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BACKGROUND

Limitations of Planetary Boundaries

In 2015, the United Nations would give individuals and organizations across the globe a set of goals that would become the hallmark of sustainable development in the modern era - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Included in the agenda titled ‘Transforming our world’ published, they present a comprehensive plan for what sustainable development in the upcoming 15 years could look like. As apparent from the name, the agenda suggests incremental improvements, that promote a transformation process in society which seeks to change systems on a more fundamental level (UNGA, 2015).

Significant progress has been made in the years since the Agenda 2030 was published, however, the efforts are still not considered sufficient to meet the SDGs outlined in the Agenda. (Eurostat, 2017; United Nations, 2017).

Meanwhile, human actions are pushing the limits of the Holocene, the so called “planetary boundaries” (Rockström et al., 2009). Exceeding these boundaries is expected to have drastic and irreversible consequences. One of these boundaries is climate change, and the safety limit for this boundary has already been exceeded. To address this challenge fundamental social changes are required to tackle our current unsustainable way of meeting our requirements (energy, mobility, food etc.). At a broader level these environmental concerns also effect livelihoods and cause economic and social distress, and the SDGs aim to counter all three.

The earth is experiencing new phenomena from the dawning of the age of the anthropocene. The need to protect our ecosystems, our society and our economy is larger than ever before.

Figure 1: The planetary boundaries as presented by Rockström et al. 2009. We have come dangerously close to exceeding the limits on biochemical flows, and genetic diversity while uncertainties remain on other boundaries like aerosol loading in the atmosphere.
To achieve this vision, the Agenda 2030 requires transformative change, i.e. changes that include “profound changes [...] in production and consumption patterns and energy use through legislation, regulation and public policies” and “changes in social structures and relations, including addressing the growing economic and political power of elites” (UNRISD, 2016, p. 3). Transformative change makes it implicit that organizations, governments, individuals and civil society must all engage with the SDGs beyond the business-as-usual practices.

In order to tackle these challenges, the Agenda particularly emphasizes the need for collaborations. Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) is specifically devoted in this aspect. This is not surprising, considering that sustainable development is usually described as a wicked problem and as such requires the collaboration of multiple stakeholders.

The Global Solvers Co-Lab uses this power of collaboration as a guiding principle.

Figure 2: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals laid down by the United Nations in the Agenda 2030 to ensure sustainable growth with focus on aspects of society, environment and economy. The goal 17 emphasizes the power of collaboration to achieve these goals.
The Global Solvers Co-Lab: Where Leaders Listen, Learn and Lead

The Global Solvers Co-Lab (henceforth Co-Lab) is a unique collaboration space created by the Melton Foundation and its long-term partner and collaborator, the Ernst-Abbe Stiftung. “Co-Lab” stands for a collaborative laboratory where ideas emerge and are tested in the real world through collective action. It aims to equip emerging, young, community leaders with the necessary skills to tackle the most pressing environmental, societal and economic challenges of our society. A collaborative space which involves the coming together of leaders from across identities, cultures, sectors, scientific backgrounds and professions; the Co-Lab aims to advance the realization of SDGs in their local communities and spheres of influence. It is a set of carefully designed activities for them to develop leadership, communication and managerial skills to tackle challenges of sustainable development in a more effective fashion. Furthermore, it is a space to induce reflection about the meaning, interconnectedness, implications, limitations and challenges of implementing the SDGs. It also delivers an ‘outside’ perspective by exposing participants to a new community, where they have the opportunity to explore issues they are facing in their respective communities in a different environment and by unpacking these issues with peers from other communities.

They listen, they learn and they continue to lead.

Core Values of the Global Solvers Co-Lab

The Co-Lab is a physical space designed to support the development of young leaders through face-to-face exchange of ideas, and strives to be a place where they can:

- Explore: The participants explore the world of complex sustainable development issues through the lenses of their collective professional, cultural and regional contexts. They also explore the local setting they find themselves in and relate it to the larger picture.
- Express: The Co-Lab is designed to be a safe space to express identity, opinions and ideas without fear of suppression and rejection. Instead, everyone is encouraged to bring their own piece of the puzzle and share it with the rest of the participants. We are better together, and thus every participant has to feel free to express their thoughts so as to realize the purpose they attend the Co-Lab for.
- Learn: Collective learning is the most important value of the Co-Lab. It is a constant process, which happens not just in workshops, field trips or group discussions, but continuously through the formation of networks, exchange of ideas and expression of identities. This learning enables leaders to be stronger agents of sustainable change in their communities.
- **Collaborate:** Collaboration is the backbone of the Co-Lab, and one of the core-purpose for which it is designed. The above values all lead naturally to collaboration, and participants constantly collaborate both during and after the Co-Lab. During the Co-Lab, they collaborate in small and large groups to understand local projects, pose reflective questions about sustainable development, and work together on each other’s projects. After the Co-Lab, this collaboration takes the form of feedback, valuable network connections and peer support.

