

A Wake-Up Call from Impact Week 2023



- *By Daniel Rostrup*

The recent [Impact Week](#) in Turin kicked off with an uncharacteristically sombre start. Perhaps this should not have come as a surprise, considering the first sessions focused on progress against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite so much effort around the world, only [15% of the SDGs are on track](#) to be reached by 2030. There was a palpable sense from the audience that, despite our best efforts, we are failing. Leslie Johnston, Chair of Impact Europe, reminded us that we are living in an age of polycrisis. In the face of the climate emergency, migration crisis, populism, polarisation, increasing wealth disparity, and wars in Ukraine and Palestine (and many others) it's easy to lose courage.

To bring the point home, the opening sessions were interspersed with hard hitting short films about migrants perishing in the Mediterranean and a film of woman screaming "you have no idea" at the top of her lungs, her face in anguish, as she walks towards the White House in Washington, DC.

The films were beautiful and harrowing, much like the acceptance speech of one of the winners of the Impact Champion award - a Palestinian woman who brought many of us to the brink of tears as she highlighted the monstrosity of the situation back home. What a way to kick-start one of the biggest European gatherings of those who have dedicated their careers to making the world a better place. We are by nature an optimistic bunch! So, was it uncomfortable? Yes, undeniably so. But perhaps this is exactly what our movement needs.

I've been working in this space for over 15 years now and have been proud to be part of the impact movement. I still very much am. I've worked at most levels of the European impact

ecosystem, from working with small social enterprises on one end to helping big corporations and foundations create impact at scale. I'm also proud to have worked for impact networks like Impact Europe (formerly EVPA) and the Global Steering Group for Impact Investment.

But I've always been slightly uncomfortable with how we think of ourselves in this space. The organisation I work for, [Sattva](#), is both based in the Global South and focuses its efforts there. Working for a Global South impact intermediary and being the only colleague from the Global North makes me an anomaly at Sattva. It has also made me begin to ask some difficult questions of the impact space in Europe. Who's at the helm of our movement? The people trying to help or the ones we are helping? Where does power reside geographically? Amongst the funders in the Global North or the recipients of that funding in the South? Are we part of the solution or (unwittingly) part of the problem? How do we de-colonialise development?

I congratulate Impact Europe for taking such a bold approach in launching their conference, whether it was intentional or not. *Only fifteen percent of the SDGs are on track...!* More than a few people at the event shook their heads and repeated this stark statistic over the next few days. It seems like a much-needed wake up call. The way in which we've been approaching impact clearly needs a massive rethink if we are to have a chance of creating a better world for future generations.

In terms of the conference itself, there were plenty of good outputs and loads of ideas on how to accelerate change. Some were novel (ex. bringing in learning from proven models of impact investing) and many were the usual suspects (the need for more 3rd party impact measurement, the importance of a systems change approach, less silos, more collaboration, etc.).

If you were there, I'd love to hear what your top takeaways were. **What is the one solution or call to action from Impact Week 2023 that you feel is important to share?**

My own thoughts are these: Let's not get discouraged by the many ways in which the world is broken. After all, "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste," according to the economist, Paul Romer. I love this quote because it underscores the point that the most meaningful change is often born from the greatest challenge. Surely then, the polycrisis we're living through demands an even greater level of optimism and ingenuity. So, let's hear it for the bold ideas and innovative solutions - especially the ones that have the power to shake things up and truly accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Sattva has been working with various non-profits and social organisations as well as corporate clients to help them define their social impact goals. Our focus is to solve critical problems and find scalable solutions. We assist organisations in formulating their long-term impact strategy by aligning with business objectives and providing meaningful solutions to social issues.

If you have any such stories or ideas to share, please write to us: impact@sattva.co.in