandström 2018), administrative and cultural variance in each organization also necessarily requires developing these in culturally competent ways, i.e., as organization-specific, -relevant, and -feasible practices.

Advocacy for cultural competence typically argues that more empowered stakeholders in some distribution network of goods (whether resources, education, or capacity building) should take more account of recipient stakeholder values when deciding on, developing, and distributing those goods (Abrams and Moio 2009; Johnson et al. 2006; Purnell 2002). However, while research can over-position cultural competence as something that global Northerners ought to acquire vis-à-vis the rest of the world (Abrams and Moio 2009), it can be equally seen that intra-organizational cultural competence must consist of and reflect practices that are institutionally legible, especially when proposing changes.

This emphasis is intra-organizational only and speaks specifically to the necessity for each institution to develop its own culturally legible and competent processes for micro-granting and institutional changes to implement it (Argote and Ophir 2017; Karim and Kaul 2015; Ngwenyama and Nørbjerg 2010). Whatever the ultimate form of this micro-granting process it must be workable for all stakeholders involved, petitioners and petition-granters alike, just as sustainable development's calls for participatory designs must fairly negotiate the needs of all involved stakeholders (Læssøe 2010). For some micro-granting institutions, there may already be discretionary, operating, or "slush" funds for enabling non- or informal projects that could then be tapped for micro-granting. Other institutions may require more formal resources allocations to supply funding, but their distribution to petitioners will still need to occur in an expeditious, simple, and non-bureaucratic way. Whether as individuals or as processes for informal grant funding, these intermediaries serve to connect micro-grant donors and recipients.

Timeliness

In part, the informality of these processes reflects a necessity to respond quickly to developing situations, especially in times of emergency. Too often, a need to get *some* message out quickly may overrun formal procedures to ensure the accuracy or relevance of the information. As such, because bureaucracies can be "cumbersome, rigid and inefficient; that they enshrine procedures at the expense of substance; that

greater specialization, if uncoordinated, does not improve the quality of services rendered to individual clients or to the community as a whole” (Spangler 1986, p. 459), any culturally competent procedure for micro-granting must also be flexible, resilient, and adaptable enough to respond in emergency time (Gunderson 1999). The practical upshot of this is that no grant cycle governs the timing of micro-grants.

Supporting the Social Pillar of Sustainability

To repeat, we frame any provision of micro-grant resources (monetary or otherwise) specifically as a *grant*—not a micro-loan for entrepreneurship (Garg and Kaur 2018), that kind of conditional cash transfer (CCT) first popularized in Mexico that then spread more widely around the world (Garcia and Saavedra 2017), or the evidence-backed proposal from Hanlon et al. (2012) simply to give money to the poor. Instead, we echo Taylor et al. (2017), who insist that the “various agencies that provide grants do so *to make possible a research project that might otherwise not occur*” (p. 460, emphasis added). While this experimental or research motivation for granting can be bound up (sometimes inextricably) with institutional or personal prestige, securing returns on investment, or affording or creating (political) alliances around the globe (Desai 2017; Engerman 2010; Madela 2020), this stated aim to contribute to knowledge that would otherwise have not existed (and so would never have been available for distribution to others who might most benefit from it) remains arguably the most authentic and humane aspect of grant-supported sustainable development.

Given the extensive literature on the effects of competitiveness and the shaping of research agendas by externalities like citation networks, fundability, and nepotism around grant awards (García and Sanz-Menéndez 2005; Parent et al. 2018; Sandström and Hällsten 2008; Shore 2005), there is a risk of idealization here in highlighting the specifically social contribution that grants make possible for knowledge. However, applying a financial, political, or self-interested hermeneutics of suspicion (Akrivoulis 2017) to every activity of sustainable development risks oversimplification just as much as idealization. While the relation of micro-grants to the overly dominating values of the *economic* pillar of sustainable development cannot be completely brushed aside, they nevertheless include an equally non-negligible emphasis on sustainable development’s social (if not also the environmental) pillar as well.