- **Commit:** Global Solvers are taken through the Co-Lab in a meticulous process which leads them to take and commit to concrete steps, no matter how small, to contribute to a cause that they most believe in. The atmosphere created during the Co-Lab allows participants to reflect on their learnings, their interconnectedness with the world and the problems they deal with, and the repercussions of their actions - small and big. Thus, they are given a space to reflect on their role in society and the influence they can have in their communities which in turn instills a drive and commitment to action.

Figure 3: All participants, of the Co-Lab 489 were moved by a deep connection to the event’s core values and principles. It is important to stay close to all those who can help us reach a better impact wherever we go.
Organizers and Partners

MELTON FOUNDATION
Co-sponsor and organizer

The Melton Foundation is a global network of fellows that promotes and enables global citizenship as a way for individuals and organizations to work together across boundaries of place and identity to address global challenges. Founded in 1991, the Melton Foundation has built a network of 550+ Fellows and addresses a variety of SDG-related topics.

ERNST-ABBE-STIFTUNG
Co-sponsor & co-organizer

The Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung is a foundation named after the German optician Ernst Abbe. It emerged from parts of the Carl Zeiss Foundation in 1992 and is committed to promoting science, research and innovation as well as social purposes.

DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES
Content Partner

Development Perspectives is an independent Development Education non-governmental organisation (based in Drogheda, Ireland). Working with partners all over Ireland and the world, its vision is to contribute to lessening poverty, inequality and climate change through transformative education and active global citizenship.

NEXUS GHANA
Co-sponsor

NEXUS is a US-founded organization dedicated to supporting the philanthropic work of their members across the globe. It catalyzes new leadership and accelerates solutions to global problems. The Ghanaian Nexus hub provided scholarships for two Co-Lab participants from Ghana.

LOCAL PARTNERS

The organization of the Co-Lab would have been impossible without the support of local partners in Aubervilliers, France - the Municipality of Aubervilliers, Konexio, Les Poussieres, and Villa Mais d’ici. They saw potential in the concept and were willing to open their doors to the organizers and the participants, and provide insights and feedback. The Co-Lab couldn't be a success without these partners, and the organizers are grateful to have been able to work closely with them.
The origins of the Co-Lab go back to 2016 when the Melton Foundation organized an event along with its partner university in Jena, Germany, (Friedrich-Schiller University) about creating an inclusive society called, “Us-versus-Them”. This event was co-sponsored by the Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung, which set the starting point for deeper conversations about collaborating more around impact events. The following year, in 2017, the second edition of Samagra, organized by the Melton Foundation along with its partner university (BMS College of Engineering) in Bangalore, India took place tackling the intersection between technology, sustainability and social innovation. From these two events, and because of the two-decade experience the Melton Foundation has in curating transformative events to bring together young leaders from the different parts of the world, emerged the idea of co-organizing an event where Melton Fellows would come together with global problems solvers from other communities, backgrounds and geographies. The event was envisioned to have novel content with workshops, project visits and other experiential learning tools. Thus, both organizations found a common goal to work on with this event.

After intensive collaboration and multiple iterations of the concept, the proposal of designing a small group-learning event, with intense, transformative, SDGs-focussed activities emerged. The SDGs set an action framework that connected to the strategy of both organizations, which are committed to sustainable development. Considering that the event would engage a group of up to 20 participants, Melton Foundation and Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung decided to focus on three out of the 17 SDGs to ensure an in-depth engagement around each goals.

The analysis of the goals, the metrics they present, and their relevance for both the organizations were considered when defining the three focus SDGs for the first Co-Lab:

- Quality Education (Goal 4)
- Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8)
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9)

The name itself was an amalgamation of the proposal by both organizations: Global Solvers Co-Lab (proposed by the Melton Foundation) and 489 UN-limited (proposed by the Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung).

The final piece of the puzzle was the content development and the application procedure. Having worked together in events and activities in the past, the Melton Foundation collaborated with Development Perspectives on developing detailed contents and sessions that built on Development Perspectives’ already existing SDG-focussed programs such as the “SDG Challenge” initiative. Event promotion and application procedure were managed primarily by the Melton Foundation through electronic marketing and leveraging global partnerships to reach the envisioned target group: emerging change agents between 20-30 years of age who are engaged in SDG-related projects in their community.
The Setting: Aubervilliers

The venue for the first edition of the Co-Lab was selected for strategic purposes, firstly because there is a partnership between Jena and Aubervilliers which was leveraged to facilitate the organization and planning of the event. Jena is a special point of connection and collaboration between the two main organizers of the Co-Lab. While it is home to the Ernst-Abbe Stiftung, the Melton Foundation has one of its partner universities (the Friedrich-Schiller-University) located there and since its inception in 1991 has been active in recruiting fellows from there as well as organizing events. Secondly, Aubervilliers presents a great representation of some of the main issues of sustainable development: urbanization, economic development and social inclusion.

