

Louvain School of Management

The role of Belgian NGOs in the achievement of SDG12 about sustainable production and consumption.

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Daytime schedule

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	1
Context, problem definition, and motivations	1
Research question	2
Steps of the research	3
Part I – Literature review	4
Chapter 1 – The Sustainable Development Goals.....	4
1.1. Definitions.....	4
1.1.1. Sustainable development	4
1.1.2. United Nations	5
1.2. The Sustainable Development Goals.....	5
1.2.1. The Millennium Development Goals as a bedrock for the SDGs.....	5
1.2.2. SDGs: objectives, targets, and indicators.....	7
1.2.3. Funding of the SDG	9
1.2.4. Limits of the SDGs	10
1.3. Legal framework for sustainable development and the SDGs in Belgium	11
1.4. Progress to date in Belgium.....	12
1.5. Covid-19 crisis: impacts, challenges, and link with the SDGs.....	14
Chapter 2 – Focus on one specific goal: SDG12	16
2.1. Why choose SDG number 12?	17
2.2. Situation in the world and in Belgium	19
2.3. Interactions between SDG12 and the other goals	20
2.4. Areas for improvement and frameworks for the implementation of SDG12 ..	22

Chapter 3 – The Non-Governmental Organizations	24
3.1. Definition of a Non-Governmental Organization and legal framework.....	24
3.2. Situation in Belgium.....	25
3.2.1. NGO types and field of action	26
3.2.2. Funding sources	27
3.2.3. Fragmentation.....	28
3.2.4. Relation with other stakeholders.....	28
3.3. The role of NGOs for the economy and sustainable development.....	30
3.4. The role of NGOs in the achievement of the SDGs	31
Part II – Practical analysis.....	34
Chapter 1 – research methodology	34
1.1. The qualitative analysis	35
1.1.1. Why does a qualitative analysis fit best with this research?	35
1.1.2. Questionnaire creation – link with the 10YFP	35
1.2. Data collection	38
1.2.1. Organisations’ selection.....	38
1.2.2. Stages of the data collection.....	39
1.2.3. Results of the data collection.....	39
1.3. Limits of the data collection	40
1.4. Data analysis method	42
Chapter 2 – Profile of the NGOs.....	42
2.1. NGO type and field of action	43
2.2. Funding sources and fragmentation.....	45
2.3. Relation with other stakeholders	47
Chapter 3 – SDGs in Belgian NGOs.....	48
3.1. The place of sustainable development.....	48

3.2. Meaning of the SDGs for Belgian NGOs	50
3.3. Incentives for the implementation of the SDGs	54
3.4. Barriers to the implementation of the SDGs	55
Chapter 4 – Focus on SDG12 in Belgian NGOs	57
4.1. Programme 3 – consumer information for SCP	57
4.1.1. Product life extension	58
4.1.2. Provided information regarding SCP	59
4.1.3. Consumer relationship	60
4.1.4. Communication channels	61
4.2. Programme 5 – sustainable food system programme	62
4.2.1. Collaboration links	62
4.2.2. Consumer involvement	63
4.2.3. Internal tools	64
4.2.4. Focus on marginalized actors	65
4.2.5. Malnutrition	66
4.2.6. Influence at the political level	66
4.3. Programme 6 – sustainable lifestyles and education	67
4.3.1. Change in consumer behaviour	67
4.3.2. Tools for change in consumer behaviour	68
4.3.3. Transport	70
4.3.4. Product life cycle	70
4.3.5. Internal tools	71
4.4. Conclusion and limits	72
Conclusions	77
Research question and action plan	77
Main findings	77

