



How do NGOs mobilize around the SDGs and what are the ways forward?

A French-German comparison

Working Paper

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NGOs ARE MOBILIZING AROUND THE SDGs.

This mobilization is more advanced in Germany than in France, but even there NGOs are increasingly aware of the SDGs and have started to take dedicated action. However, it is fair to say that the mobilization of NGOs is still biased towards development NGOs and, more generally, towards organizations working on international issues and that have a familiarity with the UN system, as opposed to those that operate at the national level, and even less to those working at the local level. There exists a knowledge and action gap between the different types of NGOs that must be filled, while the strategic reasons why some NGOs are deliberately not mobilizing around SDGs must also be taken into account. This study provides examples that aim to inspire action, to make the case for the concrete impacts achieved by applying the SDGs, and to encourage mutual learning.

NGOs PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN HOLDING GOVERNMENTS TO ACCOUNT. THEY ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF NEW ADVOCACY COALITIONS AND INCREASE THE LEGITIMACY OF ACCOUNTABILITY CLAIMS.

These emerging forms of collaboration between NGOs are a way to operationalize the integrated and universal nature of the SDGs. However, these collaborations will remain fragile if governments and the UN do not follow the example to overcome silos, and if some types of NGOs are not sufficiently included in national and international processes. NGOs can also play an important role in contributing directly *via* the implementation of their projects and in holding the private sector accountable, although we observed some reluctance from NGOs in taking up this role. This unwillingness is linked to a lack of definition of the so-called “new partnership” between national SDG actors and by a fear that this new partnership will result in blurred responsibilities.

WE IDENTIFY A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES IN THE MOBILIZATION OF NGOs AROUND THE SDGs AND EXPLORE THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY CAN BE OVERCOME, FOR BOTH GOVERNMENTS AND NGOs.

These are linked to enabling and constraining factors that we observed in France and Germany, such as the importance of credible implementation processes and instruments, along with adequate funding. To sum up, the mobilization of NGOs is closely linked to whether the SDGs are a priority for the government. However, the same applies the other way around. Governments are less likely to make the SDGs a priority if there is no such demand from civil society. Therefore, neither NGOs nor governments should hesitate before taking action.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2015, States adopted the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The preamble of the ambitious, universal and indivisible 2030 Agenda states: “All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan.” (UN General Assembly, 2015). SDG 17 promotes a new global partnership between countries but also between the State and non-state actors. Two years after the adoption, the meaning of this new partnership and the roles of the different actors are still poorly defined. Accountability and peer pressure are supposed to be the key mechanisms that will enable the move from international commitments to the concrete implementation of action at national and local scales: is the major role of NGOs therefore to be the watchdogs of implementation? Do they have the resources and legitimacy to do so? The objective of this study is to contribute to this definition of roles by focusing on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). How are they participating in the implementation of the Agenda 2030? Governments expect a lot from NGOs but do not necessarily clearly define these expectations. So, what is really the role of NGOs? How can they contribute to the SDGs? And how does their relationship with the government and the private sector evolve?

The UN defines NGOs as “any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level.”¹ We distinguish between different types of NGOs according to the issues around which they organize themselves. Given the integrated nature of the SDGs, we covered a wide range of “activity sectors” including development, environment, social welfare, gender equality, and education.

The 2030 Agenda is a global agenda but its implementation must be translated nationally across all the different activity sectors. For this reason, we looked at international NGOs but put a particular emphasis on national NGOs. Some of these national NGOs have regional and local branches.²

A recent study among NGOs showed that the awareness of national SDG implementation plans and processes is particularly low in Europe, with 54% of respondents not being aware of their countries' implementation plans for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (Together 2030, 2017). In comparison, in Africa only 29% of respondents were unaware of their countries' SDG implementation plans.

In this study we present four main roles for NGOs in SDG implementation in and by their countries, and explore to what extent NGOs are already taking up these roles. We then check whether the degree of mobilization around the SDGs varies according to the country or the activity sector. In a next step, we list the factors that explain why NGOs mobilize around the SDGs and then, on the other hand, we examine the underlying reasons that deter NGOs from getting involved with the SDGs. Finally we analyze the challenges that NGOs face today in mobilizing around the SDGs in France and Germany and explore possible ways forward.

¹ See more on: <https://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/content/about-us-0>.

² In the scope of this study we did not take into account the following levels of operation: community-based organizations, city-wide organizations.

2. METHODOLOGY

Our findings are based on desk research, on semi-guided qualitative interviews with UN and government representatives and NGO representatives, as well as on our own observations through our participation in three consultations between the French Ministry of the Environment and the civil society in the period from June 2016 to May 2017.

In a first step we identified what could be the expected roles of NGOs in the implementation of SDGs at the national level. To do so we conducted desk research along with semi-guided qualitative interviews with experts and representatives from ministries involved in the implementation of the SDGs.

In a second step, we conducted semi-guided qualitative interviews with NGOs directly to identify what they perceive to be their roles, as well as to check which roles they do or do not actually carry out, and why.

The interviews were guided by the following objectives:

- Identify potential roles for NGOs in the implementation of the SDGs
- Explore what NGOs actually do with the SDGs in France and Germany
- Understand what drives NGOs to mobilize around the SDGs
- Understand what impedes NGOs from mobilizing around the SDGs
- Identify enabling factors and potential obstacles in the country

To explore these five dimensions, we adopted a comparative approach focusing on the mobilization of NGOs in France and Germany. The choice of these two countries is based on the fact that although the two countries are close and have many similar conditions, the degree of mobilization around the SDGs is currently quite different. Therefore the comparative approach method was especially helpful to identify enabling factors but also potential obstacles that are due to the country context.