An independent municipality located in the Ile-de-France, it is a combination of colours, cacophonies, and cultures. Situated just 20 minutes from the towering heart of the megalopolis of Paris, it presents a very different reality so close to the bustling city. The participants and trainers had several opportunities to explore the neighbourhood by themselves, as part of activities, meals, and during the last 3 days of the Co-Lab work at a multi-disciplinary creative space run by members of the local community called Villa Mais d'Ici. There were also visits by local activists working on aspects of Sustainable Development which further enabled the participants to connect the dots between the work they did in their own contexts, the learnings at the Co-Lab and the ‘real’ world in Aubervilliers.

Figure 4: As part of the intercultural learning of this experience, Co-Lab 489 participants had the chance to visit and explore Aubervilliers, France.
Co-Lab Participants

APPLICATION & SELECTION PROCEDURE

The call for applications was launched in late February 2018 and closed on April 29th that year. Hosted on the Melton Foundation website and primarily promoted through its network and collaborators across the globe, over 60 candidates applied for the Co-Lab. The selection process, driven by the Melton Foundation and supported by the Ernst-Abbe Stiftung, included a technical review, which reduced the applicant pool by approx. one-third, and a further qualitative review to identify the best-suited candidates for the Co-Lab. In addition to application strength, criteria like gender balance, cultural diversity, and SDG focus balance were considered. The final selection considered 20 accepted participants and 5 wait-list candidates. Effectively 12 participants participated in the event, others were not able to travel due to visa issues or had to cancel due to arising work commitments.

Figure 5: Criteria like gender balance, cultural diversity, and SDG focus balance were considered. The final selection considered 20 accepted participants. The proportion of applications per world region was roughly preserved during the selection process.
The participants represented diversity of region (see charts below), culture, language and professional experience and were all engaged in their local communities for a cause they were pioneers in. They represented young professionals, students, activists, conveners, and community leaders with an average age of 26 years.

As stated in the introduction, one of the keys to achieving the SDG agenda is to collaborate across professional backgrounds for collective change. This has been one of the central dogmas of the Co-Lab, and is reflected on the chart below. The applications were designed, addressed and promoted to get as many applications from different professional backgrounds.

![Number of applicants accepted per World Region](image)

Figure 6: Criteria like gender balance, cultural diversity, and SDG focus balance were considered. The final selection considered 20 accepted participants. The proportion of applications per world region was roughly preserved during the selection process.
This diversity in professional expertise and knowledge was reflected in the selection of the participants, and these lead to many interesting discussions, professional connections and new perspectives, which will be further discussed in the Impact section.

Figure 7: More than a third of the applicants were from business, engineering and humanities such as education and social work. This can be attributed to the focus on education, industry and economy of the SDGs chosen for this edition of the Co-Lab, SDGs 4, 8 and 9.
PARTICIPANT EXPECTATIONS

A quick assessment of the expectations of the 20 selected participants mentioned in their applications is summarized below:

- To be able to develop new knowledge, insights and skills around the SDGs
- To share experiences, expertise and knowledge with the different participants
- To develop activities/initiatives/projects with the participants with similar interests
- To become part of a network of global leaders with scope for future collaborations
- To have a learning space to learn about the other participant's projects, their challenges and success stories
- Learn new tools and skills to take back home
- To learn strategies for converting an idea to a social enterprise
- To get international exposure and learn from a multicultural and diverse global community

- To present local projects to other global solvers, receive feedback and scale them up.

THE FINANCES: HOW MUCH DID IT COST TO HOST THE CO-LAB?

