KALEIDOS RESEARCH

Discussion Paper 1

WAIT-AND-SEE OR TAKE THE LEAD?

Approaches of Dutch CSOs to the Sustainable Development Goals

Gabi Spitz, Ries Kamphof & Edith van Ewijk
Amsterdam, December 11, 2015

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DISCLAIMER

1. INTRODUCTION

The new United Nations-led *Agenda 2030* transforms the global development agenda from a North-South agenda to a universal Global Agenda (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to eradicate poverty, fix climate change, and reduce inequality. The 17 SDGs (or 'Global Goals' – see Figure 1) are interrelated and require action both in the Netherlands and the EU as well as in developing countries. Compared to their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2001-2015), the '2030 agenda' (2016-2030) is a 'universal' agenda for various actors worldwide and devotes attention to global public goods such as energy access, resilient infrastructure, sustainable use of oceans, and inclusive economic growth (United Nations, 2014). Sustainability and security are given a prominent place alongside the traditional poverty reduction targets that were already part of the MDGs. Moreover, both the Global South and the Global North are expected to contribute. Given the extremely ambitious programme, with 17 'goals' and 169 'targets', both the implementation and the financing of the SDGs will be complex, for developed and developing countries (Kamphof, Spitz, & Boonstoppel, 2015).

This implementation and contribution will also take place in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has shown support for the new agenda by sending a prominent delegation to the UN Summit in September 2015, which included the King and Queen, the Prime Minister, and several ministers. Several Dutch Civil Society Organization representatives were also present during the summit and many more have provided input in the drafting process of the goals. Traditionally, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)[1] play a major role in the Dutch development policy process: in implementation of development cooperation policies, monitoring of policies, advocacy, and/or in raising public awareness. It also applies to other policy fields; however, these policy fields and the officiating CSOs mostly work rather isolated from the development agenda. The new *Agenda 2030* might transform this landscape as the universal nature of the Agenda requires action abroad and at home.

1.1. Dutch civil society characterized by diversity

In his speech to the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the Dutch Prime Minister Rutte underscored the role of the private sector in the implementation of the SDGs. He mentioned the 'Post-2015 Charter' as one of the leading examples: a private sector initiative where different actors can contribute in partnership to the implementation of the SDGs.[2] Several CSOs are also part of the Charter, but not all of them view cross-sector partnerships as the way to realising the SDGs. The plethora of Dutch CSOs is characterised by different views on (sustainable) development and a broad range of different thematic and geographical priorities. For example, a CSO such as *The Hunger Project* is especially committed to ending world hunger, while *Simavi* sees health as the 'first step out of poverty', and *IUCN* is particularly critical on current global production and consumption and its effect on the environment. Traditionally, the government supports the contribution of civil society to development: from 2016 onwards, 25 strategic partnerships of Dutch CSOs will receive Official Development Assistance (ODA) to carry out activities that are in line with Dutch development policy. Many other CSOs, active in for example sustainable energy or environmental protection in the

---

[1] The term non-governmental organization (NGO) and CSO are sometimes used interchangeably. In this Policy Brief, we follow the OECD DAC's (2009:26) definition of CSOs: "[CSOs] can be defined to include all non-market and non-state organizations outside of the family in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009).

[2] http://www.worldconnectors.nl/en/agenda/officieel-tekenmoment-charter-post-2015/

Netherlands, form a different 'sector', which could be labelled as the green or environmental CSOs. Together, they form two sides of the same coin: that of sustainable development.

Figure 1: Overview of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development (www.globalgoals.org).

Dutch CSOs have been under considerable financial pressure in the last decade. For decades, many development CSOs have almost been fully dependent on government funding, but this support has been declining since 2010, together with a policy shift from focussing on social development to economic development (Spitz, Muskens, & Van Ewijk, 2013). These shifts have already contributed to a period of 'soul-searching' for the development sector: a continuous 'reassessment' of their priorities and core roles, in many cases accompanied with on the one hand, cuts in budget, staff, and projects, and on the other hand, a focus on new themes and an exploration of forming new partnerships with other actors including the private sector. So, the SDGs have been adopted in a dynamic and challenging time for CSOs, and this undoubtedly affects their approach towards the SDGs.

1.2. New questions

The main question in this policy brief is therefore the following: *How does the new SDG agenda relate to the role Dutch civil society can play in contributing to (sustainable) development?* To answer this question, we conducted research among Dutch CSOs using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.[3] This policy brief first examines what we can learn from the involvement of CSOs with the MDGs, followed by an exploration of the challenges and opportunities of the new agenda. Thereafter, the different (possible) roles of Dutch CSOs with regard to the SDGs are identified as well as the prerequisites/conditions that are needed for CSOs to play these roles in the Dutch context. The policy brief ends with a summary of the key findings and perspectives as suggested by this research. This policy brief is the first part of a three-tier study on the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands by Dutch CSOs, local authorities, and small- and medium-sized enterprises.

---

[3] More information about the research methods used for this discussion paper can be found in section 6.