In our sample, we chose NGOs from different activity sectors. Comparing the degree of mobilization of NGOs from different sectors allows us to identify enabling factors and potential obstacles due to the context of the activity sector. The following table shows how we chose our interviewees to ensure that we included a broad sample that represented different activity sectors:

Activity sector	French NGOs contacted	French interviews conducted	German NGOs contacted	German interviews conducted
Sustainable development	1	1	3	3
Environment	2	1	3	3
Welfare, poverty reduction (domestic)	3	1	4	2
Gender	2	0	2	0
Education and Civic engagement	3	0	2	2
Development and international cooperation	4	2	2	2

Most of the NGOs we interviewed were umbrella organizations that grouped together several members. This allowed us to get a broader view of what NGOs do with the SDGs because we were able to ask not only about their umbrella organization but also about their members. We did not manage to carry out interviews with NGOs from all sectors, and we ended up conducting more interviews in Germany than in France. This could have been due to the fact that the SDGs are better known among German NGOs, which may therefore have been more willing to discuss the topic. In any case, this must be kept in mind when reading and interpreting our results. Finally, we also conducted two interviews on the supranational level with SDG Watch Europe and WWF Europe. The full list of interviewees can be found in the appendix.

Our interviews were carried out between December 2016 and March 2017, and it should be noted that the situation could have evolved since then.

3. WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF NGOs IN SDG IMPLEMENTATION?

In theory, NGOs can play different roles in the (national) implementation of the SDGs. These roles will depend on the type of NGO: it is possible for a single NGO to play several roles simultaneously, and for tension to exist between these different roles (Spitz, Kamphof, van Ewijk, 2015).

We asked UN and government representatives to explain what it is they expect from NGOs, and then compared these expectations with existing NGO reports and with our interviews with NGOs regarding their own perception of their roles. On this basis, we identify four roles for NGOs in the context of national SDG implementation that we consider particularly relevant:³ holding the government to account, holding the private sector to account, implementing projects, and communicating the SDGs. In this section we explain what these four roles are, why we think they are relevant and to what extent NGOs are taking up these roles.

3.1. Holding the government to account

NGOs play an important role in holding the government to account for its promises. They do this by closely following and participating in policy processes in relation to the SDGs. Through their advocacy activities they can lobby for the SDGs to be integrated into domestic and foreign policies. They can also act as watchdogs by monitoring the progress made by the government and by highlighting the problematic areas (Spitz, Kamphof, van Ewijk, 2015).

The accountability role towards the government is taken up by many NGOs. Given that States are the signatories to the SDGs, NGOs in Germany and France consider that the main responsibility for their implementation lies within the government. Hence, the NGOs we interviewed said that their main role was holding their governments accountable for their commitments. We see this role being taken up in different ways, resulting in different activities. Accountability and contestations are central roles of civil society and as such are definitely not new (Fillieule, Mathieu, Péchu, 2009). The value added by the SDGs to these roles is twofold: it allows NGOs to speak with a united voice, to establish common positions in what we will call “new coalitions”, and it strengthens their arguments.

³ This is a non-exhaustive list and there may well be other roles that we would be happy to discuss in reaction to this working paper.

Entering into new coalitions to speak with a united voice

The most important added value of the SDGs in terms of this role is that it invites NGOs to create new coalitions for advocacy and accountability. Although coalitions between NGOs existed before, the SDGs allow for a much broader collaboration beyond activity sectors. We see this happening in Germany, where an environmental and a development organization have launched an informal network to strengthen the cross-sectoral collaboration between a broad range of NGOs. This cross-sectoral collaboration leads to common accountability activities such as joint position papers⁴ and comments on the national implementation process. In Germany, around forty NGOs (development NGOs, social welfare organizations, peace organizations, environmental NGOs, etc., as well as trade unions) published a joint position paper⁵ in which they laid out how Germany should implement each of the 17 goals. Another example is the shared work on a shadow report that critically analyses whether Germany's development model is sustainable. NGOs may also be invited to formally take up this role at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York. This was the case for several German NGOs that were invited to comment on Germany's Voluntary National Review (VNR). NGOs also jointly organize conferences featuring discussion workshops where, for example, consumer organizations and welfare organizations can work together on how sustainable consumption can become affordable for the poorest households.

Cross-sectorial NGO collaboration to support SDG implementation is also emerging in other countries. At the EU level, SDG Watch Europe⁶ brings together more than 70 NGOs from different sectors and different European countries. In France, we have not yet observed such a broad collaboration between sectors to support the implementation of SDGs at the national level. However, smaller scale collaborations exist, between different development NGOs for example. While still in its infancy, collaboration among French NGOs is slowly increasing.

Referring to the SDGs to strengthen the legitimacy of accountability claims

Another way NGOs can take up the role of accountability is by integrating the SDGs into the advocacy activities of their individual organizations. Most NGOs said that Agenda 2030 and the SDGs had added value as an advocacy tool that strengthens and legitimizes their arguments.

When asked what aspects of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs they use in their advocacy, most NGOs underlined the importance of the principles and the general message of the 17 goals. Development NGOs mostly call for an implementation that puts the emphasis on "leaving no one behind" and that designs policies that ensure, according to paragraph 4 of Agenda 2030 that "the furthest behind" are the ones that are first supported, which is also in line with the first theme of the HLPF: "Ensuring that no one is left behind". Although it is mostly development NGOs who uphold this implementation principle, welfare organizations could also have an interest in this implementation approach. Environmental NGOs mostly consider that the SDGs recognize the limits of natural resources and are

⁴ German NGO Forum on Environment and Development (March, 2017): Ein Anfang der nach mehr verlangt: Die Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie muss ehrgeizig umgesetzt und weiterentwickelt werden! Retrieved from: <http://www.forumue.de/stellungnahme-zur-deutschen-nachhaltigkeitsstrategie/> (27 June 2017).

⁵ German NGO Forum on Environment and Development ed. (March, 2016): Die Umsetzung der globalen 2030-Agenda für nachhaltige Entwicklung. Retrieved from: <http://www.forumue.de/die-umsetzung-der-globalen-2030-agenda-fuer-nachhaltige-entwicklung/> (27 June 2017).

⁶ See more on: <https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/our-work>

a commitment to ensuring a “safe operating space for humanity” (Rockström, 2009). Hence, they emphasize that the implementation process should follow the “planetary boundaries framework”.⁷ When referencing the 17 goals, NGOs emphasize the importance of coherence between goals. They also use individual goals to strengthen their arguments. Particular examples include a German NGO coalition working with SDG 14 and a French NGO coalition using SDG 3 to call for a greater ODA allocation for health.⁸

What is striking is that NGOs often refer to overarching principles, like “leaving no one behind” and to the 17 goals—although often very generally—and very few talk of the specific targets, even though they offer much more precision than the 17 goals and sometimes include a quantitative target to be achieved by 2030. For example, the advocacy work of two NGOs reference Target 2.3 that fixes the objective “to double the income of small farmers”.