The Co-Lab took place in Aubervilliers, France from 22-27 September 2019. The two sponsoring organizers covered most of the event related costs, including travel, lodging and meals. Also participants contributed a share of the cost, a minimal participation fee (80€ for students, 160€ for working professionals), some also contributed a percentage of their travel expenses. The total cost of the event was equally shared by the Melton Foundation and the Ernst-Abbe Stiftung and were USD 35 388. The break-up of costs is as follows:

**Figure 8: Category-wise cost distribution for organizing the Co-Lab**
Event Summary

What happened at the Co-Lab

The Co-Lab 489 kicked off on Saturday the 22nd of September with an opening evening session. This session allowed for the participants to gently get introduced to each other through a series of name games, icebreakers and team building activities such as ‘Where in the World’ where participants were challenged to create a map of the world using tape. This allowed the group to identify which areas of the world were represented at the Co-Lab and to highlight which countries could not be there for a variety of reasons including visa issues. Following this, Lars Dietzel (Director of Strategy, the Melton Foundation) formally welcomed the group to the event. Lars reiterated the aims and purpose of the program and introduced the partners/trainers involved. The evening session came to a close by the group being invited to create their intention for the Global Solvers Co-Lab: 489 UN-limited. The following day started with an atmosphere of curiosity and expectation, to learn about each other, problem solving and the local Aubervilliers community. After a quick energizer, the participants tried to get to know each other through an activity that focused on teaching the Global Solvers about intercultural communication and showcased how sometimes various lines of communication can get misinterpreted. In groups of 5-6 with the task to explore the host community Aubervilliers through the lens of SDGs 4, 8 and 9, the participants got the first insight into the context of the setting of the Co-Lab. Following this, Stephanie Kirwan from Development Perspectives introduced the Bennett Model of Cultural Competency which offered self-reflection during encounters with other cultures.

That afternoon, a session to unpack the interconnectedness between the SDGs, activities about changing systems were carried out together, and the participants reflected on their roles and responsibilities while problem solving. After a brief presentation about their foundation, Ernst-Abbe-Stiftung, one of the Co-Lab organizers, presented insights and reflections from their work in Germany. Since one of the needs of the participants was expressed as a desire to present their work, solvers presented their work using the Pecha Kucha style, a unique way of presenting a topic through storytelling and images. Coupled with a poster showcase, they also had the opportunity to explore the various SDG projects that each Global Solver is working on back home.

The next working day, it was over to Villa Mais d’Ici, a local arts project with a beautiful garden and a stage room, which provided a perfect setting for both working and taking breaks to energize. After a quick breakfast, the participants set out on project visits in and outside Aubervilliers to learn about local initiatives, the work they do, and the challenges they face. In preparation for the visit, the participants were briefed about the two organizations they would visit later and discussed possible questions they would ask to deepen their understanding of their work and their impact on the community. During the discussion, they actively recalled the previous day’s session about interconnectedness of the SDGs and how they influence each other.
Equipped with curiosity and wonder, the participants set out at to their respective destinations: Les Poussières in Aubervilliers and Konexio in Paris. The team visiting Konexio met with the CEO and Co-Founder Jean Guo. She welcomed the visitors and after a short introduction round, she took them through the nuts and bolts of the work their organization is doing. Konexio offers ICT and computer literacy trainings to migrants and Refugees and thus empowers them to be self-sustainable, gradually accelerating their long term inclusion and integration into society. This work of course had a direct association with the SDG 4, which is around education and its universal accessibility.

After three days full of activities and learning, a routine was set, and the participants automatically engaged in conversations, and developed friendships during and outside of the Co-Lab sessions. The Co-Lab environment proved to be very conducive for the global solvers to foster meaningful relationships with one another and the local community in Aubervilliers. Continuing the activities at the Villa Mais d’Ici, the participants had a feedback session around the field trips. They shared in groups main take-aways from the inspiring conversations and the thoughts that they wanted to take home with them. Then at lunchtime, to get participants to continually engage with the community in Aubervilliers, a local teacher joined them and shared her experiences with the project Anthropology for All that she initiated, as well as the challenges that teaching in a school with children from more than 70 countries present.

In the afternoon, the Design Challenge was on: by creating wallets and purses for each other, the participants got into the depths of Design Thinking and Human Centered Design. In a fun and experiential way, the challenge brought many learnings on the process of designing anything, from wallets to projects. To close the day, the participants took part in a much-awaited Cultural Night with guests from Villa Mais d’Ici and Aubervilliers joining them. They shared food, music, dances, and stories from their countries. Stephanie from the Development Perspectives ensured that there was fun with purpose and organized a SDG quiz which helped participants further their knowledge about the Agenda 2030.

At Les Poussières, the other team learnt about how art can be used to empower youth and further civic engagement in local communities. An annual lantern festival is the largest and most popular event organized by Les Poussières, which connects the Aubervilliers community in an intimate manner. Through empowering the local youth, the organization worked towards building an economically strong community.