Grant Management and Oversight

A central part of establishing bona fides in potential grant recipients involves the attempt to ensure that the resources provisioned go to the cause identified and are not squandered somehow. Here, the problem of cultural competence—whether intra-organizationally, as grantors develop administratively legible means for connecting

resources and grant applicants, or cross-culturally, when grantors recognize the legitimacy of applicants, even when they do not strictly conform to expectations—is compounded with the question of management and oversight of the grant. Specifically, because any such management or oversight must involve an expenditure of time and labor, it is reasonable that whoever performs those functions would be compensated.

The specifics of any potential grant situation may rule out the question of providing institutionalized compensation. Nevertheless, the question “What about management and oversight” must still be answered (and not by insisting on volunteer labor, since far too much labor around the world is already tacitly and unjustly not paid for). Rather, one can point to the threshold where the needed funds for management and oversight are small enough. Institutionally, this threshold rationally occurs where the costs of management and oversight for tracking the grant administratively are higher than the grant amount itself. Further pursuing this insight, if the grant amount falls below the threshold of funds that can be cost-effectively tracked, then the intention behind vetting grantees to ensure that they use provided resources for the purposes intended becomes unnecessary. More generally, these issues around micro-grant management and oversight raise questions about any contractually agreed-upon responsibilities by the parties overall (who does what, where, and when) (discussed further below).

For micro-grants, this situation requires “re-thinking” grant contracts in more informal terms (see “Trust and Grant Formalization” below), if not abandoning them in general. For management and oversight, that intermediaries recommend projects for micro-grants will likely occur because already-underway projects have some effective (internal) oversight and management. In other words, the “effectiveness” and “grant-worthiness” of the project is implicit in the judgment of the intermediary.

In general, grant management and oversight have the dual purpose of coordinating an often large and disparate number of entities toward a common goal and ensuring that those elements do what needs doing for the sake of that coordination (Munyao 2017; Powner 2008). Studying formal granting processes for self-help groups in Kenya, Munyao (2017) advocates hiring additional oversight officers despite already-existing funding shortfalls limiting what the self-help groups can accomplish. While it may seem difficult to understand how adding overhead to already resources-straitened (self-help) groups could achieve the goal it aims for, this recommendation is also the only kind of suggestion that formalized grant processes understand or acknowledge. This situation then, in turn, demonstrates the limited applicability of formal grant processes in such contexts. In contrast, for micro-grants, no large-scale coordination comes into play in the first place, and the oversight-desire to ensure that the grant is fulfilled—ignoring the fact that it would cost more to administer and manage the grant than the micro-grant itself—can be met simply by the deliverables of the micro-grant (described below).

Grant Deliverables

As grants afford knowledge production that would not have otherwise occurred (Taylor et al. 2017), so must micro-grants similarly accomplish this goal. For formal grants, this often involves at least a final report as a return on the project (if not also midway or milestone reports). However, the non-formal aspects of micro-grants require equally non-formal reporting strategies—in part to keep at a minimum any overhead for management and oversight but also because expecting local projects to know, follow, or even have the means to generate (in an alien dialect) a formal report is untenable (even were it possible to pay a third party or intermediary to prepare such a report).

Instead, it can simply suffice that the micro-grant recipient documents their work or project product in whatever form is most convenient and cost-effective. This serves a second function as well, in that it orients micro-grants specifically toward activities that have a public dissemination aspect in the first place. Very often, in grant contexts (where knowledge that indeed would not have otherwise occurred is generated), that new knowledge never gets more widely distributed than to the recipients of the final report. There is indeed a severe gap between research and getting the findings of that research to members of the public who could directly benefit from it (Bello-Bravo 2020a, b).