Suggestions for future research	80
Bibliography	81
Appendixes.....	100
A. Organs and programmes of the UN.	100
B. Major differences between the MDGs and the SDGs	101
C. Official list of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN.....	101
D. SDGs funding mechanisms	103
E. Evolution of the legal framework on sustainable development in Belgium from 1992	104
F. 2017 review of Belgium's progress towards SDGs – 34 indicators	107
G. 2019 review of Belgium's progress towards SDGs – 51 indicators	108
H. Official list of the targets and indicators of SDG12	110
I. The sustainable development goals and the private sector.	113
J. Questionnaires for the NGOs	117
J.a. General questionnaire	117
J.b. Detailed questionnaire	118
K. Complete list of all the contacted NGOs	126
L. List of the collaborative link the NGOs maintain with other stakeholders	128
M. List of the activities undertaken by NGOs	129
N. List of the chosen programmes for each NGO	130
O. List of the actions NGOs put in place to include marginalized actors and small suppliers in sustainable food systems	131
P. Measurement methods and common frameworks of NGOs regarding sustainable lifestyles.....	132

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1 – the 8 Millennium Development Goals of the UN (Max, 2015)</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Figure 2 – the 5 pillars of sustainable development (ACADEMY EDTECH, 2019)</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Figure 3 – the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (Martin, 2016)</i>	<i>8</i>

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 1 – Fields of activity of each NGO.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Table 2 – Classification of the NGOs according to the number of salaried employees they employ.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Table 3 – Annual budget for each NGO (within the limits of available information)</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Table 4 – Classification of the NGOs according to their size (based on a mix of budget and number of employees).....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Table 5 – List of the main funding sources for NGOs</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Table 6 – Approach of the NGOs toward sustainable development</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Table 7 – The involvement of each NGO toward the 4 criteria.</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Table 8 – List of advantages NGOs find in the implementation of the SDGs.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Table 9 – List of drawbacks NGOs find in the implementation of the SDGs</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Table 10 – List of actions developed by NGOs to encourage consumers to play a role in SCP.</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Table 11 – List of actions developed by NGOs to establish a long-term relationship with consumers.....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Table 12 – List of changes in customer behaviour promoted by each NGO</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Table 13 – involvement of NGOs regarding the main topics of Programmes 3, 5 and 6 of the 10YFP</i>	<i>73</i>

INTRODUCTION

Context, problem definition, and motivations

The current world is characterized by huge mutations and distortions, whether at the environmental or social level. No matter where you are on the planet, no place is untouched. The growing number of human beings, urbanization, globalization, and industrialization of the world irretrievably lead to critical direct and indirect issues such as: scarcity of drinkable water (Arora, 2018), toxicity, salinization of soils due to intensive agriculture and shortage of non-renewable resources. Furthermore, people are increasingly hungry, biodiversity is vanishing, and the growing amount of waste accumulating every day is alarming. If this was not enough, more frequent natural disasters are leading to massive immigration, insalubrious slum quarters and social fragmentation (Arora, 2018; Ballet et al., 2020; Dubravka Pekanov Starčević et al., 2017; Ioan et al., 2020).

However, the current so-called “brown economy”, mostly characterized by the aforementioned carelessness for the environment and a non-renewable resource-based economic growth, is now progressively but assuredly leaving its place to a more sustainable one. Although the rationale behind this change of mentality often takes root in resource constraints and climate changes, this results in a willingness to call for more sustainable growth (Dubravka Pekanov Starčević et al., 2017).

Based on this statement I have chosen, in my own way, to make a contribution by undertaking sustainable development as main subject of my thesis. I believe that it is time for everyone to be aware today’s world situation, and I hope that this work will provide useful information to fight more efficiently against these issues. However, colossal nature of the topic, I decided to base my work on a particular group of actors: The NGOs, in a particular territory –Belgium– and from a particular angle, the Sustainable Development Goals.

First, I choose NGOs because of their particular commitment to sustainable development, as well as their lack of presence in academic courses. Indeed, while we often hear about companies, start-ups and multinationals, and their relationship to sustainable development, we never hear about NGOs and even less about the possibilities of getting involved with them. And in my opinion, this is a gap that needs to be filled right now.

Then, I chose to work with Belgian NGOs simply because as a Belgian citizen who has always lived and studied in Belgium, this appeared to me as a natural choice. This is the country I know best, and this is undoubtedly an asset. I decided to work on the country in its entirety because the sustainable development decisions are most of the time taken at the country level.

