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## **More information**

More information about the PFD and detailed annexes to this report can be found at <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/policy-forum-development/>

## **Disclaimer**

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## Glossary

CBS	Dutch Statistics Netherlands
CPB	Netherlands Policy Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Development Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
IUCN NL	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LA	Local Authority
LGCP	Local Government Capacity Programme
MAN	Major Alliance Netherlands
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency
SCP	Netherlands Institutes for Social Research
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
SWOT	Strength-Weakness-Opportunities-Threats Analysis
VNG	Association of Netherlands municipalities
VNG International	The International Cooperation Agency of the association of Netherlands municipalities
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature



# 1. Executive Summary

This report explores the role of Civil Society Actors (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Netherlands. The new global agenda for poverty eradication and sustainable development requires multi-stakeholder action, both abroad and at home. This research, initiated by the Policy Forum on Development, explores which national multi-stakeholder approaches can support inclusive implementation of the goals. The findings central to this research are based on document analysis, interviews with CSO and LA representatives as well as other stakeholders, three focus group discussions and two online surveys (see annexes at: <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/policy-forum-development/>).

Half a year after the adoption of the SDGs in September 2015, the first steps are being taken by a wide variety of actors in the Netherlands to strategize and implement the SDGs. After a kick-start with the Prime Minister and King present at the adoption of the SDGs in New York, the national government, CSOs, LAs, labour unions as well as the private sector have been exploring what the new agenda could or should imply for their roles and how they can contribute towards achieving the goals.

Several promising initiatives have been set up in which CSOs, LAs and/or the umbrella organisations, such as Partos (the Dutch association for CSOs working in International Development) and VNG international (the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities for LAs), play an important role. These include the Global Goals Charter (a multi-stakeholder initiative which was signed by over 70 organisations), the Dutch Global Goals website (also a multi-stakeholder initiative), the CSO-initiative Ready for Change (that focuses at coherence and the SDGs), and the global goals municipality campaign (an initiative of VNG International).

Efforts have been put in place to take stock of existing frameworks and policies which are in line with the SDGs. A clear example is the analyses of policy targets in the field of the environmental SDGs, executed by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. Netherlands Statistics (CBS) has explored how the new agenda could be monitored and plays an active role in the process of developing indicators

for the SDGs. All stakeholders included in the research believe that, for effective and sustainable implementation of the agenda, **it is crucial that the goals are integrated in existing policies and mechanisms instead of building new frameworks.**

As the research shows, it is clear that CSOs and LAs support the SDG agenda. Many CSOs have also been active in the negotiation process, for instance by providing input to the Dutch government. Although the SDGs have just been adopted and the Netherlands is still in the phase of exploring the implications of the agenda and strategizing the implementation process, several CSOs as well as LAs have started to take their own initiatives. The Dutch government in turn has also been exploring its own role, while it is embracing and facilitating initiatives from civil society such as existing multi-stakeholder arrangements. This also fits with a general development in the Netherlands, known as **the 'participation society,' (see box 1) whereby both national as well as local governments act increasingly as enablers and facilitators and leave more actions to civil society.**

Both national governments as well as local governments and CSOs do not seem to embrace a top down approach that imposes a central strategy for CSOs and LAs and other actors. That said, in the exploration of their own roles, CSOs and LAs do voice **the need for more clarity about the role of the government, in order to show strong support to the international agreement, as well as to determine their own roles in the implementation process.**

**The development of a strategy for the national implementation of the goals is being led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** in consultation with other ministries. **A special coordinator for national implementation has been installed, as well as a SDG ambassador. SDG focal points at all ministries have been appointed.** In the near future, this might help stakeholders like CSOs and LAs to seek dialogue with those parts of the government that are responsible for the implementation of specific parts of the agenda. Until now, civil society participation in the SDG process has been organized in an informal way. The advantage of this approach is that it provides flexibility and efficiency to an already complex and time consuming

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implementation challenge. The disadvantage might be that stakeholders that are not (yet) part of the informal dialogue structures may have difficulty in getting access to information and to relevant contacts.

According to the respondents, a crucial role for government and politicians at national and local level, as well as branch organisations like Partos and VNG International, is to **make a strong case for the SDGs** and show their support for the agenda. CSOs and LAs indicate that if key actors at the national level do not repeatedly underscore the importance of the SDGs and do not lead by example, it is much harder for actors at grassroots level to integrate the SDGs in their work.

Dutch CSOs and LAs perceive the SDGs as a **valuable framework which they can use for their own work**. They are not opting to enlarge their own activities in line with the interconnected framework of all SDGs. Many organisations feel burdened with tasks and under financial pressure already and will choose to stick to their current focus or strengths and connect this to the SDGs. At the same time, **CSOs are eager to take up the role of watchdog to hold governments accountable** for their commitments. Many **local authorities emphasized the integration of development and sustainability issues in the goals as an opportunity, because they can link these themes jointly to policies and practices at the local level**.

The research also shows that the **response to the SDGs outside the development cooperation sector is somewhat lukewarm**. For instance, nationally-oriented environmental CSOs and local authorities that are not internationally-oriented are generally not aware of the goals, and for these actors the relevance or added value of the SDGs is not evident. Research participants regarded it as a crucial step to inform these actors that can potentially contribute to the agenda. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm to take up such a communication role was quite limited among the stakeholders consulted in the research. It was suggested that branch organisations and associations, such as CSR Netherlands and VNO-NCW, might possibly be able to take up this challenge.

Although the Dutch implementation of the SDGs is still in an early phase, the first steps seem to point towards an **inclusive implementation strategy**. The SDG agenda fits well with

Dutch government's broad view of development cooperation (such as combining aid and trade, focusing on coherence, etc.). Furthermore, the ties between Dutch development stakeholders are strong and initiatives from civil society on the agenda are generally welcomed by the government and vice versa. The largest challenge will be to reach beyond the development community and to get other actors and sectors on board for the SDGs. Another key challenge might be that organisations at various levels will not embrace the SDGs as a holistic framework, but rather focus on a few SDGs in line with their existing activities. As the research shows, the SDGs **will need some time to take root**. This is important for creating sustainable ownership for the goals among a large range of stakeholders. **Strong champions at national level are crucial** to engaging more actors and creating wider support for the agenda as well as to facilitate partnerships.

In order to stimulate the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands, recommendations for the government include to:

- More explicitly take up a coordinating role for the implementation of the SDGs and continue facilitating and supporting collaborative arrangements among different stakeholders to enable dialogue and exchange on the inclusive implementation of the agenda.
- Broaden the political leadership on the agenda from the minister for foreign trade and development cooperation (Ms. Ploumen) towards other ministers. (Some respondents mentioned examples from Sweden and Germany where responsibility for the agenda is (expected to be) placed with the prime-minister or 'Kanzleramt'.
- Use the EU presidency as an opportunity to take on more leadership of the SDG Agenda.
- Use the SDG focal points at the different ministries to inform and involve actors outside the development sector.
- Building on Minister Ploumen's ambition to be leading in the field of policy coherence, use the SDG agenda for policy coherence for (sustainable) development. The Netherlands already has a track record in this field, which makes the Netherlands a credible champion on this topic.
- Set long-term policy targets on the SDGs now that Agenda 2030 is adopted.
- Combine existing monitors of the Dutch governmental research institutes (PBL, CBS, CPB and SCP) to create a comprehensive monitoring system for the SDGs.

