

## To Lead or To Follow? Navigating the SDGs

Host: Ted Hart

Guest: Amanda MacArthur – PYXERA Global

**Announcer:** Welcome to the *CAF America Radio Network*, a production of the Charities Aid Foundation of America. As the leader in global giving, CAF America offers more than 20 years of experience and expertise to corporations, foundations, and individuals who wish to give international league and with enhanced to due diligence in the United States. Through its industry leading grants management programs and philanthropic advisory services, CAF America helps donors amplify their impact.

This show is dedicated to these donors and the charities they support. CAF America is uniquely positioned to serve as the bridge between these important partners and transforms vision into meaningful action. Guests on a *CAF America Radio Network* are leaders in their field who share tips for success and stories that inspire. Our host is Ted Hart, the CEO of the Charities Aid Foundation of America. This is a live call in show, add your voice by calling 914-338-0855, after the show, you can find all of our podcasts at [cafamerica.org](http://cafamerica.org). Don't forget to dial 914-338-0855. Now, welcome the host of the *CAF America Radio Network* Ted Hart.

**Ted Hart:** Welcome to this latest edition of the *CAF America radio network*. We have a very important topic for you today, the topic is to lead or to follow navigating the Sustainable Development Goals. I think it's safe to say the Sustainable Development Goals is something that's on all of our minds throughout philanthropy and today we have an expert to help us explore this very important topic. Amanda MacArthur is the Vice President of Global Pro Bono and Engagement at PYXERA Global.

She leads the organization's Global Pro Bono practice, Amanda's team leads the design, implementation, and measurement of the impact on an array of programs that link the power of human capital to initiatives addressing complex development challenges, while building leadership competencies, enhancing global perspectives and encouraging innovation and out of the box thinking for corporate employees. A lot on your plate over there at PYXERA Global, welcome here to the CAF America radio network, Amanda MacArthur

**Amanda MacArthur:** Thank you so much. We are certainly keeping ourselves busy.

**Ted:** PYXERA Global is situated at the crossroads of three very important sectors, public, private, and social, that's not always easy to do. I wonder if we might start out with a little bit about PYXERA Global and how it builds partnerships to achieve social impact and then we'll start talking about the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Amanda:** Yes, absolutely. PYXERA Global has been around for about 25 years, and in that time, we've really worked across the spectrum, working primarily as a donor funded organization, working with a lot of multinationals, working with small local organizations. One of the things that we learned and have learned is how to speak a number of different languages. The

language of private sector, the language of public sector, and the language of the social sector, and then acting as a translator amongst those three groups.

It's a little more challenging than you might think, there's lots of different acronyms, different priorities, and different areas of expertise, and all of that that goes along with it. At PYXERA global, we really believe that in order to address the most difficult challenges that the world faces, and they're getting more and more complex all the time, the only way we're really going to do that is through these partnerships that bring the unique expertise of each sector to the table.

Where private sector is really great at innovating and working quickly, government is very good at bringing things to scale, and social sector is really good at getting down deep into the community level. We try to act as a conduit amongst all those three and really bring their strengths all to the forefront.

**Ted:** Well, of course that brings us to one of the probably more complex and complete set of global goals, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals. Just like CAF America, PYXERA Global works in these very complex matrices of lots of stakeholders and lots of partners, those who are trying to come together and do great good, but also do it oftentimes on a great scale, sometimes on a small scale. It all adds up to making a difference around the world.

In building those kinds of partnerships between the three sectors that you just mentioned, corporate, nonprofit, and government, how do those kinds of partnerships come together? Then if you can segue into just for our listeners today, what does that specifically mean to the Sustainable Development Goals?

**Amanda:** Well, I think the essence of partnership is really communication and I would love to say that there's some science behind, getting them right, and getting them off the ground, that there are maybe three or five steps that you can take. The truth is that it's an art and that it takes a lot of back and forth, it takes some ability to perhaps allow someone who has a different end goal than you to be on the same team.

I think one the things we really believe at PYXERA Global is that you don't actually have to have the same ultimate end goal, but your goals can't be in conflict. I think really early on, you have to work out where there might be potential conflicts and determine if they are possible to overcome or if there are ways to ameliorate them or if that's something that is ultimately going to be detrimental to the partnership.