Not many NGOs work strategically with the indicators that accompany the SDGs to feed their advocacy activities. In Germany, NGOs commented on and recommended indicators for the draft of the national development strategy. There is the example of 2030 Watch⁹, a project by the Open Knowledge Foundation that monitors the performance of Germany on a sample of indicators in comparison to other European countries, including France. Given that the indicator framework is generally seen as central to the SDGs, it is rather surprising that NGOs are making little use of it today.

3.2. Holding the private sector to account

The relevance of this role is perhaps surprising in the context of the SDGs because it is States and not businesses that have signed the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless we chose to include this role in our study. The 2030 Agenda states that all stakeholders “will implement this plan” (UN General Assembly, 2015). Today there are many businesses, including from the financial sector, that make voluntary commitments to contribute to the SDGs. NGOs could play a role in ensuring the transparency and coherence of these commitments with the SDGs.¹⁰ NGOs can lobby businesses to get involved and ensure that businesses really deliver on their commitments, for example by naming and shaming (Spitz, Kamphof, van Ewijk, 2015). They can also enter into cross-sector partnerships with businesses, taking on the role of a “critical friend” through the provision of advice on transformation processes.¹¹

To date, NGOs rarely take on the role of holding the private sector to account. This is mainly due to two reasons. First, most NGOs think that the main responsibility for SDG implementation lies within the public sector. As businesses have not signed the Agenda 2030, NGOs find it difficult to hold them to account because their role is not clearly defined. However, NGOs are very aware that the private sector is quite active on the SDGs and that government expects a lot from their financial and extra-

⁷ See more on: <http://planetaryboundariesinitiative.org/2015/10/09/sustainable-development-goals-put-planetary-boundaries-on-the-worlds-agenda/>.

⁸ See more on: <https://www.collectif-sante-mondiale.fr/collectif-action-sante-mondiale/>.

⁹ See more on: <https://2030-watch.de/en/methodik/>.

¹⁰ Upcoming blog article by Brimont, Hege at <http://blog.iddri.org/en/>.

¹¹ Byanyima, Winnie (2016, November 30). Why Oxfam won't compromise on SDGs. In: Greenbiz. Retrieved from: <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/why-oxfam-wont-compromise-sdgs> (2017, June 7).

financial contributions to the implementation process. These expectations are met with some skepticism by NGOs, particularly concerning whether private sector engagement in the SDG process is real and will lead to a transformation of business models. Furthermore, NGOs fear that blurred boundaries between actors will entail blurred responsibilities. In other words, they are afraid that the public sector is outsourcing its responsibility for SDG implementation in strategic areas to the private sector. While most NGOs admit that private sector involvement is to some extent necessary to achieve the SDGs, they underline that this involvement must be transparent and that standards are essential to ensure that it truly benefits the public good.

3.3. Implementing projects

Another NGO role is to carry out projects themselves or to support and coordinate the projects of other NGOs. They can contribute directly to the SDGs through such projects. The Agenda 2030 and the SDG 17 in particular promote a new partnership between actors. At the project level, NGOs could collaborate with new actors, for example businesses and/or local administrations.

To what extent the SDGs have any influence on the role of NGOs as project implementers is not yet clear. The discourse strategy of the French and German governments is “everybody should mobilize for the SDGs”. We observed that NGOs are unclear about what this means when it comes to project implementation. Most NGOs cite the fact that their activities already contribute to the SDGs and that they have not been waiting for the SDGs to take action. So the questions they face are: should we do more? If so, with what means? Should we work with new partners? Should we change our modus operandi? Should we take the SDGs into account in our project evaluations?

As far as the last question is concerned, things are already happening. “There is no SDG project” as one NGO put it, but the SDGs can serve as an evaluation tool for existing and new projects to ensure that they are coherent, that they actively contribute to some SDGs and avoid negative impacts on others. Some see this even as a necessity, stating that the SDGs promote mutual accountability of all actors including NGOs. Furthermore, NGOs reported that donors have started to adapt tender requirements. Up till now this has mostly been in terms of changes to the wording of project requirements rather than to the projects themselves. To what extent NGOs will take into account the SDGs at the project level will also depend on the orientation of donors.

NGOs that have taken the SDGs into account in a more substantial way at the project level include those in the fields of sustainable education and civic education. Their programmes have been adapted to the new global agenda. An example of best practice is the civil society coalition Asvis in Italy, which has catalogued existing educational material in relation to its connection to the SDGs and has organized an e-learning course for school teachers.¹²

3.4. Communicating the SDGs

NGOs are aware that they have a major role to play in communicating the SDGs to the public (Spitz, Kamphof, van Ewijk 2015). NGOs can disseminate information on any progress being made by governments and make policy processes more transparent. One of the objectives of raising public awareness is to empower citizens to make their own contributions to the SDGs. This also works the

¹² See more on: <http://www.asvis.it/activities/537-1471/education-for-sustainable-development>.

other way around. If the societal demand for sustainable development is increasing, it has a positive impact on the capacity of NGOs to put pressure on the government and take up their accountability role.

Most NGOs agree on the importance of this role and some are already taking it up. In Germany and France, we witnessed NGOs integrating the SDGs into their awareness raising campaigns. However, there are a number of difficulties that NGOs face when trying to assume this role. In France, one of these challenges is obtaining funding for SDG awareness raising projects, although the European Commission is financing a Europe-wide communication and mobilization project for the SDGs, which is being carried out by NGO coalitions across 15 countries.¹³ This project may have the potential to scale up the mobilization of citizens, NGOs and decision makers around the SDGs.

Problems regarding the communication of the SDGs are an obstacle in both France and Germany: “It is really difficult to communicate the SDGs to the public. This is due to the fact that the interest in development issues is not very high in the population but also because the media is not talking about it”. Given the complexity of the SDGs, some NGOs do not consider communication to be a priority.

4. TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE DEGREE OF MOBILIZATION VARY ACROSS THE TWO COUNTRIES AND ACROSS ACTIVITY SECTORS?