2. LESSONS FROM THE PAST, OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

After the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), many western countries were filled with the idea that poverty and injustice were the last barriers to remove for a prosperous world. This 'Zeitgeist' led to the organization of several world summits during the 1990's, where challenges such as education, women's rights, and sustainable development were discussed (Spitz, 2012). These summits formed the stepping stones towards the drafting and agreement of the Millennium Declaration in 2000. In 2001, the Millennium Development Goals were finalized by the UN, OECD, IMF, and Worldbank staff in the back rooms of the UN and added to the Declaration (Honniball & Spijkers, 2014). The deadline for the eight goals was set for 2015 and focused on the social side of development, improving issues such as access to education, and maternal and child health. The MDGs were rather unique in the sense that, for the first time in history, there was an international overarching development agenda. It provided a shared framework and a common language for all actors working on development issues (McArthur, 2013).

2.1. Role of CSOs in the MDGs

In the first years after their adoption, the MDGs were not embraced immediately. A report from Social Watch (2003) shows that many CSOs were skeptical about the feasibility of the agenda, and some were unhappy about the exclusion of topics such a good governance. All in all, many organizations wondered whether they should change their policies to adopt the new agenda (Social Watch, 2003). In the end however, the global CSO community became a very important supporter of and watchdog for the MDGs. It should be noted here that the large international CSOs focused more on the MDGs compared to CSOs working on a local level (Nelson, 2007). Moreover, the MDGs have also negatively affected the NGO-sector. The MDGs led to a relatively narrow financing focus of many donors. This was particularly visible in the health sector, where greater attention to infectious diseases (in particular HIV, TB, and Malaria) and maternal and child health, has been blamed for neglecting other poverty-related diseases as well as for a decline in attention for Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) (Van Ewijk, Bokma de Boer-Nubé, Spitz, & Boonstoppel, 2015).

Box 1. CSOs and the MDGs in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, development CSOs have always been active partners of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Already since the 1960s, up to one-third of the yearly aid budget was spent via Dutch CSOs with the aim of actually carrying out projects that are in line with the government's thematic and geographic priorities. Dutch civil society also has a history of stimulating public support for aid and has played a large role in informing citizens about the MDGs and engaging them with the goals. The Dutch government developed a special communication framework for the MDGs that included relatively extensive funds for building public awareness on the goals (Vandemoortele & Delamonica, 2010). For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spent approximately 750.000 euro on 'Het Akkoord van Schokland', a large public event on partnerships for the MDGs in 2007 ("Debat over aanbestedingen van de rijksoverheid", 2007). At the local level, many small CSOs were active. Every province had its own Centre for Development Cooperation (COS) with the MDGs central to their work, where they organized education projects, exhibitions, markets etc. In the survey among Dutch CSOs that was carried out for this Discussion Paper, a large majority of organizations indicated that their organization has worked on the MDGs in the past. Gender equality, poverty eradication, hunger, and maternal health were mentioned as the topics Dutch CSOs worked on mostly.

2.2. CSO involvement in drafting the SDGs

In contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs came to be in a very different way. The 17 goals that came out of the SDG-negotiations were based on consultations with all kinds of societal groups: from corporations

to CSOs to indigenous peoples from all over the world (Ford, 2015). The intergovernmental Open Working Group was one of the main vehicles for civil society consultations on the SDGs. Under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, CSOs also had some opportunity to provide input into the process. The UN Development Group (UNDG) initiated a Global Conversation to support societal participation in the above mentioned trajectories. Now that the SDGs are finalized, the UNDG has taken up the task to come up with strategies to support all stakeholders in the implementation of the new agenda (Sustainable Development Policy & Practice, 2015).

2.3. Dutch CSO reception of the SDGs

Many of the Dutch development CSOs that were consulted for this study have in some way participated in the drafting of the SDGs; for instance, through taking part in national and regional consultations or by being physically present at international negotiations. In general, their first response to the new agenda is a positive one. Currently, Dutch CSOs try to influence the global process of defining indicators for the goals and sub-targets as well (a process that will be finalized in March) through, for example, regional consultations. Not only are the larger CSOs active in this field, but also smaller organizations, such as diaspora-CSOs. The Dutch green CSOs seem to have been less active in the SDG consultation process, possibly because most consultations were carried out through networks of development CSOs or through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite that, large green CSOs such as IUCN, WWF, and Greenpeace have played an active role in the preparation and negotiation process of the goals.

Box 2. Dutch citizens and the MDGs/SDGs

Compared to other European countries, public awareness on the MDGs has been relatively high. In 2007 for instance, 38 percent of the Dutch had heard about the MDGs. Within Europe, only in Sweden was public awareness of the MDGs slightly higher (41%) (Scheunpflug & McDonnell, 2008). However, in recent years, the awareness on the MDGs has decreased: representative opinion research carried in alignment with the research for this discussion paper shows that currently only 18 percent of Dutch citizens have heard about the MDGs.* Nevertheless, 7 in 10 people do think that it is important to make new international agreements to combat global poverty. We presented the respondents a list of 17 topics reflecting the SDGs and asked them which topics are most important to achieve a better world. According to Dutch citizens the three most important issues are: peace and security, education, and healthcare (Boonstoppel, 2015b). They give little priority to the environmental topics

that are part of the SDGs: sustainable energy, clean oceans, infrastructure, sustainable industrialization, and sustainable cities. Previous research has shown that Dutch citizens do not yet see a connection between environmental issues and global poverty (Boonstoppel, 2015a), which might explain why they do not prioritize the environmental goals as a solution to create a better world. The increased attention paid to peace and security does not reflect the results of similar previous studies and is likely to have a relation to the European refugee crisis, which reached a zenith around the time that the research was carried out (September 2015).