Where we've seen really successful partnerships come together in places like India and Ghana, some of our most successful partnerships are places where we just have this really open communication line. We're able, and I'm willing to say to people, to our counterparts, this isn't working, this is why, and this is how we think we can fix it and vice versa. I think if you don't do that, and sometimes that can be challenging for folks, especially in the social sector, because other partners might be coming with money, but you really have to kind of recognize where your expertise is, and be willing to be perhaps flexible in other areas.

With regards to the Sustainable Development Goals, I think one of the things that makes them such a improvement over the Millennium Development Goals is this inclusion of goal 17, which is all around partnership. This recognition that these challenges are so complex, that we really are going to have to work around everybody's expertise and we're really going to have to bring everybody to the table.

These are big current problems that impact the entire world, as well as just very, very localized communities. I think that's really, really important and where there's going to be, I think, some really interesting things in the next 15 years is these partnerships between perhaps disparate actors or maybe folks at haven't sat at the same table before. Part of the thing with partnerships [crosstalk] is having to give up-- Sorry.

**Ted:** Well, you're absolutely right. What I was going to say is, oftentimes those new partners that may be coming to the table on this global scale, that was not as evident under the Millennium Development Goals is philanthropy. Philanthropists donated dollars coming into the sector looking to make a difference on these very large goals. As I often mentioned to people is, if this wasn't hard, if this wasn't complex, if this wasn't truly global, then they wouldn't be the kinds of sustainable development goals that we'd be trying to coalesce support for us.

They are big, they are hard, and it as you just said, it's going to take a lot of people coming to the table with a lot of different expertise. I just wanted to ask you is your maneuvering in working through this matrix of players. Of course, our partnership, we're very proud to have a partnership with PYXERA Global. Where does philanthropy fit within that now and what do you imagine for the future?

**Amanda:** I think the role of philanthropy is just continuing to grow. I think one of the things that is really great and really interesting is how players like Gates and Rockefeller have changed the ballgame because of the, not only the amount of money that they're putting into some of these challenges, but the level of scrutiny that they're able to apply which really holds everyone at the table to account, and that is a little different than you might have seen in the past.

I think what we're seeing increasingly also is the power of individuals to make change and to-- You can work in your own community or you can work in a specific community and and really be a powerful change-maker from a philanthropic perspective, but taking more of a profitable business approach to it and really demanding returns. I'm really looking at impact in a much more sophisticated way than might have in the past, that's certainly what we're seeing from some of our work. I'm working with some of our philanthropic donors as opposed to our governments side donors or corporate donors, corporate partners.

**Ted:** Yes, and one of the things that we're certainly seeing here at CAF America Donor Advised Funds is the pre-planning, the thinking of the impact before the grant is made. The putting together of a whole package, which I think arguably, in the past would be a really great idea, let's go ahead and fund this and then afterwards, we'll see if anything came of it. There's a lot more thinking and planning that's going into the actual upfront work, but then the execution itself. Do you see that as a big change in really last five years?

**Amanda:** Yes, I really do and I really think that the influence of philanthropic sector is really powerful there, I think there's sometimes a tendency to a one size fits all solution. If you're having challenges, it just- for example, one of the projects that we work on his post-harvest loss, and which means food that does not make it to processing or to market, to consumers. Huge amounts of food is lost on an annual basis just because it doesn't make it from the vine, essentially to the processing plants or to a consumer.

We are working on a project right now that is looking at it with a- in a specific community with a specific crop, but the same funder is doing that also in another country with a different crop and a different environment. I think that's really important and that's something that's new or newer, is this ability to localize things and this localization is really huge. USAID have a huge localization project or initiative from USAID forward, which is really looking to get as much local impact and local input, I think it's probably more important to say, into these programs.

Then even when we're looking at some of the types of programs that I designed, and I run our Global Pro Bono programs. Those really are about taking corporate employees and putting them in communities that they're not from, that they're not used to, and asking them to understand what life is like, while contributing to improving operations for a local organization at the same time in a way that you're not going to see from a typical business trip.

A Hilton in Cleveland is the Hilton in Mumbai, whereas if you are much more at the ground level you have- you're going to gain a better understanding of how a place operates. I think that is increasingly important, we do live in a globalized world, so there are some things that are global, but we're all still-- There's different cultural norms, there's different histories, there's different realities that we must pay so much attention to and increasing intention to.

**Ted:** Increasingly and moving in that direction, it's often an issue of empathy meets hard-nosed business, and for a lot of businesses trying to align, whether it's actually the Sustainable Development Goals or if it's just looking to make an impact. Oftentimes that does need to be within a business context. How do you see that happening and working and do you have some examples that you might point to, in terms of how businesses can successfully make this part of the ecosystem?