## 2. Introduction

The Netherlands has a long history of being an active force in development cooperation. As a small country and a trading nation, the Dutch economy is strongly internationally-oriented and national economic interests have always been linked to global developments. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as Agenda 2030, has broadened the development discourse and brings together two previously separate policy areas, that of development cooperation and of environmental sustainability.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 changed the global development framework from development aid into a universal and holistic agenda for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The new, rather complex agenda - consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets - implies not only the need for action in low- and middle-income countries, but also in high-income countries. Moreover, the SDGs are an agenda for all kinds of actors, including national governments, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Local Authorities (LAs), the private sector, knowledge institutions and citizens. Operationalization and implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands will require new approaches and strategies for all stakeholders. This report focuses on the roles of CSOs and LAs in the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands. It also provides an exploration of the enabling environment for CSOs and LAs in the implementation and localization of the SDGs.

### Relevance of the Agenda 2030 for the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a high-income country. It has a GDP per capita of \$ 51,590 and good access to basic services for its citizens. People who are not able to participate in the labour market have access to social security. With a Gini-coefficient of around 28, the Netherlands ranks among the most equal countries in the World (Worldbank, 2013). Although there is still a part of the population that is in need for specific support, many of the social development SDGs and targets on poverty, hunger, health, education and clean water and sanitation are less of a challenge, especially when compared

to middle and lower income countries. With regard to the new agenda, strengths also include the relatively high budget for Official Development Assistance (ODA) (part of goal 17) and economic prosperity and employment (goal 8). Nevertheless, research by the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2015) and by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (2016) shows that the Netherlands still has work to do in order to reach the SDGs. This concerns for instance the unsustainably high freshwater withdrawals, gross agricultural nutrient (im)balances that negatively affect ground water quality, improvements in renewable energy production and use and particulate matter air pollution (Kroll, 2015). Also, national policy targets are missing for some of the SDGs, for instance on climate education (Lucas et al., 2016).

### The Netherlands and development cooperation

The Netherlands has the reputation of being an active campaigner for international aid agreements and a country that advocates the need for coherent development policies and donor coordination. For decades, the Dutch have ranked among the most generous donors of ODA. Since the 1970s the country has spent at least 0,7 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) on development cooperation, thereby honouring the internationally agreed '0,7 percent of GNI target.'<sup>1</sup> In 2013, however, for the first time since 1975, the Netherlands cut its development cooperation budget and the Dutch financial commitment to development cooperation fell below the internationally agreed target of 0.7 percent of GNI (Spitz, Muskens & Van Ewijk, 2013). In 2015, the Netherlands was back on the 0,76% (OECD, 2016) which is mainly related to increased ODA spending on the reception of refugees (first year's reception of refugees falls under ODA budget) and spending on humanitarian aid. Historically, Dutch civil society has had a relatively large role in the implementation of Dutch aid policies: ODA is not only spent through multilateral and

<sup>1</sup> The international 0.7% target was first agreed in 1970 and since then has been recommitted on several occasions, both on international and EU level. Also see: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/the07odagnitarget-ahistory.htm>

bilateral channels, but also through financial support to Dutch development CSOs (the civil lateral channel). The budget cuts in ODA meant a decreasing budget for Dutch CSOs; therefore they are increasingly becoming less dependent on government support. Many Dutch CSOs are forming new cross-sector partnerships and seeking other sources of funding. Public support for development cooperation has been and remains relatively high and stable in the Netherlands with two-third of the Dutch citizens in favour of helping citizens in poor countries (Boonstoppel, 2015).

### Box 1: Dutch political system (retrieved from Spitz, Muskens & Van Ewijk, 2013: pp 10)

The Netherlands is both a constitutional monarchy and a decentralized democratic and unitary state. Compared to most other Western European countries and especially the US, there are many political parties represented in parliament, making the political arena rather fragmented. No political party has ever won an absolute majority in the elections, which means that political parties have to form coalitions. As a result, the Netherlands has a long tradition of 'consensus governance', whereby political parties have to cooperate and negotiate. The consensus approach is often perceived as the strength of the Dutch governance system, but it can also delay decision-making processes. Since the last elections of September 2012, VVD (liberal) and PvdA (labour), as the main political parties, have formed a much contested coalition.


In the past five years, national and local governments have shifted towards a more enabling and facilitating role, whereby they leave more tasks and responsibilities to civil society. This is also known as 'participation society'.

## Reception of the SDGs

In line with the image of the Dutch as strong advocates for international agreements, the Netherlands has also been a strong proponent of the SDGs. The Dutch government has shown support for the new agenda in several ways. It sent a large and prominent delegation, consisting of, among others, the Prime Minister, the King and Queen and several ministers, to the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, where they underscored the importance of the agenda in several speeches and events. Dutch citizens are also positive about the new goals: representative research carried out in September 2015 showed that 71 percent of Dutch citizens think that it is important to make new international agreements for poverty eradication. When asked to make a ranking of the SDGs, Dutch citizens find peace and security, education and healthcare most important to create a better world (Boonstoppel, 2015).

## Towards a new agenda: main country priorities

The new broader agenda matches well with the recent changes in Dutch development policy; the Netherlands has already broadened its approach towards development policies and its attention for coherence by combining the Dutch aid and trade policies. In Dutch development policy, the existing priorities of food security, water, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and peace and security remain. They have clear links to some of the SDGs, but they were already formulated in 2010. Like in many other European Countries, a national implementation plan is not yet available at the moment of writing this report (Concord, 2016). It is expected that most of these plans will be finalized in the second half of 2016 or in 2017 (OECD, 2016).



Not only has the government broadened its view on development; some 'traditional' development CSOs are now also working on poverty eradication within the Netherlands itself. Many, such as Oxfam Novib and Hivos, increasingly also focus on sustainable development issues. Dividing lines between various CSOs and private sector are becoming less clear as more instruments (such as the Dutch Good Growth Fund) become available for the private sector to contribute to economic development abroad, while some NGOs are experimenting with setting up social enterprises or becoming hybrid organisations that operate within different sectors and with various types of funding (Khieng & Quack, 2013).

### **Brief SWOT analysis on Dutch CSOs, LAs and the SDGs**

The Netherlands has a wide array of CSOs, varying from service CSOs to advocacy CSOs and all kinds of combinations of both, covering virtually all policy areas; from development cooperation to sustainable development, human rights, disabled persons, etc. Most CSOs working in the field of development cooperation are members of Partos. There are similar associations for CSOs in the environmental sector, such as the Dutch national committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN NL), and 'de Groene 11'. Partos has been informing and involving its members on the Post 2015 process and has -in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs- organised several consultations in the run up to the negotiations. For these meetings Partos also collaborated with CSO umbrella organisations from other sectors (Partos, NPM & de Groene 11, 2013).