* Based on an online survey among 1,083 respondents in September 2015 carried out by Kaleidos Research in cooperation with TNS NIPO (Amsterdam, the Netherlands). More information can be found in the Methodology section.

3. THE 4 DIFFERENT ROLES OF DUTCH CSOs WITH REGARD TO THE SDGs

In our research, we explored the role Dutch CSOs – both from the development and environmental sector – can and would like to play in the implementation of the SDGs. Considering the SDGs have just been adopted, CSOs are understandably still exploring these roles, and those roles are likely to change over time. This section of the Discussion Paper provides a preliminary overview of the roles and expectations CSOs have expressed about with regard to their participation in the SDGs.

3.1. Identification of roles

When asked what the most important roles are CSOs can play in relation to the SDGs, advocacy towards governments and carrying out activities in developing countries come out as most relevant. As Figure 2 shows, other important topics, such as monitoring progress, involving people in developing countries, and working in partnership with companies, follow but at quite some distance away. A minority of the consulted CSOs emphasized on informing Dutch citizens about the goals and carrying out activities that contribute to a greater awareness of the goals. Below we elaborate on the different roles that have been identified as part of the research.


Figure 2: Self-reported roles for CSOs in relation to the SDGs (maximum of 3 choices, n=39).

BOX 3: Prioritization of topics by CSOs

Our survey shows that the following SDGs are most important to the Dutch NGOs that were consulted: good health and wellbeing, no poverty, gender equality, sustainable consumption and production, and peace and justice (see Figure 3). The first three priorities are in line with the MDGs and can be regarded as representative of the 'old' development agenda, while sustainable production and consumption and also peace and justice could represent the 'new' topics in the SDG-agenda. As CSOs have built up a track record in the area's central to the MDGs, it can be expected they perceive these topics as most relevant. However, peace and security has been one of the four priorities in Dutch development cooperation since 2010. And several development CSOs, such as Cordaid, have a history of focusing on fragile states. The attention of the consulted CSOs for the green goals is relatively underwhelming, considering sustainability forms a large part of the new SDG agenda. This might also be the result of the distribution of the sample; a relatively small number of green CSOs were willing to participate in the survey. However, when we compare the results to the findings from the public opinion survey, we see that citizens also prioritize the traditional development SDGs over the green SDGs (see box 2).
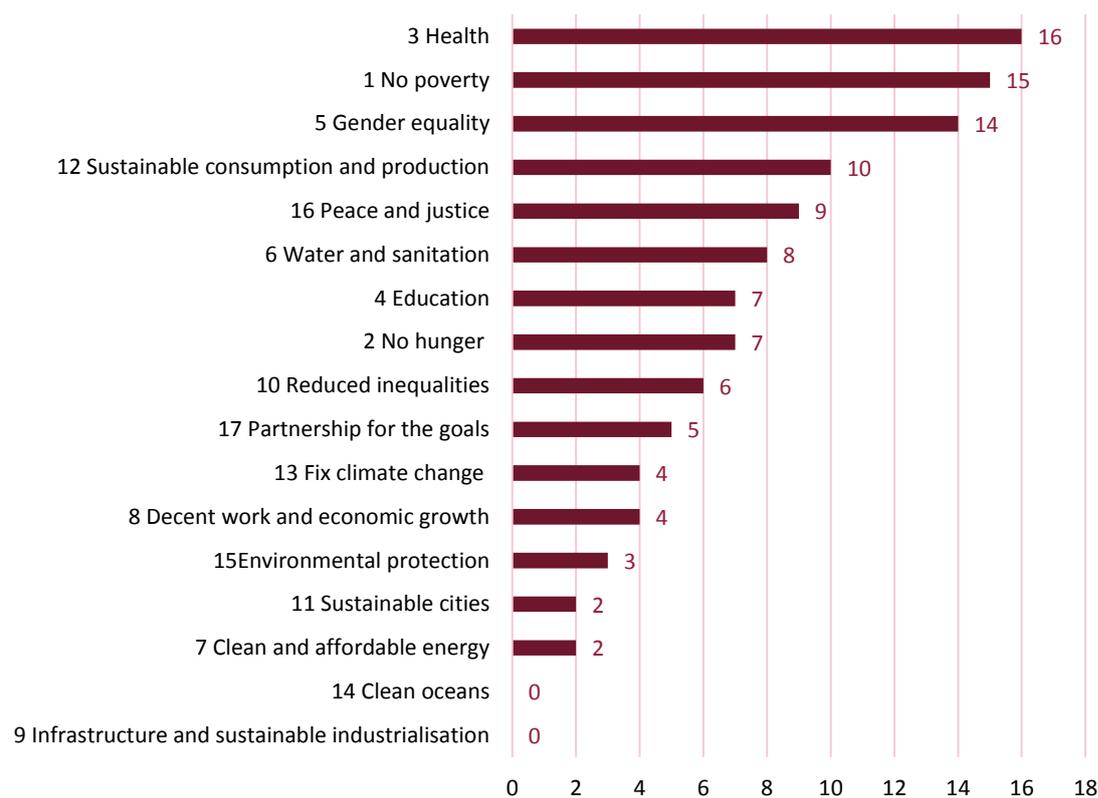
Figure 3: SDG-priorities for Dutch CSOs (maximum of 3 choices, n=39)

