

## **INTRODUCTION EP.1** [Introduction \(Ep.1\)](#)

**Locutor Víctor Ramos** [00:00:06]

Moving toward a sustainable and inclusive Puerto Rico. A special series from En Puerto Rico and GFR Media, sponsored by the Puerto Rico Community Foundation.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:00:20]

Greetings and welcome to the first episode of the special series Moving toward a Sustainable and Inclusive Puerto Rico, a collaboration of the Puerto Rico Community Foundation and GFR Media to educate about the principles of sustainable development. Today I am joined by Dr. Nelson Colón, president of the Puerto Rico Community Foundation. Welcome, Nelson.

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:00:40] Greetings.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:00:40]

Also with us is Dr. Palmira Ríos, professor at the University of Puerto Rico. Welcome Palmira.

**Dra. Palmira Ríos** [00:00:48]

It's my pleasure. Greetings to all.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:00:50]

I'm delighted to have you both at the opening of this ten-episode series on sustainable development. Nelson Colón, we wanted to start talking about what sustainability is and why it is important to talk about sustainable development in Puerto Rico today.

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:01:07]

Yes, it's an essential topic right now and the future. But basically, when we discuss sustainability, we talk about the capacity of countries and people to be able to shape their present and their future. The capacity element is essential, right? It isn't that we depend on external elements, but that we direct ourselves and develop the basic elements to move as an island, as a society, in such a way that all people in that core can enjoy basic rights, can enjoy shared prosperity. For me that's what sustainability is.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:01:51]

Palmira work is being done on this project, in a report that we will be mentioning later, a report that will be measuring to a certain extent how the Sustainable Development Goals for Puerto Rico are being achieved. But from your experience as an academic, what are the main challenges for Puerto Rico and our economy to be able to begin to integrate these goals into our public policies?

**Dra. Palmira Ríos** [00:02:19]

Well, first, it's a very different development model than the one that prevails in Puerto Rico, the one we've used for a long time. We have always approached economic development from the point of view of economic growth or increases in income, not inequalities or the protection of the environment or the planet. So certainly, this model or this proposal

integrates improving people's living conditions. Respect all their rights, protect the environment and seek prosperity and peace because of this process. So, the indicators of success are going to be different. It isn't going to be like the reports you see stating that cement consumption increased or more cars were purchased. No, those aren't indicators of greater equity, inclusion, and economic development. So, it's a different perspective. We would also be looking at the result, for example, of Puerto Rico's tax plans in relation to whether they are reducing inequality in Puerto Rico, and I want to say that it's one of the highest in the world and we should be concerned about that. Reducing Puerto Rico's poverty levels in some proportion. So, we're going to start looking at development from other perspectives, with other criteria. And from the point of view of academia and research, we must start building different instruments to evaluate. In our case, in the field of public affairs and public administration, the graduate schools of Public Administration in the United States and globally have adopted the SDGs as a criterion in the training of our students, because we believe that every graduate of our programs has to know this public management model, because the government plays a fundamental role in being able to effectively implement all these goals and these goals.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:04:30]

And obviously, Nelson, you commented that this was an exercise and more than an exercise it's a way of living, right? Personally, corporately, and publicly. And today we're releasing this first of ten chapters. Why did the Puerto Rico Community Foundation decide to venture into this ten-podcast project and educate about sustainable development.

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:04:56]

Yes, it goes to the heart of what the Foundation is, right? The Foundation has equity as its axis. The Foundation's axis is that we can develop capacities in communities so that they achieve their transformation. So, we decided to venture here because it gives us a different approach. On the one hand, we have a conceptual framework, but on the other hand it intersects with an approach that the Community Foundation began to forge in 2008, which is the community capital approach. Both the SDGs and the Foundation are extremely interested in this being disseminated and known, and the issue of community capital allows us to take the 17 goals and land them in (a way) that we can ask ourselves 'well, are we moving forward, are we not moving forward, are we improving?' So, to the extent that we can look at human capital, financial capital, ecological capital, social, cultural, and financial capital, to the extent that this gives us elements of progress and growth, it allows us to say we are getting closer to the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:06:24]

Ok. And in that sense, Palmira, the SDGs have really been developing for a long time, because the SDGs come from this line of global movements, right? Of human and ecological rights. But really, to explain to our audience, what are the Sustainable Development Goals and where do they come from?