Local governments are considered to be key actors in achieving sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) but also in addressing topics like water and sanitation, clean energy and economic growth. At the same time, the SDGs officially are a national affair, leaving local governments without an official mandate to contribute to the SDGs. Compared to CSOs, Dutch LAs have played a smaller role in development cooperation. A crucial difference is that development cooperation is not their core business. A survey among LAs in 2008 revealed that a small part of the LAs has been involved in decentralized international cooperation, while a larger share (160 out of a total 393 LAs) was involved in the millennium development goals campaign (VNG, 2008). VNG International, the international department of the association of Dutch Municipalities has recently launched a new global goals campaign to stimulate municipalities to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. The table below provides a (non-exhaustive) overview of the strengths and weaknesses of Dutch civil society and LAs with regard to the implementation of the SDGs as well as an overview of the opportunities and threats that they face.

**Table 1: SWOT Analysis on Dutch CSOs and LAs and the SDGs (based on own research findings)**

<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dutch CSOs historically play a large official role in development cooperation through co-financing system.</li><li>• CSOs and trade-unions have a strong track record in lobbying and advocacy.</li><li>• The Dutch environmental movement has been strong and has, like the development CSOs, strong ties with the government (in part due to a history of government funding)</li><li>• Many local authorities are already 'sensitized' to the SDGs due to history as Millennium municipalities.</li><li>• Dutch civil society at large is used to working in multi-stakeholder arrangements.</li><li>• CSOs and trade unions were already active in the negotiation processes.</li><li>• A new agenda for eradicating poverty and sustainable development is supported by the majority of the Dutch public.</li></ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is still a large gap between internationally-oriented development sector, locally-oriented LAs and nationally-oriented environmental sector.</li><li>• The SDG agenda is considered to be too large and complex with many goals and targets.</li><li>• The new agenda is meant to be holistic, but stakeholders cannot do everything and have their own particular missions and strengths.</li></ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local authorities consider SDGs an opportunity to align policies on sustainability and international solidarity.</li><li>• The Dutch government is actively promoting the 'advocacy' and watchdog role of CSOs, especially in partner countries for development cooperation.</li><li>• The decentralized Dutch system provides local governments with a relatively large budget and mandate.</li><li>• Combining strengths and creating added value for the SDGs in multi-stakeholder partnerships.</li><li>• Inclusive approach of Dutch government in SDG process and efforts to engage other institutes and ministries.</li></ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A challenging time and insecurity for CSOs in development cooperation about (long-term) funding due to a decrease of public funds.<sup>2</sup> LAs have generally limited or no funds for international cooperation and also rely on other funding opportunities.</li><li>• Lack of awareness among potential stakeholders, such as environmental CSOs, about the SDGs.</li><li>• Limited interest in the agenda among some stakeholders that prefer to focus on binding agreements.</li><li>• Cherry picking (also see weaknesses).</li></ul>

<sup>2</sup> Most Dutch CSOs have been able to attract other funding like private funding or public funding from other (non-Dutch) government organizations.



### 3. Learning from the past

#### Participation of CSOs and LAs in the implementation of the MDGs

In the past decade the Netherlands has been a strong advocate for the MDGs, both abroad and at home. After adoption of the agenda the subsequent development cooperation ministers Herfkens (1998-2002) and Van Ardenne (2007) adjusted development policies to align them with the MDGs (Spitz, Muskens & Van Ewijk, 2013). There has been a relatively strong role for Dutch development CSOs and local authorities in the implementation of the MDGs, in particular by carrying out development activities abroad, but also in creating public support and public awareness among Dutch citizens. Civil society was not only supported and encouraged to contribute to the SDGs by the government and EU institutions, many civil society actors also included the SDGs in their organisation's missions and strategies.

This research shows that virtually all internationally-oriented CSOs and a large part of LAs felt very much involved in the implementation of the MDGs. A majority of the local governments that participated in the research state that they have been active on the MDGs, focusing primarily on goals 7 (sustainable living environment) and 3 (education). This is also the case for Dutch CSOs as the financial support for development CSOs was strongly oriented towards the MDGs. Specifically, the Dutch co-financing grant programmes 2003-2006 and 2007-2010 were strongly oriented towards the MDGs. For local authorities, the ministry of Foreign Affairs provided two programmes called LOGO South (2007-2011) that enabled 50 municipalities and water authorities to carry out activities aimed at strengthening local governance in 17 developing countries, followed up by the Local Government Capacity Programme (LGCP 2012-2016) focusing on capacity development of local governments and their umbrella organisations in ten partner countries. However the MDGs were not clearly linked to this programme (VNG International, 2010). With support of government funding, VNG International also facilitated the Millennium Municipality campaign.

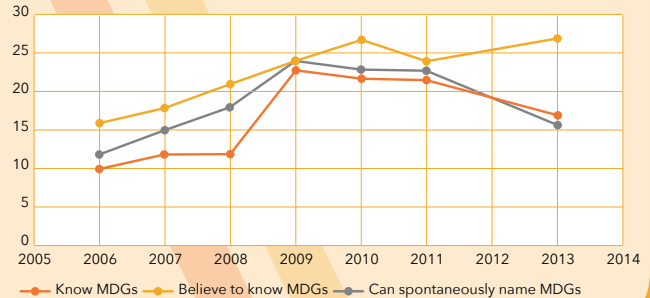
After 2010, the government's attention for the MDGs declined somewhat. The focus of Dutch development policy shifted from a focus on social development towards a focus on economic development. This was the result of the extensive professional and political debates that followed the publication of the influential report 'Less pretention, more ambition' (WRR, 2010) that argued that Dutch development cooperation could be more effective if it focused on the factors that stimulate economic development instead of social development (health, education, etc.). The report's findings were welcomed by many as Dutch development policy had increasingly been under scrutiny after evaluations of the Ministry's own Inspection (IOB) that concluded in 2006 that the former ministers of development cooperation had not managed to meet their own policy targets (IOB, 2006). As well, the Netherlands was hit quite hard by the financial crisis that started at the end of 2008. Since then, the Dutch development approach that had always been characterized by the 'salesman and the clergyman' (a combination of enlightened self-interest and moral obligation) gradually shifted more towards the role of the 'salesman' which is reflected by the appointment of the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (Spitz, Muskens & Van Ewijk, 2013).

## Box 2: Awareness creation for the MDGs

The awareness raising activities of 17 Dutch organisations carried out in 2007, for a total of 30 million euro, were evaluated by the Inspection of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IOB). This evaluation concluded that it was impossible to measure the effects of these activities, making it hard to assess whether awareness raising activities contributed to more public support for development cooperation and that the assumption that more knowledge leads to more support and subsequently to different behaviour could not be validated (IOB, 2009). The evaluation prompted the Minister for Development Cooperation at that time, Bert Koenders, to thoroughly modernize the policies aimed at increasing public support for development cooperation. The new approach centred around the concept of 'global citizenship' and resulted in a thorough budget cut for organisations working on public support (Rijksoverheid, 2009). In order to fund small-scale awareness raising activities, a special fund for citizenship and development cooperation (SBOS) was set up in 2010. After only 10 months the facility was shut down as an extra austerity measure (SBOS, 2011). As a result, the funds for CSOs to work on awareness raising were reduced to a minimum level after a very short period of time.

Dutch public awareness about the MDGs ranked among the highest in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2009). Only to the Swedes the goals were a little more well-known (Scheunpflug & McDonnell, 2008). During the glory days of the Dutch MDG campaigns (2006-2009), MDG awareness was at its highest, when almost 23 percent of the Dutch knew the goals and 24 percent had heard of the goals. After 2011, in line with the decreasing attention to the goals in campaigns and policies, awareness of the goals declined to only 17 percent in 2013 (Van Gent, 2015). Figure 1 shows the dynamics in the Dutch MDG-awareness through the years.

