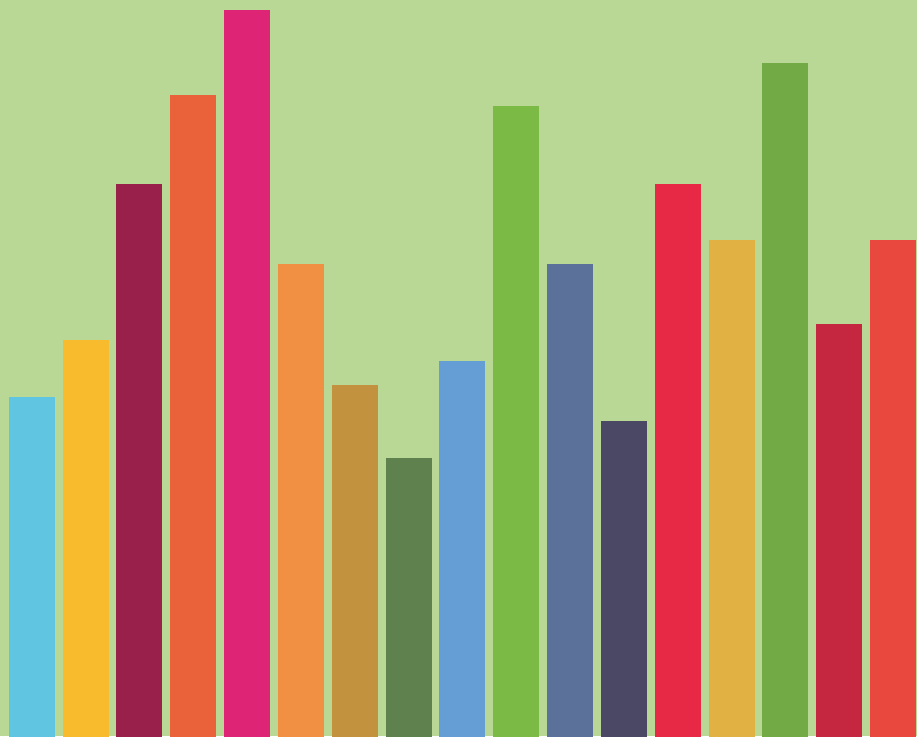


chapter

2



Ready to change?

European actors and their challenges and opportunities of the 2030 Agenda

By Kaleidos Research

The new Agenda 2030 has turned high-income countries into ‘developing countries’ on many issues such as clean energy and reduction of inequality. It transforms the global development landscape in that the universal nature of the Agenda requires action abroad and at home. It requires a change in the European mind-set. With a new global agenda that combines social and economic development with ecological sustainability, many policy areas and actors that are usually regarded as belonging to separate fields now need to come together. The implementation and contribution to the SDGs will have to take place on the level of EU institutions as well as in EU member states. Implementation of the SDGs is a ‘shared responsibility’.¹

Leaders from all parts of European society have shown support for the new agenda. The prominent delegation to the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 included the Vice-President of the European Commission and many heads of state. As described in the previous chapter, the SDGs provide both opportunities to increase policy coherence for (sustainable) development as well as challenges due to the complex interrelatedness of the goals. In order to contribute to an evidence-based debate on the implementation of the goals, this chapter investigates the different roles that various actors can play with regard to the implementation of the goals. What are the challenges and opportunities for European actors to

contribute to the agenda and what ‘early practices’ can already be identified? In short: is Europe ‘ready to change’?

STATE OF PLAY SDG IMPLEMENTATION

In an ‘ever closer union’ the EU and member states share policy coordination structures on nearly every issue of the SDGs, ranging from a secondary role of the Union in tax policy and education through shared competences in environment and development aid to exclusive competence of the Union in core areas such as external trade policy.² In the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development it is acknowledged that regional frameworks such as the EU ‘can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete actions at national level’ (par 21), but that each country has ‘primary responsibility for its own economic and social development’ (par 41). Building on existing instruments is encouraged. Taking into account the absence of legally binding targets, the actual implementation of the SDG strategy is a political choice, both at home and abroad.

Within the EU ‘at home’ strategies for sustainable development are already in place, including the Europe 2020 strategy and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.³ In light of the 2030 deadline of the SDGs the Juncker Commission will ‘set out a new approach’ beyond the 2020 timeframe

taking into account the ‘internal and external implementation’ of the SDGs.⁴ Given the many indicators and targets, Eurostat is planning to play a key role in measuring progress at EU level. With regard to the EU’s ‘abroad’ strategies, the much-awaited EU ‘Global Strategy’ expected in 2016⁵ could be linked up with the UN Agenda 2030. Several actors, including the European Think Tanks Group, have suggested using the SDGs as the basis for the EU Global Strategy as this could strengthen coherent policy-making.⁶

National governments are the primary implementers of the SDGs as the legal entities that have signed the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states that ‘governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review at the national, regional and global levels’ (par 47). Successfully carrying out this role requires the development of implementation plans as well as a division of tasks and responsibilities and adequate monitoring of the progress made towards the goals.

