SDGs as a compass for the non-governmental development cooperation

Workshop with IA and DGD on ambitions, roles and ways forward
How can SDGs serve as a compass for orientation of the combined channels’ efforts of the Belgian development cooperation? (Olivier)
## Study progression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Until May</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July onwards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews &amp; data gathering</td>
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<td>Workshops:</td>
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<td>• Enabel – DGD</td>
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<td>May 28</td>
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<td>• BIO – DGD</td>
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<td>June 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Indirect actors – DGD</td>
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<td>June 12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SCOPING WORKSHOP</strong></td>
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<td>June 28</td>
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<td>Preparation field missions</td>
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Purpose of this workshop

- Check/test findings from the scoping phase on the state of play of indirect actors in dealing with the SDGs
- Discussion on ambition, components and process
- Feeding the interactive exercise on SDG-scenarios & possible ways forward
Agenda 2030 (1)

What it is:

• Indivisible, integrated and universal agenda for a global partnership to achieve sustainable development in all countries and the world
• Political compromise containing 17 goals – 169 targets – 232 indicators + underpinning principles
• Monitoring by Voluntary National Reviews
• Common language
## Agenda 2030 (2) - underpinning principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Demands</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universality &amp; leaving no one</td>
<td>- Universalism - Priority for furthest left behind</td>
<td>- Universal public services, global public goods - Fragile countries/LDCs - Vulnerable groups, inequalities and discriminatory structures</td>
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</table>
What it is not:

- Binding
- New MDGs
- A results framework for an individual organisation, donor organisation

- So, is the SDG agenda an NGO agenda?
- If so, in which ways?
Approach to SDGs as a compass? Reach, scope and levels
Belgium

- **Ambition**: incremental use, integrated use or transformative use
- **Components**: goals, targets, indicators, principles
- **Process**: top down or bottom led process? Which institutions in support of the process?

Belgian Development cooperation

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Non-governmental development cooperation

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Organisational level

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What are the roles for non-governmental actors in dealing with the SDGs?
Three roles for NGOs in dealing with the SDGs:

1. Contribution to the official SDGs: direct - indirect
2. Watchdog function: governments - private sector
3. Communication/awareness raising
Role 1: Contributing to and programming for the SDGs
Two ways of contributing to the SDGs: direct and indirect contribution

• Direct = implementing projects and programmes that contribute to the official SDG agenda
• Indirect contribution = adaptation of NGO-strategies, programmes/projects to contribute to SDGs

Are there Belgian NGOs doing direct?
## Findings (1) – Attitude of NGOs on SDGs in development cooperation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• SDGs can be a common framework in which all sort of actors can function</td>
<td>• Limited knowledge and different interpretations of SDGs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• SDGs offer an opportunity as a communication tool</td>
<td>• Unclarity at this stage on political priorities – need for prioritisation and clear choices (not additional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Agenda 2030 provides opportunities for partnerships and clarifications on expertise</td>
<td>• Fear of top-down decisions in line with historical decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is a lot of NGO language in the SDGs</td>
<td>• There is a fear for additional administrative burden and exclusion of NGOs in political decision making around SDGs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Future programmes 2022-2026: timely start of dialogue on what is desirable and feasible</td>
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<tr>
<td>• CSFs</td>
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</table>
Findings (2) – Current NGO policy and practices

- SDGs have not changed NGO vision and mission:
  - Sustainable development > SDGs
  - SDGs not necessarily something new or useful framework to guide NGO policy

- Policies, strategies, interventions are barely adapted to the SDGs
  - Not required in the 2017-2021 programs (a few exceptions but SDG-proof or labelling?)
  - SDG retro-fitting in external communication (e.g. annual reports).

- SDG principles are supported, but rather unknown.
  - Little attention for indivisibility of the SDG agenda
  - Universality and leaving no one behind: supported, but interpreted differently
  - Shared responsibility and multistakeholder partnerships: strongly favoured.
  - Working with the principles: more interesting than the 17 goals
Findings (3) – M&E / reporting

• Most organizations: no SDGs/targets/indicators
  • Some internal exercises have been done to compare indicators. Varying results come from this exercise, but so far no follow through in actions.
  • Lack of data and capacity to measure are seen as challenges to assess the contribution to the SDGs
• For some NGOs: a link between their **theory of change** and the SDGs
  • Growing interest to link theory of change with SDGs but different approaches
    • At level of SDGs or at the level of targets
    • Above impact level? At different levels: activities, output, outcome, impact level?
    • Intrinsic or extrinsic motivation?
• No reporting to the SDGs within programs: not required
• SDG labelling in external communication: intrinsic or extrinsic motivation?
Findings (4) - NGO Variety matters

Large international NGOs

- Interested in seeing where others contribute = value of labelling exercise of activities and goals
- Decisions to include SDGs in planning and M&E depend of the international level

Small and local NGOs

- SDGs are not a useful framework to base planning and programming on – business as usual
Findings (4) - NGO Variety matters

Humanitarian NGOs

- SDGs not seen as a framework for the humanitarian sector: own set of principles and time scale to work on

NGOs mainly Noord-acties

- SDGs as a lobby & advocacy tool, communication tool
Findings (5) - NGO expectations of DGD

- Respect Right of initiative of NGOs
- NGO mobilization around SDGs is highly dependent on Belgian political credibility
  - Make clear, timely and realistic decisions with regard to SDG prioritization
  - Show political will/leadership to push the SDG agenda
  - Clear priorities
  - Invest/mobilize Belgian expertise/capacity?
    =>This will improve partnerships on sustainable development/policy coherence

- SDGs should not lead to additional reporting requirements
- Reporting on SDGs should NOT become a performance assessment
- Right of initiative of the NGOs !!!
Role 2: Watch dog – keeping government and private sector responsible
Findings

Gvt. accountability

• Different institutions have been put into place: SDG Coalition, Perspective 2030, Association 21- ...