### MDG awareness creation





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## Public support, civil society and the MDGs

In addition to the co-financing of CSOs and LAs' activities in developing countries, Dutch organisations were also supported in creating public support for the MDGs by the Dutch government (Vandemoortele & Delamonica, 2010). Both CSOs and LAs have drawn on this budget to organize activities to create awareness and engage a wide group of other organizations and citizens. To create awareness of the MDGs in the Netherlands, a Millennium Municipality campaign (total budget 1,6 million euro) was set up in 2007 (VNG International, 2015). About half of all Dutch municipalities participated in this programme. Furthermore, many municipalities installed special 'Teams 2015' that would stimulate activities for a broad range of local stakeholders concerning the MDGs. Regional activities on the MDGs were additionally carried out by provincial centres for development cooperation (COS), that were also publicly funded. Moreover, several large public events were organized around the MDGs. In 2007 for instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized the high profile event 'Het akkoord van Schokland' to stimulate and promote multi-stakeholder partnerships for the MDGs (Rijksoverheid, 2007). In 2009 a 'Millennium train' ran through the Netherlands to inform youngsters about the goals. October 17<sup>th</sup>, World Poverty Day, was often the date on which the MDG-awareness raising activities of CSOs, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, culminated.

## Assessment of the MDGs in the Netherlands

What can be learned from almost 15 years of working on the MDGs in the Netherlands? Based on this and previous research a mixed picture emerges. Overall, both CSOs and LAs have embraced the MDGs over the years and there were some mechanisms in place to enable participation of civil society in the agenda. At the same time, the thorough budget cuts in development cooperation since 2010 and the shift in policy focus (from social to economic development) have put pressure on the Dutch development sector and stimulated them to change their thematic and geographic priorities as well as to search for new collaborations and funding opportunities (Spitz, Muskens and Van Ewijk, 2013).

A special Joint Evaluation Trust was set up by CSO branch organisation Partos and the scientific organisation NWO-WOTRO to comply with the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to evaluate all granted projects under MFSII (the most recent co-financing grant programme that ran until 2015). The trust evaluated over 200 projects, carried out in 19 partnerships, amongst others, on their contribution to the MDGs. The evaluation found that: "the development programmes have positively contributed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and that lobbying and advocacy programmes have clearly influenced the agendas of policy makers (Partos, 2015; Van der Gaag, Gunning & Ronning, 2015).

There has been no evaluation of the Millennium Municipality campaign, but half of the municipalities were engaged as well as many actors within municipalities, such as local committees, foundations and local businesses.





## Role of the EU to promote CSO and LA participation in the implementation of the MDGs

Participants in this research did not explicitly give their opinion on the alignment of the policies of EU institutions and the Dutch approach towards the MDGs. In general, the EU is seen by respondents/participants as a complementary channel for funding of MDG-related activities. EU initiatives to support inclusive implementation of the goals were also mentioned as being important factors for CSOs and LAs, enabling them to refer to these commitments in their advocacy policies. For instance, according to policy officers of municipalities, the acknowledgement of the importance of the MDGs at EU level helped to obtain political support within their own city halls. Funding opportunities were also relevant, especially for larger municipalities with special staff engaged in international affairs, as well as for CSOs.

## 4. Realizing present needs

With the SDGs recently adopted (September 2015), the Netherlands is still in an exploratory phase of developing policies, framework and, programmes for the implementation of the SDGs. The main country priorities for the national agenda as a whole (beyond the development policies) have not yet been formally communicated. Notwithstanding that the strategizing and implementation of the SDGs is a work in progress, some instruments are already in place to build on for inclusive implementation of the SDGs. The Netherlands intends to address the SDGs 'through existing structures and mechanisms' rather than setting up new ones as was recommended in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup>.

### Policies, legal frameworks, programmes and other mechanisms that promote the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda

The development of a national implementation strategy is still in an exploratory phase. This applies for different levels in Dutch society (national and local) as well as for different kinds of actors (government, civil society organisations, local authorities, trade unions and private sector). Like in many other European countries, a national implementation plan is not yet available at the moment of writing this report (Concord, 2016). According to the experts consulted for this research, the Dutch plan of implementation is likely to come in the second half of 2016 or early 2017.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has appointed both a SDG ambassador and a coordinator for the national implementation of the SDGs. The position of the coordinator is, however, ministry-overarching as he will be the coordinator for the various ministries that are supposed to carry out parts of the SDG-agenda. At the same time so called 'focal points' are appointed at every ministry which are expected to promote the SDGs within their own ministries and to ensure policy coherence. The appointment of the SDG coordinator and the focal points at the involved ministries combined should facilitate the dialogue with and participation of Dutch stakeholders.

### Environmental policies related to the SDGs

For the environmental policy targets in the SDGs, a comparison of the existing environmental policy goals and the 41 SDG targets on the environment was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in consultation with the Ministries of Infrastructure and Environment and Economic Affairs. The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) has recently published<sup>4</sup> the requested analysis that indicates that for many of the targets some policy goals already exist.

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>4</sup> At the moment the PBL report is only available in Dutch, but it will also be available in English.

However, several challenges remain as some SDG targets are not yet covered by existing goals and national policy targets are missing for some of the SDGs (i.e. climate education). It was also found that the horizon for most of the existing environmental policy goals is set at 2020 (due to earlier agreed commitments, such as the Europe2020 strategy and the Dutch Energy Agreement), while the SDGs run until 2030 (Lucas et al., 2016). With two timeframes in place, it might be difficult to plan and monitor progress on the SDGs in an adequate manner. These insights are likely to be important stepping stones in the development of a national strategy and for the identification of country priorities.

### Policies on development cooperation related to the SDGs

As mentioned, the priority themes of development cooperation, namely food security, water, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and peace and security, remain. Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Lilianne Ploumen has particularly emphasized and embraced the goals of 'getting to zero'. Another important focal point is stimulating policy coherence. Minister Ploumen is co-chair of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) which plays a role in supporting implementation of the SDGs by reviewing and strengthening the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17). In line with this ambition, Minister Ploumen has emphasized the importance of policy coherence for development. Furthermore, the Dutch focus on the private sector as a crucial actor for sustainable development is likely to remain strong. The speech of the Dutch prime minister at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, for example, was mainly about the role of the private sector (Rijksoverheid, 2015). And Paul Polman, CEO of the Dutch multinational Unilever, was a member of the UN High Level Panel of eminent persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Minister Ploumen is minister for development cooperation as well as for foreign trade, which shows the strong connection between both fields (private sector and development) in Dutch foreign policy. Besides providing financial support to stimulate companies to contribute to economic development in low- and middle income countries, Ploumen, together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and organisations such as the employers' organisation VNO-NCW, improve the sustainability

of the global value chain. Last December, in the run up to the Dutch EU presidency, the Netherlands organized a conference on the EU and Global Value Chains. Here, Ploumen strongly emphasized the importance of EU institutions and Member States stimulating responsible sourcing and combatting negative practices (Rijksoverheid, 2015). Policies on coherence are critically followed by Partos and CSOs and in 2015 it was agreed to publish an annual monitor on policy coherence (Partos, FMS & Woord en Daad, 2015).