Figure 9: Participants and trainers with the Les Poussières team in Aubervilliers during the project visit. Here, the learning was centred around using art as a form of education and youth empowerment.
It was time for the global solvers to move from their idea stage to prototype stage. The solvers spent the day being hard at work designing and demonstrating how their project would have a sustainable impact in their community. Through the use of an empathy map, the group explored their ideas at their current stage. This was necessary in order to scale their ideas going forward. Following many hands on activities, the group finished their afternoon activities with a road map, a plan and a commitment to action upon return to their home communities. In order to achieve the SDGs, action is necessary, and this was highlighted throughout the sessions. Following the commitment to action, the group took part in one final activity for the evening: A Hero’s Journey. This provide a space for them to reflect on their journeys as active citizens in both their local and global contexts. It also allowed for reflection on the process of the Co-Lab and for them to look forward to the steps they will take as they continue their journey of activism.

As the Co-Lab 489 drew to a close, the participants spent the final morning reflecting on the program and evaluating the activities. The group session took place in a local park and started with a group reflection whereby each global solver had the opportunity to express key points of reflection from the week. Then, the group was invited to individually spend some time in nature and bring back a representative ‘gift’ which they would like to leave with the group to offer support and solidarity. This was followed by an evaluation session in order to determine key learnings for the team going forward.

Figure 10: Along friends, organizers, and the Sustainable Development Goals with them, Co-Lab 489 participants pose as a team during the event and the insightful activities they form a part of.
The Impact: Skills

IN THIS SECTION, THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS AND TOOLS THAT THE PARTICIPANTS DISCUSSED, LEARNT AND EXCHANGED ARE MENTIONED.

Skill 1: Intercultural Communication

One of the biggest challenges in cross-border collaboration is the different styles of communication, and yet effective collaboration is key to solving shared global social, economic and ecological problems. Even though interaction between cultures has existed for ages, with the advent of the new challenges of a globalized world, it is arguably one of the most important to master. Global Solvers often have to travel out of their home countries, interact with other leaders and discuss shortcomings and solutions. However, this adaptation is not always easy, and a little awareness about the prejudices one holds while communicating, cultural attitude towards sustainability, patterns of communication and concepts of formality and informality helps. At the Co-Lab, participants reflect on the depth of culture, using the Iceberg model, and imagine communication with a person from a culture completely different from their own.

Skill 2: Systems Thinking

Another recurring theme during the Co-Lab was developing a sensitivity to the circular nature of the world we live in; an awareness of the complexity of sustainability problems, as well as the need for a structured approach to thinking about them. In this context, importance was given in the Co-Lab to introduce the concept of Systems Thinking to the participants both from a theoretical and practical perspective. Systems thinking was presented as a diagnostic tool and an approach for examining problems more completely and accurately before acting. During the sessions, the participants were encouraged to ask better questions before jumping to conclusions about some of the sustainable development issues that were addressed during the lab. The participants did an exercise in which each was assigned an SDG and asked to position themselves closest to the two people with SDGs they felt were related to their SDG - and this led to a lot of movement and chaos in the room. The participants realized through this that some of the key aspects of systems thinking are moving from observing data to identifying patterns of behavior overtime, and to surfacing the underlying structures, events and patterns responsible for that data. Thus, the shared reflection after the session was that we can expand the choices available to us and create more satisfying, long-term solutions to chronic sustainability problems by indulging in systems thinking.
**Skill 3: Design Thinking**

Having worked with skills to be effective communicators and to be effective problem solvers, this skill was focused on being effective solution designers. After reflecting about the complexities of wicked sustainability problems, and how to approach them, the participants learnt how to use design thinking as a method to facilitate ideation which leads to human-centered, efficient, sustainable solutions.

Design Thinking is a very important skill used in several industries in ideation and development, and has applications elsewhere. The method describes a human-centered, iterative design process consisting of 5 steps—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test.

The participants engaged hands-on in the process by creating a prototype and testing it, and reflected about applying it to their projects back home. Some of their reflections were that design thinking would be useful in tackling problems that were ill-defined or unknown. They also reaffirmed the importance placed on user research in this method and stressed that they have to always engage with end-users in order to design good solutions. Another takeaway was that the creative strategies presented by the design thinking approach can also be applied to fields outside what we traditionally consider design, such as education, business, project management and strategy development.

Figure 11: Participants experienced hands-on learning throughout the Co-Lab and took the initiative to learn together all the new skills and tools that were offered by trainers.
The Impact: Tools

**EMPATHY MAPS**

Empathy maps are an immersive tool to understand users better. They are a great tool to have while interacting with the end-users in their environment, and gain an understanding of the life, behaviour, needs and context of the user. Given the nature of work of the participants, and the fact that several of them are community-engaged leaders, this tool was useful for them when they are:

- diving into the different user segments of their social enterprise’s business model canvas
- elaborating on their personas
- capturing behaviors when interviewing them
- understanding the significance of the users to their own success story

**VALUE PROPOSITION CANVAS**

The Value Proposition Canvas was introduced to the participants in order to empower them to create economically feasible social solutions for their community. It is a useful tool to map how their great ideas can benefit their community, and to ensure that they are positioned around what the users value and need. It is formed around two building blocks – user profile and the idea’s value proposition. The participants worked in several ideas that they came up with; each of which was designed to cater to one of the SDGs in focus: 4, 8 and 9.