Finally, the SDGs are the most complete and thorough framework, well as being implemented internationally and potentially usable by any type of organisation. These are the main reasons why I wanted to work on this particular framework. As far as the SDG12 “Sustainable consumption and production” is concerned, more information will follow in the second chapter of the literature review, but here are the main reasons. This is an objective that is particularly well suited to developed countries, including Belgium, but which has so far produced very unconvincing results. In addition to that, a personal dimension stands out, as this objective specifically attracts me as a citizen, given that it is an objective easy to tackle for individuals.

Research question

Now that it has been made clear what all my work is going to be about, it is time to put all these topics, problems, and motivations, into one single question. This research question will be the backbone of my research, since every single input will aim at giving the most coherent, exhaustive, and realistic answer to it. The question is:

Which role do Belgian NGOs play in the achievement of SDG12 about sustainable production and consumption?

This research question clearly highlights the three main concepts on the basis of the whole work: SDG12, Belgium, and NGO. These three notions are important to be remembered throughout the reading of all the dissertation.

In this research question, several smaller questions derive, since this question could be understood in different ways. Indeed, it can be seen as « the extent to which the SDG12’s topics are common in Belgian NGOs”, or “the extent to which Belgian NGOs use the SDGs’ frameworks to deal with sustainable production and consumption”, or even “the extent to

which Belgian NGOs contribute to the global achievement of this SDG12". From the point of view of Belgian NGOs, another relevant but still a bit indirect question is "to what extent are the activities of Belgian NGOs impacted by the implementation of the SDGs". To me, every aspect of the question is relevant and should not remain unanswered. This is why this work will tackle every one of them in order to fully capture the meaning of the research question.

Steps of the research

This undergraduate dissertation is divided into three main stages, gathered into two main parts. The first is the theoretical one, whose aim is to go through all the existing scientific literature as well as through official reports of institutions such as the UN. Shortly, three topics will be discussed in turn: the sustainable development goals, the SDG12, and the NGOs, each of them highlighting the situation in Belgium, among other topics.

Then, the second part follows these two different goals: conduct a practical analysis on Belgian NGOs, with the objective of gathering field information that could answer the research question, and then discuss these results while confronting them to the theoretical ones. This part is structured in three chapters, namely one about the methodology used for the practical research, one about the results of the data collection, and one last about the discussion between the theoretical and the practical results.

A conclusion putting forward the main contributions as well as the limits and the steps for further research will put an end to this work.

PART I – LITERATURE REVIEW

As just explain before, this first part aims to provide a theoretical framework for what has already been written on the subject of SDGs, on SDG12 on sustainable production and consumption in particular, and on NGOs. The purpose is to get a global view of how things are going at the global and Belgian level in order to provide comparing element to what is happening on the Belgian ground. Thus, this part will be divided into three chapters corresponding to each one of the big aforementioned themes: the SDGs, SDG12 and NGOs.

CHAPTER 1 – THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

How to discuss the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 12 without first having understood what an objective is, where these objectives come from, what they claim to achieve, and what place they take in Belgium since this country is the one in which I expect to conduct my research. This is precisely the aim of this first chapter; namely to lay the foundations of the SDGs to have, at the end of the day, a correct understanding of the ins and outs of the SDGs as a whole in Belgium. Indeed, these elements will turn out to be particularly important to understand the rationale between goal number 12 afterward, and in particular its relationship with the other SDGs.

1.1. Definitions

1.1.1. *Sustainable development*

The very first concept to define and one of the most important in this document, is sustainable development. Indeed, whether for the SDGs or the NGOs, this concept is at the core of all the reflections that will follow, which makes it a fundamental pillar of this work.