Our study is based on twenty qualitative interviews and it is therefore difficult to make generalizations about the results. However, what we observed on the basis of these interviews is that NGOs in Germany seem to find it easier than their French counterparts to assume the different roles. In Germany there are more NGOs that know and work with the SDGs than in France. Every NGO we interviewed in Germany gave a resoundingly affirmative response to the question on whether NGOs have taken ownership of the SDGs, whereas replies along the lines of “not yet” were more common from those in France. To date, it is mostly development NGOs that have mobilized around the SDGs in France. However, knowledge of the SDGs among NGOs in France is increasing. Several NGOs in France are now thinking about closer collaborations and have committed to increasing mobilization around the SDGs in this country. If successful, this could really scale up NGO mobilization around the SDGs in France in the near future.

In France as in Germany, whether an NGO knows about and works with the SDGs still largely depends on its activity “sector” and on its linkages with the UN agenda. Development NGOs are more involved than others for example. For these organizations, since they were already mobilized around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), there is a certain path dependency in their involvement with the SDGs. Environmental NGOs are also quite involved, but mostly those that took part in Rio+20 and the SDG negotiation process. Whereas national social NGOs, such as welfare organizations, are not very mobilized around the SDGs. Despite the fact that many SDGs concern social affairs in France and Germany, many national welfare organizations do not yet know about the SDGs. Unlike development and environmental NGOs, these organizations are not often used to working with UN agendas.

¹³ The project is led by SDG Watch Europe and financed by the DG DEVCO program DEAR (Development education and awareness raising).

Another observation is that there seems to be a lack of communication and transmission between organizations or departments within organizations that work internationally and those working at the national or local level. Those who are more mobilized have an important role in communicating the SDGs to organizations from other sectors. In Germany, this link has been made to some extent. Here, NGOs working internationally have invited national and local NGOs, including welfare organizations, to participate in an informal cross-sectoral network on SDG implementation “in and by Germany”. This explains why more and more organizations are getting involved, including welfare organizations and teacher unions.

However, welfare organizations remain less mobilized than development or environmental NGOs. The fact that they are slow to get involved might also be a result of the decentralized nature of welfare organizations. We therefore note that a communication link has to be established between NGOs that operate at the international level and those that operate at the national level, but also between national and local level organizations.

It should also be noted that some NGOs choose not to engage with the SDGs because they disagree with them. For example, this is the case for NGOs that are organized around a post-growth discourse. They consider the SDGs as contradictory since they promote not only an environmental and development agenda, but also set an objective for GDP growth (although this is limited to least developed countries).

5. WHY DO NGOs MOBILIZE AROUND THE SDGs?

In our interviews, NGOs gave us several reasons for why they do or do not mobilize around the SDGs. Presented below is a non-exhaustive list of factors that motivate NGOs to get involved with the SDGs. Given that the role of holding governments to account was the one most interviewees indicated they had assumed, the motivation factors are mostly related to this role. The list shows the added value seen by NGOs in the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

5.1. A universal and integrated agenda that was long overdue

The SDGs are a response to claims made by NGOs. The most often cited benefit of the SDGs is that they make the links clear between their different causes, as one NGO commented: “The SDGs reflect and integrate individual claims that we have been making for years. Now we have a framework that treats all these issues at once.” Due to their expertise and experience, NGOs are very sensitive and aware about the integrated nature of the SDGs.

The universal nature of the Agenda 2030 is not only a response to what NGOs are already doing, but also gives new mandates to NGOs. For example, they allow NGOs to get involved in the political discussion about sustainable development at all levels, nationally, internationally and locally. One NGO summed it up: “We consider the SDGs to be an exceptional achievement because they are global and universal. They allow us to better justify our claim that our domestic policies need to avoid negative impacts on third countries”.

After the MDGs, the SDGs are a welcome improvement: “Compared to the MDGs, the SDGs broaden the definition of education. Target 4.7 on civic education and education for sustainable development gives us as development NGOs a mandate to get involved in the political education debate in

Germany. It also gives us a mandate to communicate to the public and to provide this service of civic education and education for sustainable development”.

5.2. An advocacy tool

When asked why and how NGOs use the SDGs, the most frequent answer was that they are applied as a tool to strengthen their arguments. The SDGs are an internationally agreed agenda and are used as a reference to add legitimacy to the claims of NGOs. They can add more weight to claims and arguments they have been making for decades, as these citations show:

“The added value of the SDGs is that they help us to place these topics at the heart of public debate.”

“The SDGs make our arguments more relevant. Suddenly, it is not just one environmental NGO who is making these claims but it is a UN agreement. That adds more weight to our arguments.”

The only use of the SDGs so far by some NGOs has been to strengthen their arguments: “It is an extremely helpful reference frame for our advocacy activities - nothing more and nothing less.”

While most NGOs refer to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in a rather general way, some find it useful to use the targets and indicators to make more concrete claims. In this sense, the SDGs are seen as an improvement on the MDGs and also Agenda 21: “We see the SDGs as a tool, as a strategy to achieve long-term sustainable development. The SDGs have made sustainable development more concrete with their goals and targets, it is no longer just a concept.”

Although the SDGs are seen as extremely useful for adding weight to their advocacy claims, NGOs are also aware that the capacity for SDGs to have a real impact is limited: “The SDGs have given us an additional political instrument for our advocacy work. It is not a very strong instrument, but it provides us with one more extra tool to bring forward our arguments.”

5.3. An opportunity to create new coalitions

The universal and integrated nature of the SDGs provides an opportunity for NGOs to collaborate with NGOs from other sectors and countries.

The NGOs we interviewed see real potential in cross-sectoral organization. Most stated that they have broadened their networks since the adoption of the SDGs: “The SDGs have broadened our networks. The actor constellations that are created through the SDGs are quite new. As an environmental NGO, we collaborate today with welfare organizations, human rights organizations, and peace activists. This kind of common denominator is not present in most of our other work streams.”

They also see these new coalitions as an opportunity to set the example for the government in terms of overcoming silos: “When we work cross-sectorally as NGOs, we are setting the example. If we can overcome silos, so can ministries”; and “For me the SDGs have triggered collaboration between NGOs that is exceptional and brand new. The objective of this new collaboration is to push the government towards strengthening policy coherence in relation to the SDGs”.