**User Profile**

- Gains – the benefits which the users expect and need, what would delight them and the things which may increase their likelihood of adopting the idea.
- Pains – the negative experiences, emotions and risks that they experience.
- Customer jobs – the functional, social and emotional tasks customers are trying to perform, and the problems they are trying to solve.

**Value Map**

- Gain creators – how the idea benefits the users and how it offers added value to them.
- Pain relievers – a description of exactly how their idea or solution alleviates user problems (pains).
- Services – the services which create gain and relieve pain, and which are responsible for the creation of value for the customer.

**PECHA KUCHA**

Pecha Kucha was introduced to the participants when they had the opportunity to share their projects and experiences with their peers. It was introduced so that the stories are told in an interesting and engaging way, and so that a new tool that aids effective communication can be imparted to the participants. This is a method of that has changed the landscape of presentations and uses imagery and efficient use of spoken word to create a seamless, memorable, meaningful and concise presentation. The participants appreciated this way of presentation and said they would take it back to their own communities and talk it about as a tool for creating better project presentations. Designed to be completed in 6 minutes and 40 seconds, the rules regarding its composition are likened to visual Haiku. 20 images, 20 seconds each, and connected seamlessly with well-developed narration are the only rules.
The Impact: Personal and Professional development during the Co-Lab

In this section, the report presents the development participants experienced during the Co-Lab 489 in Aubervilliers. They shared these as a reflection after the event, and during the closing session with the trainers. First and foremost, the Co-Lab offered the participants an opportunity to study the SDGs against the backdrop of a part of the world very different from their own. It provided them the opportunity to not just be present in Aubervilliers, but also speak with French citizens and interact with them independently about their experiences and views on varied topics such as education, art, and social inclusion.

During field trips and project visits, the participants could visit Aubervilliers and Paris-based organizations and had the opportunity to talk to them whilst they were in action! This presented them with many new insights, new reflections and learnings which they shared with each other the next day during the reflection sessions. Candace Banks from Phoenix, AZ, USA also wrote about her experience during the field visits, ‘In speaking with the founders (of Les Poussières), I gained insight into how nonprofits are run in France, as well as, developed ideas for how to incorporate art as a means of engagement in my own community. A large take away was that financial capital plays a significant role in any organization’s ability to not only function but remain sustainable. A large portion of the conversation centered around fundraising possibilities.’ Thus, participants and trainers alike could learn from live examples of important skills of running a social enterprise such as fundraising, social value proposition, pitching etc. This type of interaction worked so much better since it was personal, face-to-face and the enthusiasm and passion was felt more directly and really inspired the participants.

Claudia Patino, a participant from Temuco, Chile wrote, ‘She was so passionate and expressed herself so clearly that her words really got to me. I was previously very interested in Konexio when the places we would visit were announced, so I already wanted to see and understand how it worked. But the way she explained Konexio made me understand that you don’t have to work alone, that it might lead nowhere. It really made me see that if you have a network of people, it’s a lot easier to make a change.’ This takes us back to the beginning - the power of networks. As mentioned in the background section, the SDG 17 stresses the importance of collaborating across boundaries to achieve the SDGs. More than half of the participants claimed that the networks they built at the Co-Lab helped them progress professionally and personally. Claudia expressed this sentiment very well when she wrote, ‘The sense of commitment and the enthusiasm of every participant was evident even if we came from different countries, had different studies or jobs. After all, the SDGs brought us together and because of that, I felt we were all contributing to build something and reaching out.’

Figure 12: Participants reflected that they engaged in meaningful conversations throughout the Co-Lab and that these discussions laid the initial foundations of global networks that they continue to engage with even after the Co-Lab.
The participants also realized the support they could obtain from this network, no matter the size of their actions or their motivations to make change, Noriko Edahiro from Tokyo, Japan adds, ‘Although we do not have enough experience to have creative and effective ideas now, we can try first and gain an insight through iteration in our community and networks. The Co-Lab provided me to gain necessary knowledge and networks in terms of SDGs. that encouraged me to change the way of thinking and sense of value.’ - clearly expressing how this interaction with the network helped her develop new ways of thinking, and developing a value for her own work.