**Amanda:** Yes, and I think that that idea of empathy is really important. I think, oftentimes, I think, especially in the United States just because we are something of a dominant cultural force, we have a tendency to take for granted that people are going to operate in the same way we do. When you get to a place like India where just the middle class is larger than the United States, the population of the United States. Obviously, the potential is huge, but you can't operate in India in the way that you operate in the United States.

It does take this ability to put yourself in somebody else's shoes and where I think you're seeing business pay attention to that is this realization that markets are different, and recognizing that emerging markets are the markets of the future. They need to understand at a personal level in a way that I think, maybe didn't think about before quite as much, how to operate in these

places where things like access to clean water is an issue, and what does that mean for your workforce?

If you have a workforce who is getting ill because they don't have access to clean water, that impacted your ability to deliver a product or if you have a poor education system, and you're not able to get students, to get the right workers, what does that mean for your business? You're not going to be able to grow it. It's just much more complex, the different areas you have to look at, and therefore be aware of.

**Ted:** I think, what's interesting is, I'm a bit of a history buff and it's interesting to me that model that seems it feels a bit new is very successful. Just finishing an autobiography of Henry Ford. One of the things that he did that was very innovative back in the early 1900s was to do a survey of all of his employees in terms of their living conditions at home. They would come to the plant and they would work all day, but where did they go home to.

What he found is that at that point, a majority of his employees were literally living at the poverty level, they were a little more than living in slums. He took it upon himself to say, "Listen, someone who wants to work hard and is maybe not successful maybe needs more education. Someone who is ill and not able to get to work maybe needs the hospital, and so he built schools, and he built libraries, and he built hospitals, which all were very good for building community and had some altruistic notion to it, but at the same time, made them much more successful as employees and the profits of Ford Motor Company skyrocketed.

His employees were far more efficient and effective than his competitors. The notion of how philanthropy can build communities can change lives, but also can and we don't need to apologize for the fact that that can also be good for business because successful businesses can be good for communities. There is an ecosystem here where philanthropy can really be the grease to making all that happen. It's interesting to me to see that holistic approach returning to philanthropy.

**Amanda:** I think to fully this idea of systems thinking is increasingly important and it's something that really, and especially in the development space, hasn't- maybe haven't been taken advantage of like it should. It's been very silos, this program is about education, and therefore all the money is about education, but we're not paying attention to the fact that part of the reason children aren't showing up at school or girls are showing up at school is because they're walking to get water every day or because there aren't in appropriate toilet facilities or because they have to work on the family farm.

Well, what does that have to do with agriculture? Therefore, education is an agricultural program, it is also a water and sanitation program, it's also women's health issue. All of these things need to be interconnected and hopefully what the Sustainable Development Goals will do is provide a platform for people to be able to make those connections and say, "Okay, my end goal is to get more girls through secondary school because we know that that is the single biggest determinant of their future earning and their children's ability to get through school."

There's all of these very positive indicators that come with each year that a girl is able to stay in school, but there's a whole environment in which she lives and exists that has to be, if not addressed, then at least acknowledged. I think that is really where a sea change is happening hopefully in the philanthropy community and in international development in general.

**Ted:** PYXERA certainly seems to be right at the center of all of that, and as you said, a matrix of players. We're going to take a very quick break. When we come back, I wondered if you could help our listeners make sense of the fact that there are 17 goals within the Sustainable Development Goals, as you said, very broad, very global, lots of work to be done, but someone who wants to be involved, how do they make sense of so much high thinking within the 17 goals and make themselves a part of the success of hopefully meeting the sustainable goals and making a better planet. We'll be right back.

**Ted:** We are back here on the CAF America radio network with Amanda McArthur, vice president of Global Pro Bono and Engagement at PYXERA Global. Amanda, I was wondering if you could help us make sense of these very big goals, but how can you make a difference.

**Amanda:** Now, I think we should think of the goals as aspirations. The goal number one is end all poverty in all forms everywhere. Well, the reality is that even in- we put all our effort towards that in 15 years, that's probably not realistic, but it's hugely important to have a goal to have an endpoint. I think we have to not get caught up in the flourish around the goals. We have to say is these are really important issues that are complex and that are challenging.