3.2. Watchdog

Making sure the government keeps its promises and closely following policy processes in relation to the goals, is what the consulted CSOs believe are their most important tasks. The CSOs have already been playing the part of watchdog in relation to the MDGs and in the process of drafting the SDGs. As was noted by some of the consulted CSOs, it is a role Dutch CSOs are quite familiar with. The Dutch government has a tradition of stimulating dialogue with society and even facilitating opposition from CSOs through subsidies (Rijksoverheid, 2015). CSOs can also fulfill a lobby and advocacy role to the private sector in developing countries, which might be considered as particularly relevant in the new aid and trade agenda of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but in our research this is a role that is mentioned less often.

3.3. Partner

Over the last decade, cross-sector collaboration (for example, between government, private sector, and/or CSOs) has gained momentum as a vehicle for sustainable development, and this notion has also found its way into the SDGs. This is very much in line with the focus of the Dutch development policy, in which the role of the private sector has increased in recent years. Our research shows that the attitudes of CSOs towards the private sector differ widely. Some organizations seem to prefer naming and shaming companies and do not yet collaborate with the private sector. Other CSOs, such as the Hunger Project and WWF, have fully embraced the private sector as a partner in the pursuit of sustainable development. The rest of the CSOs seem to dangle between these two approaches: they do increasingly or occasionally work together with the private sector, but are still quite suspicious about the private sector's motives and about the sincerity of their contributions to sustainable development. This is an important finding taking into account the Dutch government's hailing of the Post-2015 Charter in which the private sector, the public sector, and CSOs cooperate in the implementation of the SDGs. Within the aid sector not much new collaborations have emerged in relation to the SDGs yet. An exception is the recently launched Ready for Change initiative by the

Dutch NGOs Partos, Woord en Daad and FMS that aim to strengthen the attention for policy coherence within the SDG agenda.

3.4. (Project) Implementer

A major role of CSOs is to carry out projects themselves or support others to do so. Organizations receiving financial support from the government carry out a part of the governments' (aid) policy. This has certainly been the case with the MDGs as proposals eligible for co-financing were expected to contribute to the MDGs. Other organizations choose to focus on areas that are not part of the government's core priorities, such as education and health system strengthening. At the moment it is however still unclear how the Dutch government plans to implement the SDGs and which ministries will take responsibility for different segments of the agenda. As a result, CSOs seem to be quite hesitant in implementing the new agenda themselves; they are unsure whether they should bring their own activities in line with the government's policies or whether they should carry out complementing policies.

3.5. Communicator

Most of the consulted CSOs believe it is really important to inform the Dutch public about the SDGs; in every discussion it was mentioned that public awareness is vital and that this role should be taken up by someone. Some CSOs do see it as their role to inform and involve people in developing countries, as these people cannot hold their governments accountable if they do not know about international agreements. However, most of the consulted CSOs do not see this as their responsibility to communicate the SDGs to the public in the Netherlands. A small part of the consulted NGOs believe that this role should be taken up by the government instead.

It should be noted that many CSOs feel tension between the different roles they can play. For instance, being a government financed project implementer or part of a cross-sector partnership can influence the watchdog role of the same CSO. As one participant put it: *"The different roles – being a partner of the government or really following in a critical way - are often difficult to combine. Many CSOs struggle with this issue."*

4. CHALLENGES IN TAKING UP A ROLE IN THE SDG AGENDA

As the earlier sections reveal, Dutch CSOs see different roles for themselves in relation to the SDGs, but seem to be somewhat cautious in taking up these roles for various reasons. The study identifies at least 6 challenges for the CSOs to deal with in relation to the new global goals, namely: a) overcoming a lack of ownership, b) unclear role of the Dutch government, c) establishing new 'out of the box' partnerships, d) overcoming financial dependence, e) lack of awareness, and f) the universal, merely utopian nature of the new agenda. In some cases these challenges can be considered as opportunities as well.

4.1. Ownership

A first challenge for CSOs is the relative lack of ownership for the SDGs in the Netherlands within the CSO community. Although the importance of the SDGs is widely recognized, the Netherlands and Dutch civil society has provided input in the drafting and negotiation process of the agenda; CSOs have not yet completely embraced the new agenda. Some worry that the broader focus of the SDGs might direct attention and means away from the traditional development issues. The survey finds that a large share of the consulted CSOs do not plan to change their policies now that the SDGs have become the new international framework for sustainable development. As one participant explains: *"The goals play a limited role in the development of our strategies. We do feel supported by the goals as there is now more attention for our agenda."* It is striking that many CSOs seem to place the responsibility for the goals elsewhere. For instance, a majority of the consulted CSOs state that civil society organizations with a strong focus on the Netherlands, such as environmental CSOs and trade unions, should take up activities to get more involved with the SDGs. The government is also mentioned a lot as an actor that should take more action.