Here again, intermediaries are critical. As people in the sustainable development community travel and communicate, they encounter not only already-existing implementations of ideas (as projects and practices) responding to local manifestations of problems but also excellent and novel approaches languishing for want of resources. Intermediaries can also receive recordings or documentation of grant activities in emails or other media for delivery to designated grantors as evidence of the micro-grant's completion. This mirrors formal granting processes, where such reporting can serve as the basis for awarding similar future grants.

Trust and Grant Formalization

As for contracts generally, a rationale for documenting grant responsibilities, deliverables, timetables, benchmarks, and reporting requirements involves both clarifying and memorializing any established agreements between parties while also providing evidence in any legal action that a breach of those established agreements has occurred (Miller and Jentz 2006). However, contracts do not enforce compliance but instead establish the threat of seeking relief through legal channels (if a party can afford it); hence, “Individuals agree to perform certain tasks and, with the execution of a contract, that private agreement is given the force of law” (Goldblatt 2008, p. 15). As such, while contracts provide a mechanism for risk mitigation, their underlying premise remains rooted in some measure of trust that all parties will behave according to the terms of the agreement. Goldblatt (2008) usefully underscores this distinction

in the movement from contract to social contract, i.e., through the interdependence of formal and informal arrangements between people, given that “a contract is only valid and enforceable because the individuals involved in the contract chose to be bound by its terms before it became enforceable” (Goldblatt 2008, p. 15). As such, a contract’s formal mechanism for risk mitigation mirrors trust as the risk-mitigation mechanism in informal (non-contractual) agreements.

Given the (literally) unmanageable character of formal grant contracting (for both potential micro-grant applicants and grant funders), micro-grant agreements must rest (as all contracts do) on that basic foundation of trust. Establishing such trust, then, becomes the primary aim of any micro-grant negotiation or provision. Vouchsafing by intermediaries is one of the main channels for establishing this trust. However, the further implication is that if the grant amount is too small for the institution to “care” about, why would it not remain equally indifferent to how the funds are spent, whether the grant recipient delivered deliverables and the like? (These questions bracket out the fact that the costs for a granter being non-indifferent to these issues will undoubtedly outweigh the amount of the grant itself).

Micro-grants need not (and would not) preclude due diligence and compliance, but we must emphasize again that this proposal does not involve simply giving out money (Hanlon et al. 2012). Rather, micro-grants grandfather in and integrate the main gestures and goals of formal grant provisioning—above all, the generation of knowledge and its concomitant social benefits that would not have happened otherwise (Taylor et al. 2017)—but render this integration in culturally competent ways on a small enough scale for informal grant applicants.

Under such informal constraints, trust already suffices where formal contracts are unavailable or impossible (Gambetta 1988; Rosanas and Velilla 2003) as an essential and vital part of everyday interactions under formal/contractual settings (Lutomia 2019). To put this in a slogan: one might do without contracts but not without trust. In this sense, trust simply represents “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer et al. 1995, p. 709). That an intermediary can vouch for a local (grant-worthy) project in need of (emergency) support during a community disruption signals such informal trust to the granting institution. Moreover, such trust is further enhanced when “institutions and procedures generate an impeccable record in terms of truth-telling, promise-keeping, fairness and solidarity” (Offe 1999, p. 85).

While such trust involves risk, this also highlights a need for adequately flexible decision-making around selecting the most appropriate risk management strategy (i.e., mitigation, avoidance, or acceptance, rather than some blanket policy-refusal to engage risk at all. (Such blanket risk aversion can be extremely risky in a context like COVID-19, where fast-changing circumstances not only make risks difficult to weight in the first place but also threaten high-stakes consequences from inaction.) For example, Hajmohammad and Vachon (2016) outline parameters for such flexible decision-making around risk management strategies. Specifically, they note that *a party’s social or environmental misbehavior* (Hajmohammad and Vachon 2016) will often mandate risk avoidance (if not actual termination of association with

the offending entity) as the appropriate strategy. This recommendation echoes the observation by Gill (2012) that unethical behavior in an associate deeply undermines trust and can place the association in jeopardy. Lutomia (2019) similarly documented that unethical conduct by collaborators could not only lead to a termination of association as soon as possible (and no interest in the future collaboration) but also a sour taste for collaboration left in their mouths in general. More generally, one may say that a violation of trust justifies risk avoidance (in contrast to risk mitigation or risk acceptance).