### Development of indicators

Currently the Dutch Statistics Netherlands (CBS) is engaged in the international process of developing indicators for the SDGs. CBS has organised consultations in which several Dutch CSOs have contributed to the discussions. The Netherlands Environmental Agency (PBL) has suggested that their existing 'Monitor Duurzaam Nederland' (Monitor Sustainable Netherlands) could be adjusted to enable monitoring of the environmental SDGs (Lucas, et al., 2016). Several participants in our research also mentioned that other monitoring frameworks and indicators of the Dutch 'plan bureaus', such as the Bureau for Netherlands Policy Analysis (CPB) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) could be used in a similar matter or even combined to get an overall picture of the Dutch progress on the SDGs.

### Specific frameworks on other policy fields related to the SDGs

CSOs consulted mentioned other international frameworks currently in place which they expect to be linked formally to the SDGs. For instance CNV International, one of the two main labour unions which has also signed the Global Goals Charter, mentioned the UN Guiding Principles as the most important framework for their work, which focuses mainly on decent work. And CSR Netherlands (MVO Netherlands), the expertise centre and network of the Dutch private sector working on CSR, uses ISO 26000 as their dominant framework to implement and measure CSR policies. The same applies for other policy fields like human rights or equal rights for men and women; in most cases frameworks have already been developed. As many stakeholders already work with these frameworks, they argue it would be useful to build on these in

order to contribute to reach the SDGs. The UN Global Compact, the Global Reporting Initiative and the World Business Council on Sustainable Development have already made efforts to see how the Global Reporting Initiative G4 guidelines (a CSR reporting framework used by the private and public sector) align with the SDGs. Together they have developed a tool that helps companies to align their strategies, monitor and measure their activities in relation to the SDGs ([www.SDGcompass.org](http://www.SDGcompass.org)).

## Role of CSOs and LAs

Most Dutch development CSOs and some of the larger international environmental CSOs have been active in the negotiation process towards formulating a new global agenda, both through national consultations set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as in international networks and through CONCORD. Local authorities have mostly been active in this process via networks such as umbrella organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Many environmental CSOs, except for the larger ones such as WWF and IUCN, have not yet been very active directly in the SDG-process. However, these organisations have played an important role in the Rio+20 and UNFCCC processes.

In general, there is a willingness among CSOs and LAs to play a role in the implementation of the SDGs. The new agenda is also welcomed as a 'shared framework' or 'shared language' that brings together various issues and actors throughout the world. Dutch civil CSOs and LAs as well as (social) enterprises have taken first steps to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. See also Box 3 which presents various multi-stakeholder initiatives.

In most cases CSOs and LAs perceive the SDGs as being in line with their existing focus areas. They also acknowledge that collaboration with other actors is crucial for successful implementation of the agenda. Our research identifies approximately six interlinked roles from watchdog to implementer and facilitator. CSOs mostly see a role for themselves in holding governments accountable to their commitments for the SDGs, while LAs mostly tend to want to facilitate and partner in local initiatives related to the Agenda 2030 (Spitz, Kamphof & Van Ewijk, 2015; Spitz, Van Ewijk & Kamphof, 2016).

## Key challenges

As described above, this study finds that at this moment some new policies/frameworks/programmes/mechanisms are in place to stimulate or facilitate the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands. At the same time, many (informal) contacts exist between societal actors and policy makers working on the SDGs. In the Netherlands, the lack of formalized or institutionalized participation structures does not seem to form an impediment for CSOs and LAs to play a role in the implementation of the agenda. Furthermore, the 'open' attitude of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs enables stakeholders to easily get in touch with the policy makers working on SDG implementation at the Ministry. This is however primarily the case for stakeholders that are already aware of the SDGs. The lack of formalized structures might impede the participation of stakeholders that are less aware of the agenda and the ongoing implementation process.

CSOs that took part in this research show that challenges for an active role in the implementation of the SDGs include: a) lack of ownership; b) lack of clarity to date about a national implementation strategy; c) need to establish new forms of collaboration; d) overcoming financial dependence and finding new funds; e) lack of public awareness (also among stakeholders); and f) the universal, but complex nature of the agenda (many goals). The consulted representatives from local governments mention similar challenges concerning their role in the implementation of the goals: a) lack of political support; b) lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities of local governments; c) lack of clear mandate from the national government; d) the abstract nature of the SDG framework and the UN process; e) lack of public awareness about the goals (also among local politicians); and f) increasing pressure on municipal budgets.

As both CSOs and LAs indicated, they do not necessarily want the government to give direction to their roles, and they definitely do not support 'a blueprint' for the implementation of the SDGs. However, they have expressed their desire for the development of a national implementation strategy, set up by the government, preferably with input from civil society. Or, alternatively, at least to have more clarity about the direction that implementation is taking at the government

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level. CSOs and LAs indicated that this would help in defining their own roles. They also stated that it is crucial for successful implementation that the importance of the SDGs is publicly acknowledged at the national, as well as the international level, and communicated to relevant stakeholders. For instance, VNG International and representatives of various municipalities participating in this research indicated that it will be very hard to gain policy support at the local level if the national and international actors do not make a strong case of the implementation of the agenda. Although the ministries are taking steps to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs, this is not always clear to CSOs and LAs, and there is limited attention to the SDGs in the Dutch Parliament. Also representatives of CSOs and LAs point out that only written or verbal confirmation that they – as societal actors – are perceived as important players for the implementation of the SDGs is not sufficient; the acknowledgement of their roles should also be framed in policy making. Furthermore, providing some sort of financial support would facilitate their work. Respondents participating in this research, both from the side of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and organisations representing CSOs and LAs, indicated that it is important to connect the bottom up and top down process as initiatives are currently taking place on different levels.

### Added value of the SDGs

In most cases CSOs and LAs perceive the SDGs as in line with their existing focus areas and did not expect a drastic change of their core activities. They indicated that they could connect their existing activities or focus areas to the agenda. Some respondents shared their concerns about a lack of attention for the coherent framework as set out in the SDGs. There appears to be a tension as on the one hand organisations need to focus and find their niche, while at the other hand a coherent framework was seen as one of the assets of the new agenda.

Some representatives of municipalities argued that in order to profile their own municipality they also needed to focus on a specific area (e.g. Eindhoven is strong in health with Philips and many research institutes based in Eindhoven). They felt the various focal areas of municipalities together could also be regarded as a more coherent framework with each municipality focusing on certain themes central in the SDGs.

The consulted local governments especially appreciated the SDGs in the framework of their own international development policies and they saw less added value for the SDGs in work related to environmental related topics as, according to them, in most cases there are already frameworks in place.


### Political, policy and operational level

As the SDGs are not legally binding agreements, implementation largely depends on the willingness to act on a political, policy and operational level. Some of the mechanisms and frameworks which are in place or are being developed are expected to work at all three levels. However, they appear to cover mostly only one or two levels.