4.2. Role of the government

The second challenge for CSOs is related to the relatively cautious role of the Dutch government in embracing and implementing the goals and targets in a national agenda. While the delegation to the UN summit in September 2015 has been prominent, including the King and Queen, the Prime Minister, and several ministers, it is not yet clear how the SDGs are 'institutionalized' in the Netherlands. Currently, there seems to be no leadership beyond that of the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, while at the same time she only holds responsibility for a part of the agenda. The consulted CSOs recognize a need for 'SDG champions', but they have been hard to find in both the Dutch government or in the Dutch parliament (Kamphof et al., 2015).

The lukewarm response to the SDG agenda in the Dutch government is remarkable, as several other countries seem to be going faster than the Netherlands when it comes to the development of a national agenda (implementation plan) for the SDGs. In Sweden, for example, it is proposed to make the SDGs a responsibility of the Prime Minister's Office (Weitz, Persson, Nilsson, & Tenggren, 2015). And in February 2015, Colombia passed a decree to set up a special Inter-agency Commission for the implementation of the SDGs (Espey, 2015). Instead of a 'wait and see approach,' Dutch CSOs could also use the lack of leadership as an opportunity and follow the example of umbrella organizations in other European countries. From Belgium to the United Kingdom and to the EU institutions in Brussels, CSOs have collaborated to advise and stimulate their governments to take action regarding the implementation of the SDG agenda in their own country and in the world (11.11.11-Koepel van de Vlaamse Noord-Zuidbeweging 2015; Concord, 2014; Hickson, 2015). Several participants mentioned the upcoming Dutch EU presidency from January to July 2016 as an excellent opportunity to further shape the agenda for CSOs. Others are not very optimistic that Dutch CSOs will demand leadership from the government as *"The playing field of Dutch CSOs has become*

fragmented and CSOs, for a large part, are letting themselves be guided by the ministry (of Foreign Affairs)."

4.3. Partnerships

The SDGs require collective action from all stakeholders and are therefore considered to be a catalyser of new forms of collaboration: **'outside the box partnerships´** so to say**.** CSOs are traditionally considered supporting actors for the United Nations as the "*UN Family benefits from the energy and enthusiasm of grassroots organizations and movements that help give the high ideals of the UN Charter practical form"* (United Nations, 2011). At the same time, the UN is encouraging partnerships with various members of civil society, including business communities and public charities. CSOs are thus not 'special actors' but have become one of many partners in the UN system. This inclusive partnership approach to global challenges is widely proclaimed, also in the Netherlands where it has become an explicit part of the Dutch aid and trade agenda. Furthermore, a lack of collaboration *within* the CSO sector was seen by some participants as an impediment contributing to the goals: *"The opportunities for Dutch CSOs are paramount, but there is a lack of mutual collaboration, harmonization, and coordination."* An important challenge is especially the cooperation between green grassroots CSOs and more internationally established CSOs who seem to be 'strange bedfellows' while they could strengthen each other in successfully monitoring and stimulating policy coherence at home and abroad for the SDG agenda.

4.4. Resources

As many Dutch CSOs are to a large extent **financially dependent** on the steadily decreasing contributions from the Dutch central government, CSOs are faced with another challenge: finding new financing streams. The financial situation also affects the role of CSOs in relation to the SDGs, as one participant explained: "The lack of finances is an issue. CSOs can contribute a lot to the realisation of the goals through their networks in developing countries." The financial dependence on the Dutch government is still strong as can be seen when CSOs are asked about the most important roles that the Dutch government *should play* in the implementation of the goals: most CSO representatives see 'financial support to CSOs' as the most important role, even above 'coordinating a national agenda with stakeholders' (see Figure 4).