SDG Watch Europe put forward the same argument at the European level. One of the founders of this new coalition noted that an important impact of this cross-sectoral NGO organization was that it

enabled NGOs to speak with a louder voice and have a greater impact on decision makers. She commented: “SDGs appeared on the scene and I realized that there were no connections between the different sectors in Europe. So we created SDG Watch Europe. We now have a joint position with more than 70 NGOs and Member States in Brussels. This puts us in a powerful position, which the Commission understands, and so it wants to meet with us.” But this is not the only benefit: “Now that we are sitting together, people find each other and other things can happen”, she added.

One of these other outcomes is that NGOs have been attracted by these newly emerging coalitions. An interviewee from an NGO in Germany explained: “NGOs also get involved because they see an opportunity. Something is happening; something that does not require a lot of extra effort in terms of their advocacy work but that can potentially have a great impact.”

Hence, we observe that NGOs see the SDGs as an opportunity to work cross-sectorally. The SDGs may also be seen as an opportunity to collaborate with new partners at the international level, beyond the national and EU level, although this opportunity has not really been taken up by the NGOs we interviewed.

We should note that the SDGs do not only provide an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between NGOs, but also to overcome silos within organizations: “They have also created synergies within NGOs by bringing together those who work nationally and those who work internationally. It is very interesting to see how different teams within organizations are now being forced to work together.”

5.4. A window of opportunity to influence a national political strategy

The German government quite quickly identified its sustainable development strategy as the national implementation tool for the SDGs, as recommended by paragraph 78 of the 2030 Agenda: “We encourage all Member States to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate”. It launched a revision process of this strategy and aligned it with the SDGs. Several informal and formal consultations with the civil society took place during this process that resulted in a first draft in May 2016 and a final version in January 2017. All ministries were mobilized in the revision of the strategy. To some extent this explains why NGOs see such an interest in the SDGs in Germany, as one NGO commented: “The SDGs are today quite well known by the different departments—probably better than in other countries thanks to their integration in our Sustainable Development Strategy. For advocacy, to us the SDGs represent an added value.”

Another NGO explained that while this political process presented a window of opportunity, as NGOs they played an active role in taking up this opportunity and shaping the process: “When we found out that the federal government had chosen the Sustainable Development Strategy as the implementation strategy for the SDGs in Germany, we wrote to the government saying that we would like to be included in the revision process of that strategy. We asked for a meeting and when we were received by the Chancellor, they were impressed to see that we, as NGOs, were already mobilized and working cross-sectorally on the topic. This meeting was one of the success stories of our collaboration and resulted in a better inclusion of NGOs in the national implementation process.”

Although NGOs were happy to be included in the process, they have also expressed doubts about the effectiveness and impact of the participation mechanisms: “Many NGO surveys focus on the question: can you participate in the national implementation process? That is the wrong question, at least in countries like Germany. Here, we get involved. The real question is whether participation mechanisms are effective and whether they have any impact on the decision-making process. “

The question of effectiveness and impact is also crucial when it comes to the choice of instrument. German NGOs repeatedly stated that revising the Sustainable Development Strategy was a good start. At the same time, they were aware that this instrument had had limited success in the past and warned about the restricted impact it is likely to have on the government’s overall strategy in the future.

5.5. An opportunity for new funding sources

Given the integrated nature of the SDGs and the mobilization of all ministries in the sustainable development strategy which is now the national SDG implementation strategy in Germany, NGOs see new opportunities to ask for funding: “For NGOs the SDGs fulfill many roles: they function as a new work context, a new context for our arguments. This means we can use the same arguments and challenge every governmental level individually since they are all responsible. It is also a new funding context. Today, as a development NGO we could ask the Ministry of Environment for funding. We couldn’t do this before—now it is possible.” Where new funding sources become available it can scale up NGO mobilization and collaboration. On the flip side, it is interesting to note that there is a risk that their traditional funding sources may be shared between more actors in future. The real question is perhaps whether the SDGs will allow more money to be raised overall, from both traditional and new funding sources.

5.6. An opportunity to protect the political space for NGOs

Several NGOs mentioned that the shrinking space for civil society, at a time where autocracies are on the rise, is an urgent international issue. While this is not so much of a problem in France and Germany, where acceptance and political support for NGOs remain high, NGOs in these two countries did however point out that the rise of the extreme right has put them under pressure. One German NGO, for example, commented that the SDGs have provided a much needed further source of legitimacy: “With the rise of populism, along with the perception of inequalities, there are more and more problems that need international and cross-sectoral solutions. In this difficult political climate, we as NGOs need to legitimize our work and find new arguments. The SDGs are very helpful for this purpose.” A French NGO identified the hostile political climate as an underlying factor to explain the lack of mobilization of French NGOs around the SDGs.

6. FOR WHAT REASONS DO NGOs NOT MOBILIZE AROUND THE SDGs?

As mentioned above, most but not all NGOs are mobilized and not all are mobilized to the same degree. Therefore, it is important to identify the relevant factors linked to the international process, to national implementation, and to the way NGOs work. Presented below is a non-exhaustive list of factors that constrain NGO mobilization around the SDGs.

6.1. A Lack of trust in UN international agreements and their follow-up and review system

Some NGOs are reluctant to get involved with the SDGs because they do not trust this international agreement. As SDGs are not legally binding, they fear that implementation will be lacking.

Those who participated in the HLPF in 2015 and 2016 were disappointed by the lack of ambition displayed by States on this occasion. From the point of view of these NGOs, most countries did not use the Voluntary National Review (VNR) to identify their weaknesses. Instead, the presentations by countries were perceived as a “public relations exercise”.

NGOs expect a global agreement to enable them to take advantage of international pressure—including peer pressure between States - to hold their governments to account regarding domestic progress towards sustainable development. The HLPF could be a place that facilitates benchmarking and allows peer pressure to have an influence, while encouraging governments to tackle their weaknesses. But, according to the NGOs interviewed, the HLPF does not currently function this way.

Furthermore, national NGOs also have to address cultural discrepancies, a problem that is even more challenging for NGOs working at the local level. For them, the SDGs can seem too far removed from their everyday activities: “For our local members, the SDGs seem a bit remote. There is a cultural discrepancy to overcome.” Some NGOs know about the SDGs but do not work with them because “they are too abstract” and are difficult to translate into their everyday operations. This is for example the case for social and humanitarian NGOs that have very concrete and urgent issues to tackle.