The Global Goals Charter for instance, focuses primarily on the operational level and to some extent on the policy level. Programmes are still in an exploratory phase but initiatives which are developed are focusing on improving health conditions in African countries by investing in health centres or by introducing health innovations. Initiatives of municipalities at this moment are mostly on a policy level as policy officers are setting out new policies and exploring new partnerships. It is expected this phase will be followed by operational activities which are likely to be executed in partnerships with other actors like CSOs and private sector. Political support will be needed in order to sustain the implementation of the SDGs. Currently, CSOs are also mainly working at the policy level as they are exploring how they can incorporate the SDGs in their work. The operational level for CSOs is likely to follow in the course of 2016.

At the moment of writing this report, engagement and support for the SDGs within the parliament seems to be rather limited. According to CSO representatives participating in this research, this is partly related to another topic on the political agenda: the refugees who have fled to Europe in large numbers because of the war in Syria as well as from other unstable regions in the world. Policies on accommodating refugees in the Netherlands and regulating the number of refugees coming to Europe and the Netherlands have greatly dominated the political agenda as well as put pressure on the ODA budget (from which first-year reception of refugees is covered). In spite of various activities to engage local





politicians, on the local political level there are no strong mechanisms to pay attention to the SDGs. At the moment of writing this report local attention thus seems primarily dependent on the actions of individual local politicians. Possible monitoring frameworks (building on existing frameworks) can possibly help to translate between the operational and policy level.

### **Participation of marginalized groups**

Existing initiatives do not explicitly encourage participation of marginalized groups. Inequality and reaching marginalized groups (leave no one behind) is mentioned by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation as 'a key issue' in the Dutch policy on development cooperation as well as in the SDGs. Also, most CSOs working in development cooperation have paid specific attention to marginalized groups which can be partly explained by this being a requirement for funding. As the minister has expressed a continuation of a policy to pay special attention to marginalized groups, it is likely that CSOs as well as LAs working in the field of development cooperation will follow this approach.

### **Multi-stakeholder coalitions active in the support of the Post-2015 Agenda**

In the Netherlands several multi-stakeholder coalitions were set up (see box 3). The Global Goals Charter was already set up before the SDGs were adopted. The Global Goals charter is promising as it has many actors 'on board' and is likely to lead to new partnerships. Generally it is too soon to make claims about the (future) impact of these partnerships. Some coalitions, such as the Global Goals Charter, have managed to get access to government or EU funding. It should be noted that there are other multi-stakeholder coalitions which have not specifically been set up to support the SDGs, but do or can play such a role. Examples are the recently launched Strategic Partnerships that receive support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Dutch Good Growth Fund that stimulates economic development through partnerships with the private sector. There are also several already established multi-stakeholder coalitions which focus on environmental issues and which are related to the SDGs such as the 'National Energy Agreement' (2023).

### Box 3. Multi-stakeholder initiatives in the Netherlands

#### Global Goals Charter

A large multi-stakeholder partnership was set up in the run-up towards the formulation of the SDGs; the '**Global Goals Charter**' (previously known as Post 2015-Charter). The Global Goals charter is a coalition specifically set up to inform the national agenda on the SDGs as well as to create an enabling environment for the creation of 'solution partnerships' for the SDGs. The charter was set up by the enterprise DSM, the Worldconnectors think tank and True Price Foundation, in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over 70 organizations (CSOs, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, private sector, knowledge institutions, as well as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) have signed the charter. Although the charter argues it will work on all goals, some 'sweet spots' for mutual collaboration are identified. These include goals 3 (Health), 8 (Employment), 11 (Cities), 12 (Sustainable consumption & production), 13 (Climate) and 17 (Partnerships). At the moment of writing this report, a broad partnership on health was being set up to contribute towards SDG 3 to "Ensure healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages." The focus of the partnership is on improving healthcare delivery for women, children and adolescents at the base of the pyramid. Another partnership being developed focuses on Human Cities: SDG 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." The key players of the charter also indicate they are willing to further explore innovative financing solutions like blended finance, agri-finance, Climate finance and sustainable development oriented philanthropy. An interesting new player that joined the alliance is the Major Alliance Netherlands (MAN) an alliance of philanthropists which together with a lottery (Postcodeloterij) is aiming to set up 'SDG Solution Partnerships'<sup>5</sup>.

5 <http://www.globalgoalscharter.org/about-us/>

#### *Ready for Change initiative on policy coherence and the SDGs*

Another initiative of several Dutch CSOs is the project 'Ready for Change' that assesses the relation between the SDGs and Policy Coherence for (Sustainable) Development. Currently a report is being drafted and the association of Dutch development CSOs (Partos) plans to organise 'structural dialogues' with relevant ministries to discuss a coherent implementation of the SDGs. Also a round table meeting at the House of Representatives of the Netherlands<sup>6</sup> is foreseen. These activities will take place in the period January - June 2016.

6 The Dutch Parliament is called the States General. It consists of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. See also <http://www.houseofrepresentatives.nl/>



### **Joint communication channel: globalgoalsnl**

A multi-stakeholder consortium has also started to set up a national **Global Goals website** (<http://globalgoalsnl.nl/>) which focuses on providing information to interested citizens on the global goals and provides an overview of the various initiatives in the Netherlands related to the global goals. The website is already launched but needs to be elaborated upon. Participating organisations include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, multi-media platform OneWorld, the international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International), Partos, the Global Goals Charter, Earth Charter Nederland, Global Compact Network Netherlands and the employers' organisation VNO/NCW.

### **Global Goals Municipality Campaign**

VNG International has launched a Global Goals Municipality Campaign to stimulate the engagement of Dutch municipalities with the SDGs and raise awareness of the Global Goals. In addition, VNG International will dedicate special time and attention to inspiring and mobilizing Dutch municipalities to contribute to the achievement of the Global Goals. A "Time capsule" was introduced in which mayors and aldermen are invited to formulate their personal wish or dream for the year 2030 in relation to the Global Goals. The time capsule travels across the Netherlands creating local momentum for the local implementation of the Agenda 2030. Every year the most inspiring global goals municipality will be announced. In January 2016 the municipality of Langedijk received the award.

## **Existence of a territorial approach to favour the localisation of SDGs**

At the moment of writing this report no territorial approach is set up. As the Netherlands is very small in geographical terms and relatively homogenous, a territorial approach might have limited added value for implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands. Local governments are literally very close to the daily lives of citizens and therefore well-suited to stimulate and facilitate initiatives from their citizens, such as local businesses, schools, etc. In that sense the Global Goals Municipal Campaign should be a good starting point to localize the SDGs.

## **CSOs and LAs participating in the SDGs/ PRSP planning and monitoring**

Development CSOs have been invited and active in the negotiations on the SDG indicators in which the Dutch agency Statistics Netherlands (CBS) has a defining role. Statistics Netherlands has expertise in monitoring and sits on the UN Inter Agency Expert Group. In the research, individual Dutch LAs indicated that this is quite an abstract process that is not closely connected to their 'core-business.' As a result they feel less inclined to participate in this process.

CSOs receiving funding from the ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Strategic Partnerships Programme, are likely to have to report on their contribution to the SDGs in the future. Some CSOs participating in this research are already making preparations to be able to indicate the contribution of their activities to achieving the SDGs.

Other national monitoring processes are yet to be designed. However, the Dutch government is currently exploring options to report on the progress on the SDGs. Some stakeholders, for instance from the private sector, have expressed the desire for the inclusion of their contributions in such a reporting framework as well. That way it would not only be a governmental report, but a report on the SDG-progress of society at large.