The national governments of the EU member states take different approaches towards implementing the SDGs. Some have a wait-and-see attitude; they for instance defer to other urgent priorities such as the current migration crisis or prefer to await the results of the ongoing international process of defining global indicators. Some member states, including Estonia, France and Finland, have reason to speed up as they will be reviewed on their progress on SDG implementation and showcased during the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2016.⁷ Several member states are already quite active with early implementation practices (see boxes ‘early practices’).⁸

Research by the European Sustainable Development Network shows that in most EU member states the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a central role in leading the SDG process. This is the case in Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden. There are also some countries in which the leadership

Early practices I: Who is in charge? ‘Chefsache’?

Seeing the overarching agenda of the SDGs and its many challenges ‘at home and abroad’, some EU member states make their implementation a responsibility at the highest political level. Germany has formally placed responsibility for the implementation of the goals with the Federal Chancellery.¹⁴ In Sweden primary responsibility for the SDGs lies at the level of (the Office of) the Prime Minister.¹⁵ In Finland and the Czech Republic the Prime Minister is important in the setting up of a National Implementation Plan for the Agenda 2030.¹⁶ At the European Commission the First Vice-President Timmermans is responsible for the overall implementation, in cooperation with Vice President Katainen (Jobs, Growth, Investment, and Competitiveness) and HR/VP Mogherini (Foreign Affairs).

is shared with the Ministry for Environment, for instance in Germany and Estonia.⁹ In many countries, the first steps towards implementation of the goals consist of an exploratory process in which knowledge institutes¹⁰, advisory councils¹¹ and CSOs¹² are pointing to the needed changes in government structures and policies in order to transform the goals into actual policies. The report of the Bertelsmann Stiftung ‘Are the Rich Countries Ready’ (2016) is for instance an important building block for assessing the extent to which existing policies of several European member states are aligned with the SDGs. It is clear that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution but that most countries build on existing mechanisms. Countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Italy are for example reviewing their national sustainable development strategies.¹³ The Dutch CSO-initiative

Ready for Change is also an effort to inform the Dutch and EU implementation process from the perspective of policy coherence for (sustainable) development.

ROLES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VARIOUS ACTORS

In this section we address the roles that can be played by various actors at the EU level as well as at the level of member states. The figure below shows, building on the literature, six broad and interconnected roles (facilitation, financing, enabling, monitoring, communication and advocacy) can be identified for three different groups of actors (public sector, private sector and civil society). Together these form the 'actor-role space' for SDG-implementation.¹⁷

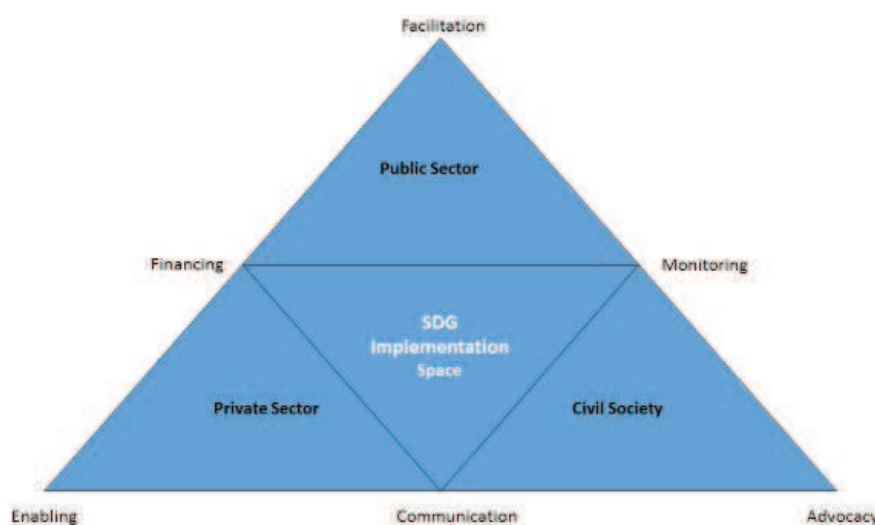
Roles of the public sector

Although much is still unclear about the implementation of the SDGs on the level of EU institutions, a survey among sustainable development policy makers in European countries shows that there are already expectations about the role that

the EU could play.¹⁸ These include:

- *Revising the EU Sustainable Development Strategy;*
- *Taking up a general coordination role;*
- *Integrating the SDGs in the internal and external policies of the EU;*
- *Stimulating and engaging in dialogue with all stakeholders;*
- *Facilitating exchange between member states on good practices for national implementation;*
- *Monitoring and reporting on the SDGs;*
- *Making data accessible;*
- *Supporting member states including financially.*