**Dra. Palmira Ríos** [00:06:47]

Well, as you mentioned, it's part of a process of many, many decades of development, of making the Universal Declaration of Human Rights effective, that all human beings are equal and must enjoy equal rights and, consequently, they have developed many conferences,

plans, development proposals, but until now they were all scattered: that of women's rights, after the Beijing Conference; Environment, on the other hand, etc. But it begins now and is first combined in 2000 with the Millennium Development Goals, which begin to integrate and seek a proposal for a development plan that begins to integrate different goals. That first plan, that first decade, the goals expected weren't reached because it also coincides with a global economic crisis. So, in the process of evaluating it, this new agenda begins to take shape, much more ambitious than the previous one. In this case, 17 goals and 169 metrics were identified, which scares the best. But it certainly gives some very specific indicators of how we know we're really progressing and where we need to improve. Of course, all this has to be tempered in each country. And it has two great pillars. On the one hand it is equity, and that's why I said before: to talk about development today we have to bring equity to the conversation, it cannot be left behind. And, in fact, there's this slogan of no one being left behind. And the other pillar of this proposal is sustainable development. This development model must be harmonized with our environment, it has to really understand it and work with planet Earth. So, for example, in this context, the islands, of which we're one of them, are playing a very important role in understanding and developing public policies, programs, that really promote development harmonized with that context of the islands. And there, for example, Puerto Rico can and does work with, not only Hawaii, with the entire Caribbean, with the Pacific. And as recently as April there was a colleague from Puerto Rico participating in a conference about the islands, about sustainability in Guam, in the Pacific. So, this process is happening.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:09:26]

Nelson, this concept of islands, of we are, we have finite, defined capabilities — we are not a continent — can be an advantage and it can be a disadvantage too, right? How can the concept of community capitals influence public policies toward sustainable development?

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:09:45]

Yes, what the concept of community capital gives you is like six references, right, that allow us to ask ourselves, are we moving toward a type of development that's sustainable and equitable? So, in that sense, in some places attempts have been made to use Sustainable Development Goal goals. I think it doesn't work that way. If one takes it piece by piece, we aren't going to get there. So, we must find a comprehensive framework that allows us to group these 17 goals. I think that as an island, I think that as an island that's a bridge to the Americas, we have real advantages. For example, the issue of energy. Puerto Rico can perfectly be a laboratory of equitably distributed energy, looking at renewable energy resources, solar energy, wind, water. The fact that we're an island and that we're small gives us better and greater possibilities of achieving these goals. So, what this is about is seeing, remembering that these are proposals for governments. So, what's the role of nonprofits? We can discuss that later, but remembering that, it's about seeing how we can reconfigure, how we can tighten these goals in such a way that we can look at ourselves and, as Pope Francis said in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, we can look and say: No one here is discarded, no one here is disposable, all human beings have equal rights and all human beings have equal capacity to produce for everyone's well-being.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:11:44]

One could get lost, no, in measuring the Sustainable Development Goals and it could become a more technocratic exercise in public policy. And in fact, the United Nations is already warning that there has been a delay in many countries, for reasons we know, in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. But in any case, Palmira, it's important to make them visible, it's important to educate about it and it's important to start measuring them. And in that sense, how does this voluntary report from Puerto Rico, if you can tell us a little about it, how does this report move forward this measurement of the SDGs?