For micro-granting, taking into account the three factors of (1) the small sums involved, (2) the record of recommendations by any intermediaries for various micro-grant recipients, and (3) the non-interdependence of the granting institution on the grant recipient as factors in risk management decision-making in general, this motivates risk *acceptance* as a rational organizational choice under micro-granting, especially in fast-moving emergencies where more timely responses have more significant effects.

The Threat of Success

Farson and Keyes (2003) discuss the risks of failure that success can bring, particularly when an upsurge of organization visibility or popularity overwhelms its existing capacities. Admittedly, while outlays for any given individual micro-grant are, by design, relatively minimal, a potential hundred if not thousands of such grants occurring at once instantly multiplies those negligible costs to potentially onerous levels.

This re-emphasizes that the *social* pillar of sustainable development could bear this problem (Afful et al. 2019). That is, it would be unfair (if not also infeasible) to ask granting institutions to shoulder the burden of potentially hundreds or thousands of micro-grants. Equally, “outsourcing” that task to a third party would justly require compensation for such services and thus incur costs that need covering. While this situation might prompt imagining the founding of an organization specifically to provide funding (or to channel funding), support, and management/oversight for any such volume of micro-grant servicing, this merely reproduces the existing problems of (formal) granting or shifts them to some, as yet not imagined, different organizational location. Again, bringing the social pillar of sustainability into the picture helps negotiate these issues.

Re-“Viewing” Sustainable Development

An implicit assumption in the preceding is the notion of organizations as individuals (resembling the individual “hero’s” template as an actor during an emergency). As such, instead of lone organizations addressing micro-grant applications

autonomously, a structure of distributed (shared) responsibility would more fairly, and thus more feasibly, support even high-volume micro-grant servicing. Such collective effort and solidarity evoke the social pillar of sustainability (Afful et al. 2019) explicitly. Traditions of modernist individualism (and their formalities in contracts) contrast the individual with the collective (and its informalities of trust) in polemic and typically mutually exclusive ways. Thus, Goldblatt (2008) can note, “For modern scholars, contractualism implies individualism and vice versa” (p. 16). Whatever the merits and advantages of this identification, it similarly tends to position institutions as more favorably and strategically better off when individually isolated from others compared to operating as a collective in some sense. For this reason, despite the numerous forms of legal and extra-legal inter-organizational structures that have evolved to bridge from individual organization to individual organization, critiques of such bridging persist (c.f., Longoria 2005; Sydow et al. 2016 for a broad discussion of these critiques).

In contrast to this specifically modernist notion of individualism—founded on a “basic (nominalist) assumption that only individuals (entities with aims) exist, not social wholes (societies and social institutions) ... All versions of individualism share the denial that societies have aims or destinies” (Agassi 2017, p. 1)—indigenous and African notions like “it takes a village” reflect a threefold image of (1) social sustainability through solidarity, (2) distributed responsibility for the wellbeing of the community as a whole, and (3) a sense of personhood (not individuality) embedded within that social matrix of solidarity and community.

If this seems too abstract or inapplicable to micro-grants, it links the “goodwill” of micro-granting to long-standing, historically tenable models that persist as alternatives to a form of modernist individualism that denies the reality of social wholes, communities, collectives, collectivities, or simply groups and thus any sense of non-selfish, collective responsibility. As such, it echoes or runs parallel to tropes within “western” discourse concerning notions of distributed responsibility as well (Florida 2016).