Although the universality of SDGs is supposed to allow all actors including NGOs to carry out international benchmarking, it is worth noting the frustration expressed by one German NGO, which stated that they cannot use SDGs as a means of pressurizing their government if other countries take an even less serious approach to the implementation of commitments: “Germany is still doing more compared to other countries like France and Great Britain. This means it is difficult for us to use the performances of other countries as a reference for pushing Germany to do more. We can use Finland and Columbia as examples of best practice, but that’s about it.”

Finally, we should note that one NGO interviewed saw the lack of coherence between the SDGs and other international agreements as an obstacle to trust: “Our members are reluctant to work with the SDGs because they observe a lack of credibility and coherence at the international level. There is no coherence between adopting the SDGs and trade agreements like CETA.”

6.2. NGOs already have more ambitious advocacy tools

Some NGOs expressed regret that the SDGs are not more ambitious than other advocacy tools already in use internationally and nationally. This is especially true for environmental NGOs but also for social NGOs. In their advocacy, these NGOs already refer to one or several frameworks of goals, targets and indicators or international agreements. These frameworks are often more ambitious or more concrete, and therefore the SDGs do not represent any added value for them. A welfare organization told us: “We already have the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It is much more detailed than the SDGs”.

Another NGO explained: “We are not fans of the SDGs. For some NGO federations they are great, especially for development NGOs, since they are the broadening of the MDGs. For others, such as environmental NGOs, they are not so good. For example, SDGs include an objective on economic growth, and the environmental goals are relatively weak and often do not extend the level of ambition beyond that which exists already. Human Rights are not very well represented either.” One NGO stated: “I can understand why a trade union or welfare organization does not see any added value in working with the SDGs, because they already have a poverty reduction strategy with indicators”.

What is striking however is that even when SDGs do bring something new to advocacy work, NGOs do not necessarily seize the opportunity. One NGO argued: “Some of the SDGs are quite specific, such as SDG 10.1 on income inequality. So it is reasonable to wonder why they are not used more by NGOs. What happens is that we become used to working with the indicators and goals we already know, and do not necessarily see the potential of the SDGs.”

6.3. A confusing indicator framework

Most NGOs agree that the indicator framework for the SDGs is critical. It constitutes a unique opportunity to monitor and compare the performances of countries around the world. It is a powerful tool to hold governments to account for their promises. However, in practice NGOs have not so far made much use of the indicators in their advocacy. Following up on the indicators is critical but also very time consuming, as one NGO explained: “We would like to look at the indicators but we do not have the time. The indicators are critical. If the indicator framework doesn’t work, the SDGs won’t work”. This tendency might be due to the high number of indicators and the apparent technicality of the discussions on the subject.

We also observed that the current state of the indicator framework is confusing. First of all, data does not yet exist for some indicators, particularly for the most innovative ones, which are the ones in which NGOs would have more interest. Furthermore, although some indicators have been agreed on, disaggregated data is currently unavailable, which is something on which NGOs place a lot of importance. Second, there is confusion between national and international indicators. The German sustainable development strategy for example does not systematically use the same indicators as the ones negotiated by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals. We therefore observed that it is not yet commonplace for NGOs to use and refer to the indicator framework. The ones that do are often very specialized and aware of the technicalities of the debate around the indicators. While complementing the UN indicators with national and local ones is necessary and useful, it may also constitute an obstacle for NGOs to compare a country’s performance with that of other countries.

6.4. A lack of trust in national implementation processes

The lack of trust and credibility is not only an issue at the international level. NGOs, especially in France, are also reluctant to take up the different roles because they are skeptical about the national implementation process.

Although in Germany the revision of the sustainable development strategy constituted a window of opportunity for NGOs to mobilize around the SDGs, NGOs are frustrated by the “lack of ambition of

the objectives and indicators in that strategy". Furthermore, NGOs doubt the impact the strategy is likely to have on the government's overall actions and are worried about the lack of coherence among sectoral policies. NGOs regret that the new strategy does not sufficiently respond to strategic sustainable development challenges in Germany, such as decarbonizing the transport sector and phasing out coal. If the German Federal government wants to keep NGOs interested in the process, these questions and doubts should be taken into account.

Compared to Germany, where the political instrument for the implementation of the SDGs is clearly defined, NGOs in France said that the choice of political instrument is not yet clear:

"In France we lack an action plan for SDG implementation. Will there even be one? If yes, how will it link to the existing sustainable development strategy? Will there be two parallel processes?"

"What is missing in France is a political instrument, a shared strategy that defines priorities and the means to tackle them."

As stated above, our interviews were realized between December 2016 and March 2017 and we acknowledge that the situation may have evolved since then. It is important to note that these interviews were realized at the same time as the French administration was developing its SDG implementation strategy further, and that the new government might put SDGs higher on its political agenda.

Furthermore, it is important to note that France already has other processes linked to sustainable development. Therefore, some French NGOs do not see the need for another opportunity to strengthen their arguments, or to get politically involved. NGOs have been very active in other political processes related to sustainable development: "In France, we were very actively involved in the COP21, the Energy Transition Law, the Law SAS on indicators beyond GDP, the National Health Plan and the biodiversity law. And we shouldn't forget that in France we already have a dashboard of indicators for the annual environment conference. This could be a working and evaluation tool for the SDGs".

6.5. A lack of capacity, along with many existing strategic priorities

The most frequent explanation given by NGOs for not working with the SDGs was linked to a lack of resources in terms of time and money. Which to some extent is linked to the complexity of the SDGs: "We didn't know about the SDGs and we have no time to learn about the SDGs." The entry cost is relatively high.

By taking a closer look, however, this lack of capacity is often linked to other reasons. As an example, this is how one NGO described the difficult political climate: "We just don't have the time. There is a lot of tension currently in France and the political climate is not very favourable." Another explained that they had other priorities: "We do not work strategically with the SDGs because we don't have the capacity to do so, and we have other priorities." NGOs have limited resources and must make strategic decisions on how to allocate these resources to causes and processes where they can expect to have an impact. Therefore, if they do not mobilize around the SDGs it brings us back to the lack of credibility of the international and national processes.