**Dra. Palmira Ríos** [00:12:24]

Well, Puerto Rico, like many other countries, is going to face the first challenge of statistics and I believe that it's going to put on the table the importance and urgent need of having better statistical systems. This has been pointed out in other countries, but I believe that here it's evident that we must take affirmative steps in that area. That's essential to make informed public policy decisions, to be able to identify what the problems are, the magnitude of the problem and whether we're making progress in that direction. Something that we also see in this SDG process is that beyond central governments, local governments, community organizations, specialized organizations, are adopting the SDGs as a model. So... Despite the complexity, it also has flexibility. We see how cities, not only states, Hawaii, New York, but cities like Orlando, Los Angeles, have adopted the SDGs as a model for their operation and issue Voluntary Review reports. Also, organizations like AARP, which are beginning to temper the SDGs with the goals of healthy aging. Likewise, ethnic groups, indigenous peoples, people of African descent. In fact, a few weeks ago there was a meeting in Colombia between the vice president and Afro-Colombian organizations to begin to harmonize the SDGs with this agenda. So, despite the complexity, it also has that flexibility and many organizations and countries, or local governments are doing it. And along those lines we're proposing that from Puerto Rico, with all the problems we face, we have a model that can help us respond to the crisis the island is facing. Not only talk about the problem, but also say: look, there are alternatives. And even more so, some of this work is already being done, not aware that they're under the shadow of the SDGs, but many community organizations are already advancing some of those agendas. And this is what we're discovering with the research work that something is already being done, we aren't starting from scratch, or everything is negative. And it's to strengthen that work, but also to promote alliances and collaborative work among all these organizations.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:14:47]

It seems to be, Nelson, that the sustainability movement was and is born and is made from the communities. It has been the communities who have been articulating it, advocating for it. And in that sense, how has the Foundation been able to continue preparing communities to continue promoting these goals?

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:15:11]

There is certainly an extraordinary opportunity to see it from the birth of the communities, because it would depend on the government's will to adopt these 17 goals. So, in the absence or lack of that, then we look at the model from the bottom up and the Foundation has been looking at the development of different communities. For example, there is an organization, Cossao in Utuado, that is looking at both economic development and agricultural development, such as food sustainability. That produces examples and learning,

just like what is happening in Loíza. So, what the community model really gives us are experiences, it gives us small learning laboratories where what we do small we could do for all of Puerto Rico, which at the end of the day isn't that big either. So, there's a lot of potential in what we can do. And what we hope in this conversation of these ten podcasts is that we can begin to intertwine those communities that are focused on sustainable development with their particular models, that we can begin to intertwine and connect. And that would be at the end of the day, part of the Community Foundation's work.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:16:44]

And you must remember, right, Palmira? that the SDGs are goals that are intertwined with each other. That they should not be compartmentalized as such. And in that sense, this report that's going to be produced, what type of film, what type of painting, what type of country are we going to begin to see when we begin to intertwine these concepts.

**Dra. Palmira Ríos** [00:17:11]

Well, that's a very important point, recognizing that they're all intertwined. Unfortunately, if something positive comes out of the pandemic, it's that we've experienced how all the factors are intertwined. That a health crisis creates an economic crisis. That the most vulnerable sectors are beginning to be identified. So, there is greater awareness of vulnerable sectors. Of the gender dimensions of the phenomenon. So, we've experienced that interrelationship and it's a bit of the look that we're going to be taking... There are two things that are fundamental to this report. One is to recognize the centrality of the challenge of climate change on an island where sea levels are rising and the impact that this is having.

We cannot continue to ignore it. And public policies must be pointed in that direction. And another fundamental element of this proposal, which is essential for us to understand, is inequality. Not only talk about poverty in Puerto Rico, which is very high, but the inequality rates in Puerto Rico are intolerable. They're among the highest in the world, the highest in the United States. And that hasn't yet permeated our public policy makers, in legislation. And it would create awareness that achieving reduction should be a strategic, but tactical, goal of the governments of Puerto Rico, it isn't all to politicize it, and that all legislative measures must be evaluated considering the extent to which they reduce poverty and inequality in Puerto Rico.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:18:56]

How can we begin to measure the difference and explain the difference between inequality and equity, equality, and inequality? Because there may be equal conditions, but there may be conditions of inequality right there, right? Let's start talking a little about the difference between inequity and inequality.

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:19:16]

Of course, when we look at inequality, what we're really looking at is the capacity that groups and people have to be able to meet their fundamental needs. That's what we're looking at. And the other currency of inequality is equity. How is equity built? Perhaps a very close example is equity in houses. The more you pay, the less you owe. And the less you owe, the more ownership you have in that house.