Taking into account the importance of the Global Partnership to achieve the SDGs, the EU, as well as national and local governments can play a crucial role in facilitating cross-sector collaboration for the SDGs. The public sector is well-placed to connect different stakeholders and stimulate knowledge exchange on cross-sector collaboration. The European Economic and Social Committee has for instance suggested that the EU should set up a European Sustainable Development Civil Society Forum with the goal of involving Europeans in the implementation process.¹⁹



The SDG-implementation pyramid

The potential success of the SDGs largely depends on the monitoring and reporting of SDG progress. It is crucial that governments develop strategies to monitor the SDG process. Both international knowledge institutions, such as Eurostat and the OECD as well as national institutes, such as statistics offices from the Netherlands, UK, Germany, France and Sweden, are playing a crucial role in making the SDGs more measurable as part of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDG).²⁰ This includes advising on the development of adequate indicators, revising existing monitoring frameworks to fit data on the SDGs and improving the availability of data.²¹ Innovative methods, such as mobile phone based surveys, should also be considered to collect data. CSOs and the private sector can help to make such technology available and to reach target groups in remote areas.

The financial implementation of the SDGs will be a major challenge, in particular for the public sector. In the MDG-era there was general agreement that fulfilling the international commitment of spending 0.7 per cent of national income of donor countries on development would more or less cover the efforts needed to implement the goals. Although this target was not reached, ODA rose towards USD 135 billion a year in 2015.²² The SDGs however require far more funds than their predecessors; experts estimate implementation of the SDGs could cost up to USD 2-3 trillion a year, around 4 per cent of global GNI.²³ These trillions cannot be provided by national governments alone, but should be collected through innovative financing measures, via blending and taxation as well as through the private sector etc.²⁴ Measures to finance the Agenda 2030 were discussed during the Addis Conference on Financing for Development (2015), where the creation of enabling environments through regulation and public policies for private sector investment was underscored. This means that governments and EU institutions should make efforts to get the private sector on board to contribute to the SDGs.

Local governments and the 'sub-national' level are also encouraged to contribute to the SDG implementation. Research in the Netherlands shows that there is enthusiasm to contribute to the implementation of the agenda particularly around the combination of the local sustainability and international cooperation policy agendas.²⁵ In Austria, a common strategy framework is being prepared in the form of a Federal-State Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development to combine state and federal level. There are different levels of political decentralisation in European member states²⁶ which affects the actual policy 'space' of sub-national actors.

Early practices 2: CSOs 'bring the Global Goals home'

Many Civil Society Organisations have already been active in the negotiation process, but are now also starting to make efforts to 'bring the Global Goals home', to quote the British network, BOND.³⁰ They do this particularly by highlighting the shortcomings in national (and EU) governments' policies in the current context where new policies and structures are needed for the SDGs. One key example of such scrutiny is by the federation of CSOs in Belgium³¹, who are actively campaigning for accountability and incorporation of the concept of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development.³² In the Netherlands, a consortium of CSOs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a multimedia platform OneWorld, the employer's organisation VNO-NCW, Global Compact Netherlands and the Dutch Association of Municipalities, have set up a website that brings together Dutch initiatives on the SDGs as well as the latest news on the goals.³³

Roles of civil society and the private sector

Civil Society Organisations and the private sector have a vital role to play in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.²⁷ They are implementers of the goals when carrying out their own projects and activities on sustainable development, both abroad and at home. CSOs are also 'guardians' of the goals and the commitments that were made. The SDGs are not legally binding, and as a result it is crucial that other measures are used to hold governments accountable. Civil society is well suited to promote and ensure accountability (including through parliament) for effective implementation of the commitments made by governments.²⁸ Many CSOs have already been active in the negotiation process and are still playing an advocacy role. As Linda McAvan, chair of the European Parliament's Development Committee, puts it: 'In order for us to succeed, more people across Europe need to know about the goals; they need to be aware of the ambitious agenda we all want to achieve. Policymakers need to be regularly reminded of these goals. The world must not forget about our commitment to the poorest people'.²⁹

So far it has been a challenge to bring the different expert communities together: environment and development aid experts, from CSOs, governments and academia, are not yet used to collaborating with each other. Without broad ownership and support that goes beyond the development sector it will be very hard to implement the agenda in the holistic way that has been envisaged. Nevertheless, some initiatives are taking form and international environmental organisations such as IUCN and WWF have been active in the negotiation process. Environmental CSOs also have a strong track record on participation around international processes such as Rio+20 and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Early practices 3: Global Goals Charter with the private sector and CSOs