The uniqueness of this collaboration was the intercultural mix of the trainers and participants. Many networking events and collaboration events happen in the participants’ countries but this one gave them a chance to mingle with what is usually considered ‘the others’ Victor Valenzuela, a design-thinking coach from Temuco, Chile and a trainer at the Co-Lab reflected on this aspect of the Co-Lab and wrote, ‘Cultural and geographical diversity is always an added value when working on global challenges, it provides with insight and empathy-development, and helps to have a better understanding of the huge differences that a single problem can have, when analysed in different ecosystems.’

Many participants brought up the impact they felt in their advancement professionally by appreciating the tools and the interactive methods used by trainers in the Co-Lab. They not only expressed satisfaction with the tools, but also said that they would share them with their friends and colleagues. This multiplying effect is a significant power of ‘network of networks’ which the Co-Lab believes is essential for creating and sustaining change.

One example of this was provided by David Ohene-Asante, a participant from Ghana, ‘I cannot say everything about the Co-Lab without mentioning the Pecha Kucha Style of presentation which I had never heard about until the Co-Lab 489’.

Furthermore, the Co-Lab was also successful in delivering a safe, collaborative, experiential space, as highlighted by Nana Ya, from Accra, Ghana, ‘I have attended several workshops, seminars, conferences and training programmes elsewhere, however the Co-Lab489 module looks very different to me in terms of how engaging the Co-lab was, everyone was given the opportunity to express his/her views on issues that were discussed. In what seemed like a whirlwind of days passing by, I discovered first the significance and impact of culture from the workshop sessions on intercultural communication, cultural competency and the interconnection of goals. I got to ‘live’ out the sessions as well.’

The participants also developed a significant awareness about the SDGs, their mission, their inter-connectedness and their usefulness in bringing about effective change. All participants caught up especially on the interconnectedness aspect, as can be seen by their Commitments to Action which they designed - most of the participants chose to commit to actions that are related to more than one of the three chosen focus SDGs.

In conclusion, as backed by the participants’ responses in the following chart, participants mentioned the networking opportunities, the tools they learnt about, the opportunities to interact with the local community and increased awareness of the SDGs as the main benefits or take-aways from their experience at the Co-Lab.
Participants’ reflections after 3 months

The aim of the Co-Lab is to keep up the networking momentum built during the event and constantly keep in touch with both the participants and the trainers to monitor the use of SDGs in their journeys, discuss possibilities to re-connect and draw from the network, and offer opportunities to share learnings with one another. In view of this, the Co-Lab organizers conducted a check-in call together with all the participants after 3 months of the Co-Lab. During the call, participants shared how they were weaving in learnings from the Co-Lab and tracked the progress they had made with their commitments to action. Before elaborating further, the table below presents the Commitments to Action from the participants after the Co-Lab concluded.

The participants were encouraged to take a small action right after the Co-Lab to pilot the learnings of the Co-Lab. The purpose was to continue the thought experimentation developed at the Co-Lab and share the challenges of implementing these solutions with the other Global Solvers. The actions were classified as either (i) engaging a part of the community around the SDGs (ii) creating a product/service that enables mitigation of an issue in the community or (iii) designing a product/service that enables mitigation of an issue in the community. Furthermore, the participants chose a partner from the participants who would help them stay on track in order to complete their commitments to action.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Commitment to Action</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>SDG focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan Jarandilla</td>
<td>Engage wider youth networks around the SDGs</td>
<td>La Paz, Bolivia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia Patiño</td>
<td>Create a blog to break stereotypes around migrants and help create better working conditions for them</td>
<td>Temuco, Chile</td>
<td>4, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Martínez</td>
<td>Design a space for students with lack of resources to enter universities</td>
<td>Cajamarca, Perú</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Ohene-Asante</td>
<td>Engage the local community in a better understanding of ICT tools</td>
<td>Accra, Ghana</td>
<td>4, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny Tucker</td>
<td>Create workshops for women with knowledge for them to become more empowered and self-reliant</td>
<td>New Orleans, USA</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel Clifford</td>
<td>Engage youth leaders in order to understand the Pecha Kucha style of presentations</td>
<td>Accra, Ghana</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina Boateng</td>
<td>Create and support the women in the extractive industry</td>
<td>Accra, Ghana</td>
<td>8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhammed Kisirisa</td>
<td>Create a workshop for women entrepreneurs around SDGs</td>
<td>Kampala, Uganda</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nana Yaa Korankyewa Ayim</td>
<td>Engage with rural communities to support the vocational development of youth through education</td>
<td>Accra, Ghana</td>
<td>4, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noriko Edahiro</td>
<td>Create and design innovative workspaces to increase happiness at the workplace</td>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
<td>8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentina Farías</td>
<td>Create an informative campaign on the working conditions of migrants on social media</td>
<td>Temuco, Chile</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yousra Jali</td>
<td>Create a website with the skills taught at the Co-Lab 489 in order to spread awareness about them</td>
<td>Casablanca, Morocco</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the call, the participants shared that they had been working occasionally with their partners from the Co-Lab to ensure that they are able to deliver their commitments to action. However, they described that even to fit in a small act into the regular schedule was very difficult in terms of finding the time and resources for it. A suggestion for future editions of Co-Labs would be to also consider the context of the local communities they plan to their actions into the design process, as well as know-hows of the organizations/individuals they plan to involve so as to be able to deliver the actions on time and more effectively.