The Minister for Development Cooperation (and International Trade) has a clear preference for CSOs taking up a critical 'watchdog' and 'advocacy' role especially in developing countries (Rijksoverheid, 2015), yet many development CSOs are expected to take up a role of 'monitoring' the implementation of the Global Goals, as well as be eligible for funding. The 'green' CSOs are currently less involved with the SDGs, but if other ministries such as Infrastructure & Environment and Economic Affairs take up the implementation of the Global Goals in the Netherlands, funding opportunities might open up.
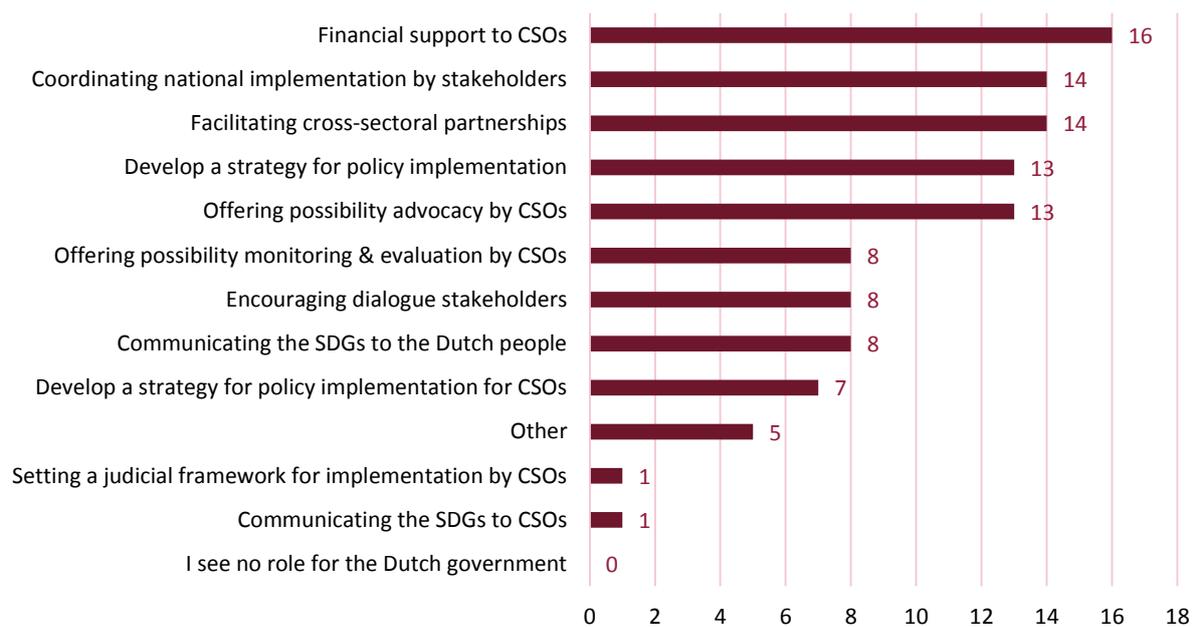
Figure 4: Prioritization of roles that the Dutch government should play in the implementation of the SDGs (maximum of 3 choices, n=39).

4.5. Lack of public awareness

A problematic challenge for the implementation of the Global Goals in the Netherlands has already been raised earlier; almost all of the consulted organizations believe that **public awareness** is crucial for the success of the SDGs. Notwithstanding this view, Dutch CSOs do seem to be very hesitant in taking up this challenge. As a result, public communication runs the risk of falling between two stools. Nor does the government seem to see public communication on the goals as their responsibility. Possibly other actors such as media (De Correspondent, OneWorld) and the private sector, might help stimulate public awareness on the SDGs. If other stakeholders remain noncommittal on taking up this communication role, the Global Goals will most likely play a very marginal role in the Netherlands.

4.6. Feasibility

A related fifth challenge is the ultimate choice whether or not to fully **embrace the new universal but 'utopian' agenda.** The merely idealistic nature of the goals is recognized and critically looked upon by many of the consulted Dutch CSOs and might form an impediment to actual implementation of the agenda by CSOs. One participant explained: *"Too little is asked from countries in terms of actual concrete commitments."* Especially when taking into account that the global community is confronted with other urgent issues. As a result, the broad and long-term SDG agenda is easily overshadowed by impactful events such as the refugee crisis and security issues that require short-term action. Some, CSOs are worried that the aspirational SDG agenda could turn into a 'Trojan horse' for less regulation and more voluntary commitments in areas where civil society is already pushing for more binding commitments; for instance, on climate related issues. Other CSOs feel that the input that they deliver isn't used: *"The government wants feedback from civil society, but has not done much with recommendations (from civil society) until now."* This is not unheard of: a general lack of influence in actual UN decision-making processes for CSOs is also observed in the literature (Alliance Sud, 2013).

4.7. Setting the Agenda

All in all, the cautious reactions and insecurity in the CSO sector are understandable taking into consideration the many arising challenges, such as increasing demand on ODA to cover the costs of the growing stream of refugees. Nevertheless, the goals themselves can also be considered an

opportunity. The Global Goals are a unique framework to set the global agenda for the coming 15 years, and CSOs have been involved from the beginning. Their experience in contributing to many of the MDGs is considered valuable for similar implementations of the SDGs, and if any sector would be well-placed to help better connect the Netherlands and the EU with developing countries, it would be CSOs. The partnerships for global challenges can be considered an opportunity, considering the expertise and experience CSOs can bring into cross-sector collaboration for sustainable development. This is definitely acknowledged by many CSOs that feel the SDGs stimulate the search for new types of partners. As a majority of the CSOs underscores the importance of the agenda and as many worry that the SDGs will not be successful without active participation and coordination on government level, it might be worth for CSOs to consider a more proactive role. For example, by stimulating the implementation of the SDGs in a national agenda by actively sharing ideas, engaging in new forms of collaboration, and joining forces with other kinds of CSOs to work together on realising the Global Goals with all relevant stakeholders. This way, challenges can change into opportunities for CSOs; making a substantial and indispensable contribution from civil society to the SDGs possible.

5. SUMMARIZING

The newly adopted universal *Agenda 2030* strikes the **question** whether (and how) Dutch CSOs in the development sector as well as outside the development sector will respond to these new goals.