• Individual organisations: Mainly by advocacy NGOs - Shadow report Trade Union report on Belgian realisation of SDG Agenda

Private sector accountability

• SDG Charter
Reflections: digging a bit deeper

<table>
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<th>Ambition</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Process</th>
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| • Ad hoc use  
  • Consistent but instrumental for Setting-influencing the political agenda  
  • Transforming advocacy work | • At what level should advocacy take place? In Belgium?  
  • Goals, targets, indicators, principles? Whom should do what? Division of labour? | • Different initiatives such as the SDG coalition, SDG Charter, Perspective 2030, Association 21  
  • lead by example if demanding change of government/private sector |
Role 3: Communication - awareness raising
Findings (1)

General pattern

- Narrative: sustainable development > SDGs
- SDGs = international framework → claim contribution to sustainable development
- Narrative = level of the goals (SDGs) > level of principles (components)

BUT

- Is use of SDGs in communication instrumental or substantive?
  - ‘business as usual’ versus SDG proof (explain this on a separate slide)
- Difference between SDGs as a communication tool and communication on SDGs as a goal
Findings (2) - NGO variety matters

Large (international) NGOs

International exercise and reflection has taken place, Belgian NGOs follow suit and use international materials in their communication?

Is this change purely a matter of communication or does it reflect a real change?

Small and local NGOs

Labelling – framing → make-up exercise or more? (a first step to start to connect with wider agenda’s?)

Humanitarian NGOs

Useful framework in communication – connecting with others - coordination
Reflection: digging a bit deeper

- Ambition: how important are SDGs for communication (and reporting)?

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<tr>
<td>SDG labelling of activities and results</td>
<td>SDG communication for global change</td>
<td>SDGs as core business reflects in all communication products</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs as a communication tool for the organisation</td>
<td>Theory of change</td>
<td>Awareness raising for global change</td>
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- Components – which are the most useful components to work with in awareness-raising/communication? Goals? Targets? Principles?
  - Suggestion: SDGs and the sustainable development narrative as a common language

- Process – Moving away from silos/indivisibility
Conclusions
Knowledge

The knowledge on SDGs is limited – often still seen as an ‘agenda with 17 goals/silos’, rather than a global, universal and indivisible agenda for sustainable development.

Ambition

Different levels of ambition level.

- At Belgian level where they take up the role as communicator and watch-dog we see an active Belgian civil society.

- At the international level and in their contribution to the SDGs directly or through their programmes, there is barely an incremental use of SDGs.
Components

Lack of clarity at NGO level with regard to components: Which are the most useful components to work with? Goals? Targets? Indicators? Principles? ...

Process

Lots of questions, few answers. For example:

What should be the role of SDGs in the NGOs’ future programmes (next: 2022-2026)?

At what intervention level should SDG integration take place for the non-governmental cooperation?

• E.g. Common strategic frameworks in line with SDGs?
• Bottom up led processes / lead by example / sharing good practices

Multistakeholder partnerships: what? how? feasibility?...
What are ways forward?
Ambition

How ambitious should we be with regard to the SDGs?
- Belgian level
- DevCoop
- NGOsector
- Organisational level
**Levels of ambition**

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<tr>
<td>Use Agenda 2030 to communicate and define actions</td>
<td>Use Agenda 2030 to shape your own strategy and as a transition agenda - to question the context in which your organization operates (lead by example?)</td>
<td>Use Agenda 2030 as a transformation tool (change management) - how to transform your own organization to become future-proof</td>
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The knowledge gap needs to be addressed?

• Who is responsible? Shared responsibility of development actors to inform and improve knowledge on Agenda 2030?

• How can knowledge be improved?
Process

Do we need a NGO sector discussion on feasibility on working with the SDGs?

DIALOGUE NGOs-DGD !!!! (start before the end of 2019 !!!)

Clarity from DGD on expectations (ambition level, formal requirements etc)

• At what intervention level should SDG integration take place for the non-governmental cooperation?
  • E.g. Common strategic frameworks in line with SDGs?
  • Bottom down led processes / lead by example / sharing good practices

• Importance of multistakeholder partnerships?
Individual and group work:
Prospection: Level, scope and reach.
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Field studies

Choice of countries: criteria? e.g.
- Current (innovative) initiatives
- Specific challenges
- Current phase of project cycle
- National initiatives/local context

Focus of case-study, e.g.
- Results monitoring & SDGs
- Alignment & harmonisation (with country; other donors...)
- Operationalisation of SDG principles
- Local capacity to use SDG targets & indicators
- ...