Of course, the lack of resources is closely linked to funding, while the way these limited resources are allocated can also depend on the political signals observed:

“When we see a decline in French development aid, the signal we receive is that the SDGs are not a priority for France”

“The political climate is not favourable for the SDGs internationally, particularly in the education sector where we are seeing a decline in global funds.”

One must underline that the financial support for NGOs is today higher in Germany than in France. NGOs in Germany considered financial support from the government to be very high; while their French counterparts described such funding as insufficient and cited it as a constraining factor.¹⁴ NGOs in France pointed out that they are under financial pressures, especially in some regions of the country where NGO funding has been severely reduced.

We can therefore see that there is a close relationship between NGOs not making SDGs a priority and governments doing the same. If governments do not allocate a critical amount of resources in terms of time and money to the SDGs, NGOs will be less likely to do so. However, the same applies in the opposite direction. Governments are less likely to make the SDGs a priority if there is no such demand from civil society.

7. WHAT CHALLENGES DO WE FACE IN THE MOBILIZATION OF NGOs AND WHAT ARE THE WAYS FORWARD?

Seven main ideas and challenges clearly emerged from the interviews conducted and the analysis presented above. The first is that NGOs are increasingly mobilized at the national level for the implementation of SDGs. This mobilization is more advanced in Germany than in France, but even there NGOs are increasingly aware of the SDGs and have started to take dedicated action. However, it is fair to say that the mobilization of NGOs is still biased towards development NGOs and, more generally, towards organizations working on international issues and that have a familiarity with the UN system, as opposed to those that operate at the national level, and even less to those working at the local level. It is worth noting that this situation reflects what happened during the SDG negotiations.¹⁵ According to some interviewees, development NGOs were much more active in this process, and only a few environmental organizations were involved in the NGO contributions to the SDG negotiations, even though the decision to establish global SDGs was taken at Rio+20. NGOs

¹⁴ If we take development NGOs as an example, a recent report shows that France is lagging behind in terms of financial support for NGOs. Whereas in Germany 7.1% of ODA (€893 million) is delivered through NGOs, this figure is only 2.5% (€203 million) in France (E&Y, 2016).

¹⁵ To understand the involvement of NGOs in the SDG negotiation process we have to look back at the history. The Agenda 21 agreed on responsibilities for nine different sectors of society. The so-called Major Groups became increasingly integrated into the decision-making process between the Earth Summit in 1992 and Rio +20, where the involvement of these stakeholders, including the group of NGOs, became central. This involvement continued to increase in the SDG Open Working Group, the body responsible for the SDG negotiations, in a broader and even more inclusive way. The influence of the stakeholders on the final agenda was greatest at the beginning of the negotiation process (Dodds, Donoughue, Roesch, 2016).

acting exclusively on national and local issues were not part of the negotiation process, which makes it more difficult for them to join the process today.

Therefore, there remains an SDG knowledge gap to be bridged between the international, national and local levels. Many national and local NGOs know little about the SDGs, and nor do they understand what added value they could gain from them. This is especially true for NGOs working on national or local issues and who are not members of a broader international network. The UN and national governments have a clear role to play in filling this knowledge gap through targeted communication activities. NGOs also have a role to play. The higher degree of NGO mobilization observed in Germany is directly linked to the efforts of certain organizations, which are specialized in following the UN agenda, in informing and mobilizing other organizations for whom the UN and global goals can feel far removed from their daily activities.

Thirdly, there is a great need to clarify what is expected from NGOs in terms of implementing SDGs at the national or even the local level. Among the four potential roles identified, NGOs assume the tasks of holding the government to account and of communicating the SDGs to the wider public. However, few take up the role of holding the private sector to account. This is due to various reasons including skepticism toward voluntary commitments taken by the private sector. Moreover, few NGOs consider that they can increase their contributions through project implementation, because they consider their own existing projects to already be in line with the SDGs. Generally speaking, we can say that NGOs focus a lot on what governments should do, and are rather concerned when it comes to their own contributions or to the contribution of companies. They fear that calls for NGOs and the private sector to do more might blur the boundaries regarding who is responsible for taking action. NGOs insist that what is needed first and foremost is action by governments to adapt the national regulatory and budgetary framework. This is in strong contrast to the vision of many governments and the UN, according to which all stakeholders have to contribute and build new partnerships among themselves and with the government. Although international partnerships have emerged, urgent clarification is needed on what these contributions and partnerships could look like at the national level on the NGO side, and on what firm support they will need.

As far as partnerships with the private sector are concerned, and given the active involvement of the private sector in SDGs, it could be worth exploring this role more for NGOs. They have a key role to play in raising awareness and creating societal demand for sustainable consumption and production, and can monitor voluntary commitments and verify whether private sector engagement is merely lip service or actually involves a transformation of business models.¹⁶ Finally, NGOs can enter into new partnerships with the private sector by providing consultation on the transition towards a sustainable business model, acting as a “critical friend”.¹⁷

Fourthly, NGO involvement depends on how they perceive the political credibility of SDGs, both nationally and internationally. They seem to be more active when governments open a political process that NGOs can use to advocate for national policy reforms, for example through the alignment of national strategies on SDGs, that NGOs consider credible enough to have a real impact

¹⁶ Upcoming blog article by Brimont, Hege at <http://blog.iddri.org/en/>.

¹⁷ Byanyima, Winnie (2016, November 30). Why Oxfam won't compromise on SDGs. In: Greenbiz. Retrieved from: <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/why-oxfam-wont-compromise-sdgs> (2017, June 7).

on the political agenda. The inclusivity of these implementation processes is necessary but not sufficient: participation mechanisms have to deliver, to be impactful. The perceived political weight of the follow-up and review system of the HLPF, and more generally of the UN, is also crucial. Some NGOs, especially those working mainly on national or local challenges, see SDGs and the HLPF as weak voluntary commitments that are “too far removed” to have an impact on their reality. **The challenge for policymakers here is to make the official SDG implementation processes politically credible in their own countries and at the international level.**

Fifthly, it must be realized that SDGs are not a “silver bullet” for advocacy NGOs in countries such as France or Germany. In these countries, NGOs often already have access to various political processes on their specific topics, and they have official, national or international targets and indicators to keep governments accountable. It is particularly true for the environmental community: in France for example, inclusive and permanent consultation processes already exist, indicators have been set up to monitor progress, and multiple targets have been adopted in recent years - on climate, energy and biodiversity - which are more ambitious than those from the Agenda 2030 (Hege et al., 2017). In other words, for many NGOs, SDGs do not represent a major new opportunity to keep governments accountable on specific issues. The benefit of SDGs lies more in their capacity to integrate environmental, social and development challenges.