As a matter of fact, the notion of sustainable development is not a new one. Indeed, already in the 70s, scientists, celebrities and politicians already got acquainted with environmental and social dysfunctionalities (Futura Planète, n.d.; Gasper et al., 2019). The

discussions about these sustainable concerns progressed for about a decade before resulting in a clear definition of what is meant behind sustainable development. Indeed, the term sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the Commission on Environment and Development, better known as the Brundtland Commission, in its report *Our Common Future* as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Furthermore, sustainable development implies a balance between social, environmental, and economic concerns (Futura Planète, n.d.). Today, this same definition is still the one that prevails, for example regarding the definition of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the SDGs (see section b) (Barbier & Burgess, 2017; Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; Ioan et al., 2020; ONU, n.d.).

1.1.2. *United Nations*

As the initiators of the SDGs, as further explained in the following section, the United Nations (UN) has a special place in this document, which prompts me to clearly define what actually the UN is. The UN is an international organization founded in 1945 with the conviction that every single state must cooperate to improve everyone's life and to peacefully resolve conflicts (Centre Régional d'Information pour l'Europe Occidentale, n.d.; United Nations, n.d.-a). The organization gathers 163 Member States, whose involvement in the UN is ruled and guided by the Charter of the United Nations. Based on this charter, the UN takes action to solve the biggest problems of this century, such as peace and security, climate change, human rights, gender equality, food production, or sustainable development¹.

1.2. **The Sustainable Development Goals**

1.2.1. *The Millennium Development Goals as a bedrock for the SDGs*

Now that the necessary concepts have been defined, it is high time to come to the main subject of this work: the SDGs. As explained in the introduction of this work, the world is

¹ More information about the UN can be found in Appendix A.

plagued by many global issues that turn out to be not a new phenomenon at all. As a result, those sustainable preoccupations have already been at the core of the discussions multiple times over the last decades. It began with concerns about environment, which were internationally officialised in Stockholm (Sweden) in 1972 during a conference about the environment hold by the United Nations. These first texts of multilateral agreements led to a beginning of a dialogue about the link between the environmental, social, and economic pillars by both developed and developing countries (Département de l'information, 1993; Handl, 2013; Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.). Later, the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992 by the United Nations as well as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 confirmed this commitment to making the world a better place (Département de l'information, 1993; Handl, 2013; Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.).

However, the need for a clear, measurable, and international framework backed by concrete means, arises both in developed and developing countries (Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.). It is against this background that the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were created in 2000, unanimously supported by the UN member states. These goals aimed to tackle the most urgent issues of the world at that time by 2015, namely hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, diseases, environmental sustainability, and global partnership (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2000).



Figure 1 – the 8 Millennium Development Goals of the UN (Max, 2015)

In 2015, time to take stock of the MDGs, and the results could have been more positive, but also more negative. Although important gaps remain, significant improvements have been observed, such as a reducing global poverty by half, decreasing child and maternal mortality significantly, as well as HIV infections, or improving sex equality, sanitation, and official development assistance (ONU, n.d.; United Nations, 2015; Wysokińska, 2017). This constitutes a real incentive for the UN countries to maintain this momentum by keeping up and improving their efforts regarding sustainable development. It is with this idea of learning from the

previous mistakes in mind that the UN members gathered once again in Rio in 2012 (the Rio +20 Summit) to discuss the formation of an Open Working Group, whose duty would be to establish a new set of goals aiming at sustaining the efforts made over the last 15 years: the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)² (Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.; Gunawan et al., 2020; ONU, n.d.).

1.2.2. SDGs: objectives, targets, and indicators

As briefly aforementioned, the SDGs were born in 2012 during the Rio +20 Summit and were officially launched in 2015, to be achieved by 2030. As explained before, several events and summits have contributed to this desire to upgrade the world we live in, such as the attribution of the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore and the IPCC in 2007, or the 2009 conference hold by the Development Studies Association. All these events reflect the crucial need for a universal framework on sustainable development (Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.; Gunawan et al., 2020).