Many Dutch **development CSOs** have in some way participated in the drafting of the SDGs, and many are now involved in the process of developing indicators for the measurement of the goals.

The Dutch **green CSOs** seem to have been somewhat less active in the SDG consultation process and seem to see the SDG agenda more as a development than environment agenda, although large green CSOs such as IUCN, WWF, and Greenpeace have played an active role in the preparation and negotiation process of the goals.

The consulted Dutch CSOs identify the following **SDG-priorities**: good health and well-being, ending poverty, gender equality, sustainable consumption and production, and peace and justice.

CSOs identify four **roles** for themselves in relation to the SDGs: advocacy, carrying out activities in developing countries, and working in partnership with others. Only few see a role for CSOs in communicating about the goals themselves.

Although CSOs see different roles for themselves in contributing to the SDGs – many were already involved in the drafting of the SDGs – and negotiation process, they are still quite **hesitant** to take action regarding the implementation of the goals.

When it comes to their role in the implementation of the SDGs, CSOs are confronted with the following **challenges**: a) overcoming a lack of **ownership**, b) the unclear role of the Dutch **government**, c) establishing new forms of **collaboration**, d) overcoming **financial dependence**, e) lack of **public awareness**, and f) the universal, merely **utopian nature** of the new agenda.

All in all, the cautious reactions and insecurity in the CSO sector are understandable considering the many arising challenges, but at the same time, it is clear they have a **vital role to play**; in particular, the valuable expertise and experience CSOs can bring into cross-sector collaboration for sustainable development.

CSOs could consider taking up a more **proactive role** to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs: they can contribute to ending the leadership-vacuum around the SDGs in the Netherlands; for example, by lobbying for a national agenda, leading by example, partnering with CSOs, and other actors.

METHODOLOGY

This Discussion Paper is the first part of a three-tier study on the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands by Dutch CSOs, local authorities, and small- and medium sized enterprises. Kaleidos Research (part of NCDO Foundation) carried out this study using four different research methods: desk research, semi-structured interviews with key experts from CSOs and national government, a focus group discussion, and survey research among CSO representatives and the Dutch public.

1. The *desk research* focused on relevant publications (policy documents and academic literature) from renowned sources. It enabled us to contextualise the empirical findings in this study and to offer the reader a more comprehensive overview of the debate on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Publications were selected based on their relevance, recentness, and the importance of the author or source. The desk research did not aim to include all relevant publications, as it is impossible to do justice to all available sources.

2. The *qualitative research* consisted of *semi-structured interviews* with key respondents (5 in total, with 7 experts) that were conducted from July to November 2015. Also, on November 2, 2015 a *focus group* was organized in which five key stakeholders from the CSO community were asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards the SDGs. Furthermore, participative observation was carried out during the SDG expert meetings at Springtij Forum (September 24-26, 2015). The data collected during the interviews, focus group, and expert meetings were analysed in a structured and replicable manner; based on transcriptions/reports and using content analysis software.

3. Two *surveys* conducted were:
- A survey among CSO representatives was sent in November 2015 to 146 invited people. 40 respondents answered all questions in the survey (completion rate of 27 percent) representing 39 organisations. 15 out of 39 organisations focused on at least one climate-related issue[4] and they are therefore considered 'green' CSOs in the analysis of this survey. 31 out of the 39 organizations worked 'mainly outside the Netherlands' and 8 of the 39 organizations are working 'mainly in the Netherlands'. Although a sample of this size cannot be considered representative for the whole of Dutch civil society, it does provide useful information on the attitude and expectations of Dutch CSOs towards the SDGs. Nevertheless, a little caution is required when interpreting the results.
- An online survey among 1,083 respondents in September 2015 was conducted using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). The design and analysis was done by Kaleidos Research, while fieldwork was done by TNS NIPO (Amsterdam, the Netherlands). In order to have a sample that was representative for the entire population of the Netherlands, the data was aggregated based on gender, age, region, education, and size of family. A separate factsheet on the survey can be found here: https://www.oneworld.nl/research/nederlanders-vrede-en-veiligheid-belangrijkste-werelddoel.

Questions about this publication and the research methodology can be directed to the authors through: info@kaleidosresearch.nl.

---

[4] Biodiversity, climate, food security, nature conservation/protection, and urban development.

REFERENCES

11.11.11-Koepel van de Vlaamse Noord-Zuidbeweging (2015). *Pistes voor de uitvoering van de duurzame ontwikkelingsdoelen in België* (Dossier SDG's). Brussel, België: 11.11.11. Retrieved from http://www.11.be/downloads/doc_download/1757-belgie-en-de-sdg-s

Alliance Sud (2013). Post-2015 (2): There is a danger of consultation overkill. *Alliance Sud News, 74*. Retrieved from http://alliancesud.ch/en/publications/downloads/asn74-web.pdf

Boonstoppel, E. (2015). *Nederlanders & de toekomst van ontwikkelingshulp*. Amsterdam: Kaleidos Research / Stichting NCDO. Retrieved from http://kaleidosresearch.nl/download/2015/08/2015-Nederlanders-en-de-toekomst-van-ontwikkelingshulp.pdf