## 5. Strengthening the means to achieve the SDGs

### Mechanisms, coalitions and policies enabling the achievements of the SDGs

#### Beyond the development cooperation sector

Almost all stakeholders consulted for this research stressed the importance of aligning the SDGs with policies and actors that go beyond the 'development sector.' At ministerial level this would imply that not just one, but all ministries will be responsible for the implementation of the SDGs. In practice, specifically the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Infrastructure and the Environment and Economic Affairs are likely to be involved. A more central coordination mechanism from the Cabinet of the Prime Minister (as proposed by some EU Member States) is not considered in The Netherlands. Also, the importance of involving the environmental sector, CSOs in particular, was emphasized by a majority of CSOs and LAs participating in the research.

This wider engagement of actors beyond the 'development sector' was also mentioned at local level. For instance, within the Association of Netherlands municipalities (VNG), the international department (VNG International) has started to engage other departments, such as the department focusing on environment and mobility. Also some representatives of local governments mentioned that a start was made in engaging several departments within city hall. At the moment of writing this report, these organization-wide approaches were only in a starting phase.

#### Informing and involving a wider audience

Nearly all respondents representing CSOs and LAs mentioned that they felt it was important to inform a wider audience about the SDGs. However, none of the actors seem to perceive communicating about the agenda as their responsibility. Therefore, a possible bottleneck for the future implementation of the goals is a lack of awareness about the goals. This lack of awareness might limit the involvement of potential stakeholders or agents of change such as environmental CSOs, local politicians and SMEs in the implementation of

the agenda. It is important to note that the respondents and experts that took part in the research explicitly do not advocate for large campaigns, or campaigns to communicate all the goals to raise public awareness. However, they do feel that efforts are needed to inform and engage a wider group of stakeholders. Participants also mention that it will be crucial to facilitate more multi-stakeholder arrangements, as everyone feels this is essential to reach the SDGs but most feel these arrangements need to be facilitated in some way.

#### Setting a good example

Participants in this research voiced that it is crucial that governments, politicians as well as umbrella organisations like Partos or the Association of Dutch Local Governments (VNG International) clearly express the importance of the SDGs. Not only in words, but also through leading by example and aligning their own policies with the SDGs. Setting a good example can help smaller actors legitimize their efforts to reach the Agenda 2030. For instance, policy advisors of Dutch local governments mentioned that this is crucial to gain political support (e.g. from councillors) at the local level.

#### Existing structures to be elaborated or improved

One of the ways to support the work of the implementation of the SDGs is to set out monitoring and reporting mechanisms. To support this, the existing monitors of the Dutch governmental research institutes (PBL, CBS, CPB and SCP) could be combined to create a comprehensive monitoring system for the SDGs. As already mentioned, PBL analysed current policies and frameworks for the implementation of the environmental related SDGs. For other goals a similar exercise might be helpful to obtain better insight of what is already in place and which gaps remain.

For the private sector, reporting efforts have also been made to explore to what extent existing reporting guidelines, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), are complementary or overlapping with the SDG indicators. Some have also

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argued that the SDG indicators on civil society inclusion are insufficient and that the Busan principles could be used to complement the SDGs in this respect.

### **What potential mechanisms/policies/coalitions are relevant for this context and could be developed?**

A challenge that was often mentioned is the existence of a 'gap' between 1) 'the development cooperation sector' that is already aware and engaged with the SDGs and 2) the more national-oriented ministries and civil society organisations that also have to play an important role in the implementation of the SDGs, but that are generally not yet aware of the SDGs and their role in the agenda. Those that are aware, such as the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, struggle to translate this partly new agenda (that comes with a 'new' language and 'new' actors) into concrete plans. Especially for the implementation of environmental related targets for the Netherlands, several participants expressed they did not yet see the added value of the SDGs as there are already other existing mechanisms in place.

### **Role of the Netherlands in encouraging participation of CSOs and LAs**

First of all, it should be emphasized that CSOs as well as LAs in the Netherlands are already involved in the implementation of the SDGs. More clarity on the role of the Dutch government could help in further defining their roles. Several CSOs and LAs that took part in the research expressed the need for a clearer legitimization of the SDGs and SDG leaders (or champions).

A lack of resources, both financial as well as in terms of tools and communication materials, was mentioned by some respondents as an obstacle, although most representatives of CSOs and LAs indicated they would look for alternative ways of funding, like engaging with the private sector or applying for EU funding. Local governments expressed a desire to exchange experiences and best practices with other local governments. Although respondents indicated that they were not dependent on government funding and would not wait for government funding opportunities, they did indicate

that making small amounts available can make a difference and would demonstrate that the government sees value in the role of CSOs and LAs in implementing the SDGs.

Although the Dutch government has no policy on creating public awareness for the SDGs and is not likely to change this policy in the near future, it might play an important role in further engaging several actors. Additionally, it might facilitate mechanisms to regularly obtain input on what kind of activities CSOs and LAs are engaged in and what they would need to further implement the new agenda.

## 6. Conclusions

In general the policy environment for inclusive SDG implementation is quite positive in the Netherlands. Traditionally CSOs and LAs have always played a relatively large role in Dutch development cooperation, and over the past fifty years, strong ties have been developed between the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs and Dutch civil society in its broadest sense. Although ODA support for civil society organisations has decreased in recent years, the strong ties from the past still enable dialogue, exchange and collaboration between the government and society. Also, the scope of Dutch development policy has already been broadened, for instance by combining aid and trade in the portfolio of one minister and by the emphasis that the Netherlands places on the importance of policy coherence. Combining and aligning different policy fields (development, environment, and human rights) is crucial to rolling out the SDG agenda. Culturally, the Dutch also have a tradition in multi-stakeholder collaboration and dialogue; such experience can advance the global partnership for sustainable development.

The reception of the SDGs has been positive in the Netherlands. Dutch citizens welcome new global agreements for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Although some criticism remains on the large number of goals and the complexity of the UN system, the consulted stakeholders generally embrace the SDGs as an 'agenda of opportunities.' Some stakeholders have started to develop activities on the SDGs, such as the Global Goals Campaign for local government and the Global Goals Charter that brings together private sector, CSOs and knowledge institutions. Most stakeholders see the SDGs as a useful universal framework to which (mostly existing) priorities and activities can be connected. This pragmatic approach is seen among many Dutch stakeholders. It is also the road that the Dutch government has taken until now: focusing on the development policies that are already in place (food, water, SRHR, peace and security), with a specific focus on the role of the private sector and on leaving no one behind.

Notwithstanding the many positive Dutch starting points for SDG implementation, there are some concerns. The rather informal organization of stakeholder participation is on the one hand appreciated. However, this also means that stakeholders that are not yet part of these informal structures might have trouble gaining access. Also, there is concern that not all sectors might feel involved. As was discussed previously, the largest challenges for the Netherlands are related to the the environmental-related SDGs, and it is therefore crucial that this sector begins to feel ownership for the Agenda 2030. Furthermore, the lack of awareness of the goals was regarded as an issue of concern. Not only has the agenda not yet 'landed' in Dutch society, but many actors that can make a positive contribution to the implementation of the goals, such as local authorities, SMEs, environmental CSOs, are not yet very aware of the agenda. As noted, the response of actors outside the development community seems to be a bit lukewarm. Some stakeholders, such as the ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, are now starting to appreciate their role, while other actors, such as financial institutions or nationally-oriented environmental CSOs, do not yet recognize the Agenda 2030 as something of their concern, or have not yet heard of it. It is not yet clear who should take up this role of informing specific actors in society; Dutch CSOs and local authorities at least do not feel inclined to take up this role.