In the Netherlands several front runners in the private sector, such as DSM, Unilever, Friesland Campina and Philips signed a special 'Global Goals Charter', which was also presented at the United Nations itself. They see a specific role for businesses in relation to the SDGs by respecting human rights, conserving natural resources, promoting good governance and being transparent by reporting about their impact on society.³⁶ The Charter signatories include over seventy organisations, from business and civil society, universities and trade unions.³⁷ In the Czech Republic a similar initiative has been set up with the aim of involving firms and CSOs in the policy-making process.³⁸

The private sector is also taking up a role in many member states. The World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a global platform of business leaders that actively engages with the SDGs. They have welcomed the SDGs as a framework that includes the private sector as an important stakeholder and have participated in the negotiation process. CSR Europe, the private sector member organisation working on furthering responsible business practices on a European level, has called upon the European Commission to include the SDGs in their forthcoming CSR Strategy. In the Netherlands, the private sector response to the SDGs is also enthusiastic: umbrella organisations

Early practices 4: 'Gap analysis'

In many countries existing mechanisms in government structures and policies are being analysed in order to see what changes are needed for the SDGs. In the Netherlands, for example, the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) has compared 41 environmental indicators from the Agenda 2030 with Dutch environmental policy targets.⁴³ Similar processes are taking place within the European Commission as well as in Finland. Like the report of the previously mentioned Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Dutch PBL study not only makes the comparison between policy targets and the SDG indicators, but also assesses the Dutch performance on these targets. This helps to inform policy making on the issues and areas where efforts need to be intensified in order to comply with the Agenda 2030.

in particular see the agenda as 'an agenda of opportunities'.³⁴

In many EU member states, such as the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, businesses are involved in SDG implementation (see box). Such networks do not only work on creating an enabling environment for implementation of the SDGs, they can also help to create tools that can help business to contribute to the SDGs, such as the UN Global Compact. WBCSD and the Global Reporting Initiative together have developed an SDG Compass, that facilitates businesses' assessment on the ways they can best get involved in the Agenda2030.³⁵

The importance of public awareness on the SDGs is acknowledged by many stakeholders.³⁹ Without information about the goals citizens cannot hold their governments to account. Without information, it is also hard for 'unusual suspects', such as Small and Medium Enterprises, local politicians or nationally oriented CSOs, to get on board. In that sense, awareness can be seen as an enabling factor for cross sector collaboration; the goals need to be recognised by those stakeholder as something relevant or interesting before partnerships, within and between sectors, can take flight. As John McArthur and Christine Zhang from the Brookings Institute explained: 'In order to be achieved [the SDGs] will require ample public and scientific debates. Those will need to diffuse much more broadly and deeply than the MDG-linked deliberations of the past 15 years'.⁴⁰

Early practices 5: Future visions and strategies

The SDGs provide concrete goals and targets for 2030. In many EU member states the SDGs can thus be integrated in a long-term National Sustainable Development Strategy.⁴⁴ Slovenia, for example, is developing a national vision 2050 and a strategy which supports the implementation of the SDGs. This includes a 'Horizontal Group' with representatives from ministries and a 'Futures Group' with inclusion of wider stakeholders in academia, business and civil society.⁴⁵

Some communication initiatives have already been taken to inform citizens about the agenda, such as the international Global Goals campaign.⁴¹ Among the recently announced 'SDG Advocates' are renowned Europeans such as Queen Mathilde (Belgium) and Paul Polman (CEO Unilever).⁴²

CONCLUSION: READY TO CHANGE AT HOME AND ABROAD?

The SDGs require a change of the European mindset in action both abroad and at home for sustainable development. The SDGs are no longer only part of the development discourse, like the MDGs, nor are they only part of the environment discourse, like Rio+20. In order to successfully implement the SDGs, a broader recognition is needed of the universal nature of the agenda. It requires different sectors to come together in a global partnership for development. Many actors in Europe can play a role in SDG implementation, from the public sector to the private sector as well as civil society organisations and from local to globally operating actors. It is a 'shared responsibility' between the EU and member states with an absence of legally binding targets. The actual implementation of the SDGs and strategies at home and abroad is therefore a political choice at EU and member state level.

The SDGs offer a whole wealth of opportunities. As the following chapters of this Ready for Change? publication make clear many existing mechanisms are already in place, but more has to be done. Many actors can play a role, from implementation, facilitation,

monitoring, advocacy and communication to financing of the agenda. New actors such as the private sector and local governments are actively seeking to contribute to the agenda. Taking into account the re-orientation of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, PC(S)D mechanisms and the EU Global Strategy as well as national sustainable development strategies, there are many opportunities for all kind of actors to contribute to the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Although the implementation of the SDGs is still in its embryonic phase, initiatives in several member states show that the implementation of the SDGs is under way, that there is a lot of potential in broad civil society to contribute to this process and that steps to align national policies with the SDGs are being taken. This leadership, both from governments and civil society in its broadest sense, is crucial to inspiring change within the EU institutions as well as in EU member states.