Boonstoppel, E. (2015). *Nederlanders: Vrede en veiligheid belangrijkste werelddoel.* Amsterdam: Kaleidos Research / Stichting NCDO. Retrieved from http://dn9ly4f9mxjxv.cloudfront.net/sites/oneworld.nl/files/fs_vrede_en_veiligheid.pdf

Concord (2014). *CONCORD letter ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council on 26 October 2015.* Brussels, Belgium: Concord. Retrieved from http://www.concordeurope.org/publications/item/469-concord-letter-ahead-of-the-foreign-affairs-council-on-26-october-2015

Debat over aanbestedingen van de rijksoverheid (2007). Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal: Den Haag. Retrieved from https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20072008-714-733.pdf

Espey, J. (2015, October 30). Getting started with the SDGs: Emerging questions from the first 30 days of SDG implementation in Colombia. Retrieved from http://unsdsn.org/blog/news/2015/10/30/getting-started-with-the-sdgs-emerging-questions-from-the-first-30-days-of-sdg-implementation-in-colombia/

Ford, L. (2015, September 2015). Sustainable development goals: All you need to know. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/19/sustainable-development-goals-united-nations

Hickson, C. (2015). *Bringing the goals home: Implementing the SDGs in the UK.* Londond, England: Bond. Retrieved from https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/bringing_the_goals_home._implementing_the_sdgs_in_the_uk.pdf

Honniball, A., & Spijkers, O. (2014). MDGs and SDGs: Lessons Learnt from global public participation in the drafting of the UN development goals. *Vereinte Nationen-German Review on the United Nations, 62* (6), 251–256. Retrieved from http://www.dgvn.de/fileadmin/publications/PDFs/Zeitschrift_VN/VN_2014/Heft_6_2014/Spijkers_Honniball_VN_6-14_eng_FINAL2.pdf

Kamphof, R., Spitz, G., & Boonstoppel, E. (2015). *Financing development now and in the future: Implications for the Netherlands and beyond.* Amsterdam: Kaleidos Research/Stichting NCDO. Retrieved from http://kaleidosresearch.nl/download/2015/07/2015-Financing-for-Development-report.pdf

McArthur, J. (2013, February). Own the goals: What the millennium development goals have accomplished Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2013/02/21-millennium-dev-goals-mcarthur

Nelson, P.J. (2007). Human rights, the millennium development goals and the future of development cooperation. *World Development, 35* (12), 2041–2055. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.02.006

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2009). *Civil society and aid effectiveness: Findings, recommendations and good practice* (Better Aid). Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Civil_Society_and_Aid_Effectiveness_2_.pdf

Rijksoverheid. (2015, 30 januari). Ploumen vernieuwt samenwerking met ontwikkelingsorganisaties. Retrieved from https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2015/01/30/ploumen-vernieuwt-samenwerking-met-ontwikkelingsorganisaties

Scheunpflug, A., & McDonnell, I. (2008). *Building public awareness of development: Communicators, educators and evaluation* (Policy Brief, 35). Paris, France: OECD Development Centre. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503781.pdf

Social Watch (2003). *Social Watch Report 2003: The Poor and the Market*. Montevideo, Uruguay: Social watch. Retrieved from http://www.socialwatch.org/annualReport/2003

Spitz, G. (2012). *Armoedebestrijding in de 21e eeuw. De post-2015 agenda* (Globaliseringsreeks, 5). Amsterdam: NCDO. Retrieved from http://kaleidosresearch.nl/download/2015/08/2012-Armoedebestrijding-inde-21ste-eeuw.pdf

Spitz, G., Muskens, R., & Van Ewijk, E. (2013). *Dutch development cooperation: Ahead of the crowd or trailing behind?* Amsterdam: NCDO. Retrieved from http://kaleidosresearch.nl/download/2015/08/2013-Dutch-development-cooperation.pdf

Sustainable Development Policy & Practice. (2015, September 25). UNDG details support for 2030 agenda. Retrieved from http://sd.iisd.org/news/undg-details-support-for-2030-agenda/

United Nations (2011). *Basic facts about the United Nations*. New York, NY: United Nations Department of Public Information.

United Nations (2014). *The road to dignity by 2030: Ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet. Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General On the Post-2015 Agenda*. New York, NY: United Nations. Retrieved from http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5527SR_advance%20unedited_final.pdf

United Nations General Assembly (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development* (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 70/1). New York, NY: United Nations. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

Van Ewijk, E., Bokma de Boer-Nubé, H., Spitz, G., & Boonstoppel, E. (2015). *Health has no borders: Addressing global health in The Netherlands*. Amsterdam: Kaleidos Research/NCDO. Retrieved from http://kaleidosresearch.nl/download/2015/08/2015-Health-has-no-borders.pdf

Vandemoortele, J., & Delamonica, E. (2010). Taking the MDGs beyond 2015: Hasten slowly. *IDS Bulletin, 41* (1), 60–69. doi:10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00105.x

Weitz, N., Persson, Å., Nilsson, M., & Tenggren, S. (2015). *Sustainable development goals for Sweden: Insights on setting a national agenda* (Working paper, 10). Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm Environment Institute. Retrieved from http://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/SEI-WP-2015-10-SDG-Sweden.pdf