Which also are attainable in some degree and that have the opportunity for smaller successes that will ultimately lead to a large reward. One of the things we talked a lot about at PYXERA Global is what are the actionable problems? How can we break these goals down into things that we think are able to be addressed? Take the problem and break it down into its sub components. For example, I mentioned post-harvest loss before. Well, that's really about market linkages and transportation and getting produce to processing into market.

That's something that we know how to do. If we look at it from that perspective, that's the type of thing that it falls under the larger agriculture goal, which we can take steps to address and I think that's really important. I think as far as how people can become involved in their own way. I think taking a really-- take a look at the goal, for instance 17 of them and they actually are broken down into very discrete areas, recognizing, like I said earlier, that they are all interconnected.

Say, where do I have expertise, where do I have knowledge, where do I have interests that I can contribute to some aspect of this? We're never going to solve clean water and sanitation everywhere all together. We're going to solve it with local solutions and individual communities or individual countries over a period of time. Thinking of it in more bite-sized ways is one way to do it.

**Ted:** Taking a look at the goals, as you said, they're very broad and very aspirational, but I also take a look at it as a checklist of things that we need to make very sincere progress on. Because

if we get to the end of the development goals period and we've not made some progress on all these goals we may not even have a habitable planet and certainly we will not have made it a better place for our fellow human beings to live, to live well and to raise their families.

It's really about being good stewards, it's about showing empathy to others, but it's also recognizing the fact that well, we live on this planet and we certainly take from this planet if we don't seriously have a set of goals or checkboxes of things that we need to be making progress on. They could literally overtake the human race.

**Amanda:** Yes, absolutely. This is a critical moment and the reason-- One of the great things about the Sustainable Development Goals is that they really were developed in a big tent. Whereas the Millennium Development Goals, we joke that they were some guys in the back room of the UN who basically came up with these eight goals that they were going to address. They were taken on a road show. Private sector companies were asked to contribute, large philanthropic donors were asked to contribute.

Individual people were asked to contribute, countries. These really all came together and we joke about the fact that there are 17 of them, it seems just like there's too many. It's because everybody has- recognizes that these are the challenges that face our world, and because of the big tent aspect of it, they have some gravity to them that I think we need to really pay attention to.

**Ted:** I agree, and part of corporations being involved of course is employee engagement. That's a very important part of the work that you do that can add effectiveness to philanthropy. Can you talk to us a little bit about it's not just about the dollars?

**Amanda:** Yes, I think any company you talk to will tell you that their greatest resources there is human capital. I think that really is true. I am so blessed to be able to work with a number of multinational companies and their employees. They really are just really smart, really passionate people. Having the opportunity to take them to a place they haven't been before to switch up their perspective to look at life slightly differently perhaps appreciate their own life a little bit more is really a passion of mine and something that I'm so lucky to be able to provide.

What I think it does for the business is it gives the business an opportunity to really make a positive impact in the world. Hopefully, these people are now coming back to their day jobs and saying, "I know how we can apply our business in a way that will be more powerful and more positive in the communities in which we operate in." Maybe that's a global community or maybe it's just their community at home. Some of our clients really use these programs as a way to capture innovation.

How do we need to adapt our products and services to meet these markets? Which is clearly a profit driven idea. I think one of the things you always have to think about in emerging markets is that these are countries that oftentimes were kind of given the leftovers as far as, "This product works in the United States or Europe and so then we're just going to send it to Nigeria and it'll work the same." By actually putting people on the ground, they say, "We need to

actually adapt this and we need to take into account their cultural realities and the infrastructure realities and all of those sorts of things." You drive your consumer base in that way, which I think it's really potentially powerful.

**Ted:** Exactly.

**Amanda:** I also think there's opportunity to have more global employees. We can't underestimate what that means just from a piece of security perspective as well.

**Ted:** Sure, well, and the ability to broaden the horizons of any employee makes them a better asset. I'm sorry to say we're just about out of time, it always goes much faster than we would like when we have such fascinating topics and such terrific experts as yourself. Before we wrap up in just about a minute, can you please tell our listeners how they can reach you?

**Amanda:** Yes, absolutely. You can find me at [amacarthur@pyxeraglobal.org](mailto:amacarthur@pyxeraglobal.org) or you can find me on twitter [@amaca\\_dc](https://twitter.com/amaca_dc).

**Ted:** That's terrific and Amanda McArthur is a vice president of Global Pro Bono and Engagement at PYXERA GLOBAL. Thank you so much for being our guest today here on the *CAF America Radio Network*.

**Amanda:** Thank you so much for the opportunity.

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