The participants also shared insights of how they had been integrating take-aways from the Co-Lab in their daily lives. Some of the participants mentioned that they had shared their experiences with their colleagues and spheres of influences. Candace Banks, a trainer and a Senior Fellow of the Melton Foundation, said, ‘The students (Candace is a teacher in Phoenix, USA) have taken to the ideas and have expressed interest in knowing more about other countries.’ In this way the experience of the Co-Lab as a creative, collaboration space has been shared across the globe.

Candace also added that the Co-Lab contributed to her own professional growth and that she has done more research on the different methodologies presented by other trainers and Co-Lab participants. She believes that this networking opportunity was very rewarding for her, and wrote ‘I am extremely happy with the amount of networking that took place at the Co-Lab. I am in touch with several trainers and anticipate we will continue to share methodologies, experiences, and resources for some time to come.’

Furthermore, the Co-Lab has contributed to a shifting of perspectives for several participants and given them new avenues to explore in their fields of work.

David Martinez, who was already an engaged Youth Leader in Peru, for example, has started introducing more concrete SDG awareness with his next batch of Young Leaders, and wrote, ‘For me, it is very satisfying to write again after a couple of months of this event that undoubtedly changed and will continue changing my different perspectives of the social world around the 17 SDGs. I would like to share with you that Global Solvers (Co-Lab) allowed me to expand and strengthen my network around the world and allowed me to give more support to my activities with my organization “Young Peruvian Leaders” in Peru.’

The Co-Lab has, since its completion in September 2019 helped spread awareness about the SDGs, equipped young leaders with the tools and skills they can use to be more effective activists, triggered hundreds of small aha-moments, and ideas, given new perspectives, and made all the participants (and the organizers) more creative. It has encouraged them to think about the complex problems of sustainable development with a systematic structure, and given them access to a network that helps them reference the magnitude of the impact they create and reach out to it for support when needed.

The Co-Lab has been an inspiring journey for many global solvers, and has proven that the true agents of achieving a sustainable world are small, cohesive, inclusive, collaborative actions by changemakers across the globe.

The Co-Lab maybe over, but the journey continues!
Conclusion

The Co-Lab was a learning experience that helped participants but also trainers and organizers broaden their horizons, as is evident from the impact section. The Co-Lab benefited from the diversity of partners both in terms of logistics and content, since the collaboration with several organizational partners allowed to all parties involved to leveraging their skills and networks effectively. While project visits during the Co-Lab were very well-received, for the next edition, preparations should be started much earlier in the event planning to increase the value and impact-orientation of the activities. This would be a measure to commit & engage local partners early, and thus ensure a meaningful connection of the activities with the local ecosystem. It would also allow the participants to do more detailed pre-departure research and be better prepared to engage with the participants.

Given the scale of the event, there is a need for an effective handling of all the logistics, including a clearer division of tasks and responsibilities among co-organizers. Important lessons have been learnt regarding visa applications (start as early as possible and designate time and resources for for invitations and tracking, if possible by committed local partners), collection of registration fees (PayPal and credit card payments are easy, but do not work in all geographies), as well as on-the-ground logistics (strong and engaged partners on the ground are key for identifying best-suited venues, collaborators, and projects).

To avoid budget losses for last minute visa and flight cancellations, it is suggested to (a) make sure all travellers contact a travel insurance that covers cancellation, and (b) define a cut-off date for participants who require a visa in order to cancel tickets ahead of time at a lower penalty.

There could be benefit in enriching the transformative learning journey by adding additional ‘theoretical’ knowledge about relevant topics, skills or practices.

In order to leverage networks more effectively and build visibility more efficiently, an Event Promo Kit would be useful to help supporters and network partners cross-promote and endorse future iterations of the Co-Lab. This would support brand building of co-organizers, increase credibility of the event & its impact, and reach potential applicants in more parts of the world (including Europe, where only 2 individuals applied).

Figure 14: Participants took one last picture after the event, holding up their Co-Lab 489 diplomas.