Moreover, although the fundamentally autonomous framing and legal structuring of large-scale granting organizations make efforts to establish systems of distributed responsibility across collaborative, corporate, and meta-informational contexts challenging (Afsarmanesh et al. 2004; Power 2019; Saran et al. 2008), these very successes demonstrate not only the possibility of doing so but also how a culturally competent approach to these challenges can span multiple organizations—in the same way that the collective culture of a village reflects the individual (and unique) personhood of each of its inhabitants.

That such a structure of distributed responsibility could support any volume of micro-grant petitions may more involve a change of mission or attitude than the kind of “major system overhauls” envisioned by Ioannidis (2011, p. 529). At a minimum, distributed responsibility manifests in the difference between “we don’t do that” (“I can’t help you”) versus “I can’t do that right now (or don’t know how to), but I’ll connect you with someone who does.” While “villages” typically have hundreds, if not thousands, of years of intra-organizational networking traditions to build on, for sustainable development as a whole, (re)making, rediscovering, and

(re)connecting those linkages as traditions will require time but can accelerate the process by learning from others' efforts. Here again, intermediaries become essential for witnessing and then sharing those traditions to large-scale granting organizations.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined (1) the increasingly urgent necessity for sustainable development channels that respond quickly to emergent issues, whether emergencies or not, and (2) some of the main characteristics of micro-grants that afford sustainable development efforts the capacities needed to achieve SDG1.

This requires recognizing and taking seriously the role of sustainable developmentalists for poverty elimination in EU28 and beyond. This can be neither mono-directionally "giving" solutions to local people (including refugees) nor "giving" such people their "freedom" to work out their solutions without our help; the former is unworkably condescending, while the latter condescendingly reneges on our collective responsibilities. While empowering people means enabling access to a world of game-changing solutions, whatever further global strategies emerge from the currently shifting geography of the world and the downstream effects of COVID-19 for refugees, we can also listen and learn from our global/local friends and elaborate a developmental sustainability that supports existing (or imagined) local projects toward reaching SDG1.

As proposed in this chapter, micro-grants describe one such potentially new formal-informal channel for ensuring that opportunities for such goods are not missed. Currently, established university programs like Scientific Animations Without Borders (SAWBO) can work with NGOs to afford informal service providers with educational approaches that enable micro-grants among diverse groups. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, SAWBO-RAPID funding by USAID to minimize the secondary effects of COVID-19 recruited local individuals for translating animated anti-COVID-19 videos into local languages through micro-grants. In principle, however, every institution can provide a pathway for micro-grants. The main barrier to doing so (absent some ideological stance that people do not "deserve" help or "free" money) involves setting aside any existing bureaucracies for disbursing money that generate front-end or administrative overheads in excess of the micro-grant amounts. It will definitely be possible for any well-funded domestic or multinational institution to find its own (unique) way to do this. In this sense, implementing micro-granting becomes a question of leadership and will, not money or risk assessment.

The ongoing reconfiguration of geography under COVID-19 makes this leadership and will more urgent and more visible. COVID-19 drove people together virtually, while worsening refugee situations have brought together people physically, face-to-face. These situations personalize our encounters with others on the sidewalks of the world community, such that activity (like helping a woman to obtain anti-COVID-19 information for her community in her mother tongue) becomes possible.

The pace of this information age also affords enormous strategic possibilities, so long as sustainable development can react adaptively, resiliently, and flexibly to the new technological opportunities. Turning the slogan “think globally, act locally” into a sustainable, developmental mode of action over new geographies is (already) possible. By turning the slow-turning aircraft carrier of development into a lithe, flexible, quick-moving skiff, institutions (each and severally) can articulate culturally intelligible micro-grants as a means for reaching SDG1. Such efforts afford small scale (even tiny-scale) but enormously beneficial support for environmental, social, and economic projects that cannot otherwise occur.