So, equity, both in the educational area and in the financial area, as well as in the ecological area, is nothing other than rescuing those assets that are in the communities, that are in society and that each community has the potential to develop them, it has the potential to make them grow. So, one measurement, one way to measure it is, in those six fundamental areas: How are we developing? How do we get started with green capital? Has there been less erosion? Has there been greater protection of the environment? How do we look at financial capital? Has this community that had "x" poverty rate reduced that poverty gap? Have academic levels been increasing? So, looking at in that way and grouped around these six areas, it really allows us a very precise measurement of progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Let me add a very brief thing and that's, after the report what? And maybe this could be the last question. For me the report is an organizational tool. For me, the report is a tool to be able to sit down with communities, institutions, and say: this is the picture. How do we organize ourselves to move and progress in each of the Sustainable Development Goals? So, that tool of data, information, metrics is essential to generate that conversation and, from my point of view, that community conversation.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:21:38]

There is an enormous capacity of Puerto Rican academics, men and women who are also professionals, also with people from the community, who are all working in different facets of sustainable development. How can the Foundation — this is a question for both of you — begin to collect and to try to compile all this knowledge that exists and is being practiced from the community level to the academic and professional field. And how are these voices not left out?

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:22:14]

It's, in fact, part of the work that Palmira is doing at the Foundation, as a consultant at the Foundation, to collect information. We're creating indicators, we're creating data banks, we're connecting with existing data banks. So, part of the work of this project, within the Foundation, of the Sustainable Development Goals, is nothing other than accumulating information and presenting that in what would be the voluntary report. So that report really, at the end of the day, is a way to capture all that knowledge and the Institute of Statistics and what the departments have, including what the Legislature is doing and what the researchers are doing, capturing that knowledge in this report, which is what we're calling the Voluntary Report. So, we have a very powerful tool there to capture that information.

**Dra. Palmira Ríos** [00:23:11]

Yes, we're meeting with different sectors, first to receive input from them, to identify which are the priority areas and to help us collect information. So, we already had a very large, very successful first meeting, with many people from different organizations. But we're also going to have meetings with specialized groups, in the government sector, taking advantage of many of my graduates who are in positions to help us collect the information and take this message to their agencies; with community sectors; with university groups, because there's a lot of work for universities in the 2030 Agenda. And we also included a meeting with faith-based organizations because many faith-based organizations are doing this work not aware that it's under (the SDGs), so we're going to integrate them. And we want to have a meeting with representatives of the media to train them, so that they know and are also

actors in relaying this message. So, there are many meetings that we're going to be holding and conversations, because this has to be very broad.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:24:24]

But this report, Nelson, at what rate is it going to be published, what are the next steps?

**Dr. Nelson Colón** [00:24:34]

Yes, next steps: the report should be ready in about 18 months. We would be seeing the first print run at the beginning of next year as it's being refined, because the interest of the Foundation is for it to be a collaborative report. This is, at its core, leadership management. So, this is a call to institutional leadership, to the leadership of universities, to the leadership of community organizations and even to government leadership, to look at that report, to enter that conversation, to the heads of media outlets. Let's get into that conversation to really be able to organize ourselves to move these goals forward, one; and two, communicating the speed at which we're moving or that we aren't moving, that's a possibility too. And to be able to communicate how close or how far we are from the Sustainable Development Goals. For me that's the great value. It's your possibility to organize, organize ourselves in Puerto Rico at different levels and really exercise leadership management so that the island moves in that direction.

**Luis A. Ferré Rangel** [00:25:51]

And in that sense, this series of ten episodes that the Puerto Rico Community Foundation is sponsoring, together with the collaboration of Dr. Palmira Ríos, will give visibility to these experts, both in the practice and in the study of sustainable development in Puerto Rico, and we're inviting the audience to stay tuned to this podcast. The second episode that we're going to produce is going to be about the end of poverty and zero hunger and we're seeing how we're already integrating the Sustainable Development Goals and how the concept of hunger that tends to be minimized in Puerto Rico clearly exists. I want to thank Dr. Nelson Colón, president of the Puerto Rico Community Foundation, and Dr. Palmira Ríos, professor, expert on the subject, from the University of Puerto Rico, for having been here in this first episode of the series Moving toward a sustainable and inclusive Puerto Rico, a collaboration of the Puerto Rico Community Foundation and GFR Media. Until next time, in the second episode of this series. Thank you very much.

**Locutor Víctor Ramos** [00:27:03]

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