As was also voiced in the research, the SDGs require transformation at the policy and operational levels and this process takes time. Pushing stakeholders into the implementation process or imposing policies could have negative effects. Instead, slowly letting the SDGs take root and building on the unfolding energy and initiatives in society might be a more fruitful approach. It is also the approach favoured by most of the participants in the research. Integrating the SDGs into existing policy targets, monitoring frameworks (such as the Monitor Duurzaam Nederland), and dialogue platforms (such as The Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands - SER) is regarded as the most effective approach.

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## 7. Key messages and recommendations

This section provides an overview of the key messages and recommendations that were found in this research. These are the results of input and suggestions provided by participants that took part in interviews, focus group discussions and/or survey research as well as literature review. The recommendations have been categorized for different actors: EU institutions, national government and (broad) civil society.

### Key messages

- The general attitude in the Netherlands towards the SDGs is positive: it is widely acknowledged by the 'development' stakeholders (government, CSOs, LAs, private sector) that it is a joint agenda that requires efforts from all relevant stakeholders. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is leading the transition from negotiation to implementation of the agenda.
- As in other European countries, there is no formal implementation framework or a 'national strategy' yet. Some first initiatives of Dutch stakeholders on the SDGs are emerging.
- Many of the consulted stakeholders understand that strategy development for such a complex agenda takes time. At the same time, it is also felt that the lack of clarity on the priorities, roles and responsibilities of the national government somewhat hamper actors from civil society to actively take up their role. This was more the case for CSOs than for local governments. The latter, however, look towards the national government and national politicians to publicly take action on the SDGs as this helps to legitimize local action as well.
- The Dutch actors primarily build on already existing mechanisms, structures and networks. The Dutch 'informal' approach in relation to the SDG process has worked quite well, especially for the already active CSOs and LAs.
- The consulted stakeholders prefer to integrate the SDGs as much as possible into existing frameworks. This is especially the case for monitoring of the goals, where several representatives warned against an increase in administrative burden on stakeholders.
- Different stakeholders move at different paces and cover different parts of the agenda, but they need to come together somewhere in the process. The Dutch development sector is well-connected to the global UN process on the SDGs, while the environmental sector's attention seems to be directed more towards trajectories related to Rio+20, UNFCCC and European frameworks such as Natura2000. Local governments are less connected to the international process, but are very close to local bottom-up processes. Until now there is not much synergy or collaboration between these different sectors on the SDGs.
- The research finds that both CSOs and LAs see several roles for themselves. Local governments mostly expect to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs as facilitator, by leading by example (in own policies and abroad) and as communicator (towards specific relevant groups, not the community at large). CSOs mostly see their role as watchdogs, carrying out relevant activities abroad and working in partnership with other stakeholders.
- Notwithstanding the overall enthusiasm for the SDG agenda, challenges for inclusive implementation were also identified. Both for local governments and CSOs these concern a lack of ownership and official mandate to contribute to implementation of the goals. Also the lack of public awareness, not only among the general public, but also among potential stakeholders and partners, was considered a challenge for the successful implementation of the goals. Especially when it comes to getting 'unusual suspects' on board to contribute to implementation of the SDGs, communication was considered key.

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- Furthermore, the relative lack of funding for civil society activities on the SDGs was mentioned by many as an obstacle for the localization of the goals; in particular because Dutch CSOs and LAs are already confronted with resource allocation challenges due to decreasing funds and often increasing tasks.
  - Opportunities were also identified, for instance that the SDGs provide a common framework and shared language for various actors, both at home and abroad. The universal and holistic nature of the SDGs also stimulates new forms of collaboration.

## Recommendations

Although steps are being taken towards SDG implementation in the Netherlands, it should be noted that implementation is still in its very early stages and it will take time before the Dutch national implementation strategy will be fully crystallized. Nevertheless, we summarize several recommendations based on the research.

### EU institutions

- Lead by example by revising strategies and integrating the goals in internal and external EU policies. This is also relevant for the Netherlands, as a large share of Dutch policies is derived from EU policies.
- Make accurate and timely data available to establish a strong and continuous monitoring process. Participants mentioned the role of Eurostat, but other initiatives, such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) could also be considered.
- Foster/stimulate dialogue and exchange of best practices amongst Member States, as well as different thematic sectors (environment, development, human rights) and stakeholders.
- Provide further funding opportunities to stimulate the implementation of the SDGs by various actors and stimulate multi-stakeholder arrangements.



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## Dutch national government

As national governments are the signatories of the SDGs, both CSOs and LAs place much emphasis on the responsibility of the government to implement the SDGs. Suggestions for action included:

- Consider developing a strategy for national implementation of the goals which will legitimise the roles of all actors in the implementation of the agenda.
- More explicitly take up a coordinating role for the implementation of the SDGs and continue facilitating and supporting collaborative arrangements among different stakeholders to enable dialogue and exchange on the inclusive implementation of the agenda.
- Broaden the political leadership on the agenda from the minister for development and foreign trade towards other ministers. (Some respondents mentioned examples from Sweden and Germany where responsibility for the agenda is (expected to be) placed with the prime-minister or 'Kanzleramt').
- Use the EU presidency as an opportunity to take on more leadership of the SDG Agenda.
- Use the SDG focal points at the different ministries to inform and involve actors outside the development sector.
- Building on Minister Ploumen's ambition to lead in the field of policy coherence, use the SDG agenda for policy coherence for (sustainable) development. The Netherlands already has a track record in this field, which makes the Netherlands a credible champion on this topic.
- Set long-term policy targets on the SDGs now that Agenda 2030 is adopted. Combine existing monitors of the Dutch governmental research institutes (PBL, CBS, CPB and SCP) to create a comprehensive monitoring system for the SDGs.

## CSOs and LAs

- Follow the initiatives of CSOs in other countries, for instance Belgium, to develop reports that advise the government on the implementation of the SDGs. To a large extent the Dutch Ready for Change initiative has now taken up such a role, albeit with the focus on policy coherence.
- Create a platform for dialogue among sectors on SDG implementation and facilitate moments for exchange.
- Build on the tradition of multi-stakeholder collaboration to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration within sectors, as well as across professionals with different thematic expertise.
- Make more use of the potential of collaboration between similar types of organizations. (Many smaller CSOs and LAs, for instance, view the UN process on the SDGs as very complex, while larger CSOs and LAs have more experience in this process and the capacity to actively participate.
- Have a keen eye for new funding opportunities related to the SDGs.
- Explore how the integrated framework of the interrelated SDGs could be connected and of added value to specific focus areas.
- Make use of the common language related to the SDGs in (inter)national partnerships with other CSOs and LAs.
- Make use of the emphasis that implementation of the SDGs is an agenda for all to explore new multi-stakeholder partnerships.

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