References

- Aalbers MB, Beerepoot N, Gerritsen M (2020) The geography of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Tijdschr Econ Soc Geogr* 111(3):201–204. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12456>
- Abrams LS, Moio JA (2009) Critical race theory and the cultural competence dilemma in social work education. *J Soc Work Educ* 45(2):245–261. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2009.200700109>
- Afful A, Kumi-Acquah GK, Agyekum K (2019) Level of knowledge of design professionals on the principles of social sustainability in Ghana. Retrieved 27 April, 2020, from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3511538
- Afsarmanesh H, Mañik V, Camarinha-Matos LM (2004) Challenges of collaborative networks in Europe. In: Camarinha-Matos LM, Afsarmanesh H (eds) *Collaborative networked organizations*. Springer, Boston, MA, pp 77–90
- Agassi J (2017) Methodological individualism [abstract]. In: Turner BS (ed) *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of social theory*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Hoboken, NJ, pp 1–2
- Akrivoulis DE (2017) Beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion in the critique of humanitarian intervention. *Rev Int Stud* 43(2):240–259. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000383>
- Argote L, Ophir R (2017) Intraorganizational learning. In: Baum JAC (ed) *The Blackwell companion to organizations*. Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, pp 181–207
- Aura CM, Nyamweya CS, Odoli CO, Owiti H, Njiru JM, Otuwo PW, Waitthaka E, Malala J. (2020) Consequences of calamities and their management: the case of COVID-19 pandemic and flooding on inland capture fisheries in Kenya. *J Great Lakes Res* 46(6):1767–1775. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jglr.2020.09.007>
- Bello-Bravo J (2020a) Getting the message across: characterizing a need to bridge public health messaging for tuberculosis across a rural/urban and CHW/traditional healer divide in Madagascar (a review). *Scien Africa*:e00321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sciaf.2020.e00321>
- Bello-Bravo J (2020b) Scientific animations without borders (SAWBO): educational animations to address global challenges. Paper presented at the international society for neglected tropical diseases (ISNTD) festival, London, UK
- Bello-Bravo J, Brooks I, Lutomia AN, Bohonos JW, Medendorp J, Pittendrigh BR (2021) Breaking out: the turning point in learning using mobile technology. *Heliyon* 7(3):e06595. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06595>
- Bornmann L, Mutz R, Daniel H-D (2007) Gender differences in grant peer review: a meta-analysis. *J Informet* 1(3):226–238. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2007.03.001>
- Chung KC, Shauver MJ (2008) Fundamental principles of writing a successful grant proposal. *J Hand Surgery* 33(4):566–572. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhsa.2007.11.028>
- Desai K (2017) *Girlscape: transnational productions of neoliberal girlhoods* (PhD) Teachers College, New York City, NY
- Engerman DC (2010) Social science in the Cold War. *Isis* 101(2):393–400. <https://doi.org/10.1086/653106>