Indeed, and this is the sixth idea we want to highlight, integration and universality are not “empty” concepts for many NGOs; their operationalization, however, is “fragile”. In a fragmented world where social and environmental challenges are often considered separately, and where the impact of decisions taken in one country on neighbouring ones is rarely considered, these principles are the main strength of SDGs and the Agenda 2030, and the main motivation for NGOs to mobilize. These principles are “operationalized” first and foremost in NGO coalitions, bringing together organizations working on different challenges to influence the implementation of SDGs by governments and increase their bargaining power in the political debate. It is important to stress however that this cross-sectoral cooperation remains fragile: what activities should actually be carried out together, beyond advocating for a credible implementation process by the government, remains an open question. Some hope that NGOs will now start to gather around more specific topics, promoting messages that are more political than institutional. As a step forward, one German NGO has initiated a reflection process on what SDG implementation at the national level means in terms of budget.

More worrying for the integrated nature of SDGs is that some organizations are of the opinion that the Agenda 2030 is not particularly “integrated” in practice: the weak inclusion of environmental NGOs in the HLPF, and the fact that it is hosted by a UN Agency whose mandate focuses on social and economic affairs, are two reasons why some NGOs have started to lose interest in the SDGs. It is claimed that the SDGs fully integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, but some consider this not to be reflected in the international implementation and review process.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that **the mobilization of NGOs is highly dependent on their financial capacity.** Out of the NGOs that clearly see the political benefits provided by the SDGs, and who are convinced that they offer an opportunity, there are some that are too financially constrained to launch new activities. To encourage more NGOs to take an active role in SDG implementation, be it through advocacy work or new on-the-ground projects, public as well as private funders will have to increase their financial support. Furthermore, if NGOs are supposed to

take the Agenda 2030 principles of integration and universality into account in their own projects, then a paradigm change is required in the way funding programmes are designed. One NGO gave the example of a project that simultaneously targets farmers in Europe as well as food security in Africa: in such a case it becomes difficult to identify the right funding programme. This raises the question: how can we make funding programmes transversal?

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

NGOs are mobilizing around the SDGs because they see an added value in the universal and integrated Agenda 2030. In other words, NGOs need the SDGs. At the same time, achieving this ambitious global agenda is a tremendous task and the SDGs need NGOs to deliver on their roles. In this study we have shown what these roles could be, and given examples of the numerous actions that NGOs are already undertaking to assume these roles.

We interviewed NGOs in France and Germany from different activity sectors, including those that operate either internationally and nationally, or nationally and locally, and asked them what they do with the SDGs and why they mobilize around the SDGs, or why they do not. On the basis of these interviews, we identified challenges that must be overcome to foster a broader mobilization of NGOs around the SDGs

We hope that the challenges that we have identified can inform governments on the better integration of NGOs in the implementation of the SDGs at the national level. We also hope that the examples of what NGOs are already doing will help inspire others to join the process, and that this study will encourage dialogue and mutual learning across activity sectors and countries.

These findings are based on our observations in France and Germany. It would be interesting to explore to what extent our conclusions would also be true for other countries. We are aware that the conditions for NGO mobilization around the SDGs are very different in many developing countries, which may have very different starting points and face very different challenges. At the same time, the need for global goals might be more tangible in some developing countries and NGOs might face very different challenges, especially when it comes to the effective participation in the policymaking processes. Nevertheless, certain questions and challenges might also be shared. This could for example be the case for the question on how NGOs can assume the role of holding the private sector to account, and on how SDGs can translate into the design, evaluation and funding of on-the-ground projects, as well as the challenge to create effective participation mechanisms. While we were unable to cover more countries in this study, we would welcome any opportunities to continue the discussion and would be happy to receive feedback from other countries.

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APPENDIX

List of interviewees:

Abshagen, Marie-Luise	German NGO Forum on Environment and Development (FUE)
Asali, Sami	Coordination Sud
Balz, Julia	NABU—Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V.
Bouvier, Maelle	Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères
Carpentier, Chantal Line	UNCTAD
Chabrolle, Alan	France Nature Environnement
Darras, Marc	Association 4D
Darviot, Pierre-Antoinin	Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères
Derdek, Noria	Fondation Abbé Pierre
Grigat, Sonja	Venro
Jesaitis, Maren	Oxfam Germany
Johann, Emilie	Secours catholique
Klinger, Ansgar	GEW—Die Bildungsgewerkschaft
Linner, Stefanie	Micha Deutschland
Lorioux, Vanessa	Ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire
Nicholson, Sally	WWF Europe
Obenland, Wolfgang	Global Policy Forum
Reichert, Tobias	Germanwatch
Rinjhout, Leida	SDG Watch Europe & Friends of the Earth Europe
Scholz, Imme	German Development Institute (DIE)
Scholz, Stefanie	Diakonie
Schwegmann, Claudia	Open Knowledge Foundation
Vedder, Alois	WWF Germany
Wenzl, Christine	Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (BUND)

The Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) is an independent research institute dedicated to fostering the transition to sustainable development and prosperity for all.

IDDRI identifies the necessary conditions for the integration of sustainable development into public policies and proposes tools for their implementation. It takes action at different levels, from international cooperation to the policies of countries, cities and businesses.

IDDRI provides a platform to facilitate a transparent dialogue between all stakeholders (research and academic community, governments, civil society, private sector), while ensuring mutual learning and the relevance of its research.

Its work is structured around four thematic agendas:

- Climate : resilient and low carbon societies
- Biodiversity and ecosystems: identifying levers of change
- Ocean: strengthening cooperation for the sustainable and equitable management of marine resources
- Governance innovations for sustainable development / Governance of sustainable development: innovative arrangements ensuring effectiveness and inclusiveness

As a non-profit institution acting for the common good, IDDRI makes all of its analyses and proposals available to all *via* its website, and shares them at conferences and seminars. IDDRI actively participates in the public policy debate, internationally and nationally.