- ERCC (2021) Arrivals of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2021. Retrieved 1 March 2021, from https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ercmaps/20211217_DM_Europe_migration.pdf
- Farson R, Keyes R (2003) *The innovation paradox: the success of failure, the failure of success*. Simon and Schuster, New York City, NY
- Floridi L (2016) Faultless responsibility: on the nature and allocation of moral responsibility for distributed moral actions. *Philos Trans R Soc A: Math Phys Eng Sci* 374(2083):20160112. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2016.0112>
- Gambetta D (1988) Can we trust trust. In: Gambetta D (ed) *Trust: making and breaking cooperative relations*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, UK, pp 213–237
- García CE, Sanz-Menéndez L (2005) Competition for funding as an indicator of research competitiveness. *Scientometrics* 64(3):271–300. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-005-0251-x>
- García S, Saavedra JE (2017) Educational impacts and cost-effectiveness of conditional cash transfer programs in developing countries: a meta-analysis. *Rev Educ Res* 87(5):921–965. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317723008>
- Garg S, Kaur S (2018) Entrepreneurship and micro loans in India. *Asian J Multidimen Res (AJMR)* 7(7):149–153
- Gholipour A, Lee EY, Warfield SK (2014) The anatomy and art of writing a successful grant application: a practical step-by-step approach. *Pediatr Radiol* 44(12):1512–1517. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00247-014-3051-8>
- Gill L (2012) Systemic action research for ethics students: curbing unethical business behaviour by addressing core values in next generation corporates. *Syst Pract Action Res* 25(5):371–391. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11213-012-9228-x>
- Goldblatt DL (2008) *From contract to social contract: Fortescue's "Governance" and Malory's "Morte"* (PhD), Yale University, New Haven, CT
- Gunderson L (1999) Resilience, flexibility and adaptive management—antidotes for spurious certitude? *Conserv Ecol* 3(1):7. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-00089-030107>
- Hajmohammad S, Vachon S (2016) Mitigation, avoidance, or acceptance? Managing supplier sustainability risk. *J Supply Chain Manag* 52(2):48–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jscm.12099>
- Hanlon J, Barrientos A, Hulme D (2012) *Just give money to the poor: the development revolution from the global South*. Kumarian Press, Sterling, VA
- IEB (2020) IEB Report 4/2020. Retrieved 1 March 2021, from https://ieb.uv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IEB_Report_042020.pdf
- Ioannidis JPA (2011) Fund people not projects. *Nature* 477(7366):529–531
- Jerrim J, de Vries R (2020) Are peer-reviews of grant proposals reliable? An analysis of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding applications. *Soc Sci J*:1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2020.1728506>
- Johnson JP, Lenartowicz T, Apud S (2006) Cross-cultural competence in international business: toward a definition and a model. *J Int Bus Stud* 37(4):525–543. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400205>
- Karim S, Kaul A (2015) Structural recombination and innovation: unlocking intraorganizational knowledge synergy through structural change. *Organ Sci* 26(2):439–455. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2014.0952>
- Keiser LR, Mueser PR, Choi S-W (2004) Race, bureaucratic discretion, and the implementation of welfare reform. *Am J Polit Sci* 48(2):314–327. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2004.00072.x>
- Læssøe J (2010) Education for sustainable development, participation and socio-cultural change. *Environ Educ Res* 16(1):39–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620903504016>
- Longoria RA (2005) Is inter-organizational collaboration always a good thing. *J Soc Social Welfare* 32(3):123–138
- Lutomia AN (2019) *A case study of successes and challenges in a scientific collaboration program based in the United States and Benin* (PhD) University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL

- Madela LM (2020) Perspectives on South-North institutional collaboration/partnership research in higher education (PhD) University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL
- Mayer RC, Davis JH, Schoorman FD (1995) An integrative model of organizational trust. *Acad Manag Rev* 20(3):709–734. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1995.9508080335>
- Miller RLR, Jentz GA (2006) Business Law today: the essentials: text and summarized cases. In: e-commerce, legal, ethical, and international environment. Thomson West, Eagen, MN
- Mom C, Sandström U (2018, 12–14 Sept 2018) Does cronyism affect grant application success? The role of organizational proximity. Paper presented at the 23rd international conference on science and technology indicators (STI 2018), Leiden, Netherlands
- Munyao PM (2017) Influence of grant management practices on sustainability of self-help groups' projects in Matungulu Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya (MA), University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya
- Nanda J (2011) Blind discretion: girls of color and delinquency in the juvenile justice system. *UCLA Law Rev* 59:1502–1539
- Ngwenyama O, Nørbjerg J (2010) Software process improvement with weak management support: an analysis of the dynamics of intra-organizational alliances in IS change initiatives. *Eur J Inf Syst* 19(3):303–319. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejis.2010.18>
- Offe C (1999) How can we trust our fellow citizens. In: Warren ME (ed) *Democracy and trust*. Cambridge University Press, New York City, NY, pp 42–87
- Parent MC, Bradstreet TC, Harmon KA, McAndrew J, Comiskey A, Cook ACR (2018) The psychology of men and masculinities: using citation network analysis to understand research domains, collaborations, and grant competitiveness. *Psychol Men Masculinity* 19(4):512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000139>
- Parker J (2001) Microfinance, grants, and non-financial responses to poverty reduction: where does microcredit fit? World Bank, Washington, DC
- Pfaff M (1973) Micro-grants-economics. Paper presented at the Allied Social Science Association Meetings, New York City, NY
- Power M (2019) Infrastructures of traceability. In: Kronenberger M, Bowker G, Elyachar J, Mennicken A, Miller P, Nucho J, Pollock N (eds) *Thinking infrastructures (research in the sociology of organizations, vol 62)*. Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, UK, pp 115–130
- Pownner DA (2008) OMB and agencies need to improve planning, management, and oversight of projects totalling billions of dollars. US Government Accounting Office, Washington, DC
- Purnell L (2002) The Purnell model for cultural competence. *J Transcult Nurs* 13(3):193–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10459602013003006>
- Reif-Lehrer L, Adler A (1995) *Grant application writer's handbook*. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Burlington, MA
- Rosanas JM, Velilla M (2003) Loyalty and trust as the ethical bases of organizations. *J Bus Ethics* 44(1):49–59. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023238525433>
- Sandström U, Hällsten M (2008) Persistent nepotism in peer-review. *Scientometrics* 74(2):175–189. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-008-0211-3>
- Sanya BN (2017) States of discretion: black migrating bodies and citizenship in the United States (PhD) University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL
- Saran A, Munoz L, Kalliny M (2008) Corporate culture, organizational dynamics, and implementation of innovations: a conceptual framework. *Asian J Mark* 2(1):10–19
- SDSN. (2021). *Europe sustainable development report 2021: transforming the European Union to achieve the sustainable development goals*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Institute for European Environmental Policy, Paris, FR
- Shore C (2005) Culture and corruption in the EU: reflections on fraud, nepotism, and cronyism in the European commission. In: Haller D, Shore C (eds) *Corruption: anthropological perspectives*. Pluto Press, Ann Arbor, MI, pp 131–155
- Siche R (2020) What is the impact of COVID-19 disease on agriculture? *Scientia Agropecuaria* 11(1):3–6. <https://doi.org/10.17268/sci.agropecu.2020.01.00>

- Spangler E (1986) Law and order in the New Guinea highlands by Robert J. Gordon and Mervyn J. Meggit. 9, 2:454–461
- Steinþórsdóttir FS, Einarsdóttir Þ, Pétursdóttir GM, Himmelweit S (2020) Gendered inequalities in competitive grant funding: an overlooked dimension of gendered power relations in academia. *High Educ Res Dev* 39(2):1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1666257>
- Sydow J, Schüßler E, Müller-Seitz G (2016) *Managing inter-organizational relations: debates and cases*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York City, NY
- Taylor RR, Suarez-Balcazar Y, Pépin G, White E (2017) Writing a grant proposal. In: Taylor RR (ed) *Kielhofner's research in occupational therapy: methods of inquiry for enhancing practice*. F.A. Davis Company, Philadelphia, PA, pp 460–487
- Vergnat V, d'Ambrosio C (2021) Poverty in Europe: a hard-to-measure phenomenon. In: Bosch DN (ed) *Poverty in Spain and Europe. Effects of COVID-19*. Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, pp 12–15
- Wedding D (1997) Creating a research-friendly workplace. *J Clin Psychol Med Settings* 4(1):51–59. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026280003584>
- Wolman D (2020) Amid a pandemic, geography returns with a vengeance. Retrieved 3 March 2022, from <https://www.wired.com/story/amid-pandemic-geography-returns-with-a-vengeance/>
- Yang CS (2015) Free at last? Judicial discretion and racial disparities in federal sentencing. *J Leg Stud* 44(1):75–111. <https://doi.org/10.1086/680989>