In this respect, the UN General Assembly agreed on the necessity of an Open Working Group (OWG) to create brand new action-oriented, easily communicable, measurable, and universal goals (Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.; Gunawan et al., 2020; Yonglong Lu et al., 2015). To avoid repeating the mistakes of the MDGs, this OWG collaborated with as many stakeholders as possible. Since the SDGs were intended to be applicable to and applied by the widest public possible, representatives of more than 70 countries and members of the scientific and corporate worlds engaged in this participative decision (Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.; Williams et al., 2019; Yonglong Lu et al., 2015).

It is following this gathering that the general assembly of the UN came up in 2015 with the 17 sustainable development goals by 2030 (Task force développement durable, 2017; United Nations, 2015; Williams et al., 2019). As the CEO and President of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development perfectly claimed: “The SDGs are the framework for how we want to develop the world.” (Williams et al., 2019). More than 190 countries thus committed to this “to-do list” covering a large variety topics based on the five pillars for

² More details about the differences between the MDGs and SDGs can be found in *appendix B*.

sustainable development: people, planet, prosperity, partnership, and peace (Chakravorti, 2015; Division de la communication stratégique & Département de l'information, 2015; Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.; ONU, n.d.).



Figure 2 – the 5 pillars of sustainable development (ACADEMY EDTECH, 2019)

The latter will cover 17 goals, sub-divided into 169 targets, (between 5 and 19 per goal) to cover as thoroughly as possible the problems inherent in each objective³ (Fondation pour les Générations Futures, n.d.; Task force développement durable, 2017; The Danish Institute for Human Rights, n.d.). In order to make these targets measurable, 232 indicators have been developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators and confirmed by the UN statistic commission to keep track of the goals' achievement (Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, 2016).



Figure 3 – the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (Martin, 2016)

It is relevant to point out the suggestion of the UN to an integrate approach to the SDGs. Indeed, they have been conceived on purpose with the fundamental idea of

³ See appendix C

interconnectedness between all the goals. However, it will be further emphasized that, for this work, it will be necessary to slightly deviate from this recommendation, since tackling every one of the goals in an integrated way would mean requiring a document of a much bigger scope. Moreover, a crucial determinant for the success of the SDGs is that not only countries but also businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and any other organizations of the entire world would take an active part in their achievement. (ONU, n.d.; Task force développement durable, 2017). In particular, NGOs may substantially support the SDGs by lobbying governments and businesses, raising awareness about these goals, or carrying out concrete actions to implement them⁴ (Justaert, 2018).

1.2.3. *Funding of the SDG*

Now that the SDGs are formalized, the question of the funding of all these goals remains. Indeed, whatever the category of the goal, implementing all those ambitious initiatives has a cost (Jones & Comfort, 2019). In theory, the current existing capital in the world should be sufficient to meet the SDGs funding requirements (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; ONU, n.d.; United Nations, n.d.-b). However, the governments and the public sector alone do not stand a chance to gather sufficient capital (United Nations Global Compact et al., 2018). This is one of the reasons why, in contrast to the MDGs, demanding the private sector's contribution is so relevant in the achievement of the SDGs since they are the ones able to fill in the funding gap (Chakravorti, 2015; ONU, n.d.).

Obviously, the UN has given much thought to this question of financing. Indeed, multiple frameworks, platforms, and initiatives have been and are still put in place to make sure to raise the necessary capital for the implementation of the goals⁵.

⁴ This subject is to be developed in the second chapter "The Non-Governmental Organizations"

⁵ A non-exhaustive list of such actions can be found in *appendix D*.

1.2.4. *Limits of the SDGs*

Although the implementation of the SDGs has witnessed an unprecedented international and interdisciplinary collaboration between many different stakeholders (businesses, NGOs, governments, scientists, civils, international organizations, etc.), it turns out that these goals still contain some limits, most of which apply to NGOs as well.

The first one boils down to the word “terminology”. Indeed, some of the vocabulary used in the definition of the goals are not specific and precise enough compared to the level of accuracy demanded to be able to measure, compare and achieve those very goals (Jones & Comfort, 2019; Yonglong Lu et al., 2015).

Directly linked with this essential topic of rigor and measurability comes the second limit of the actual quantification and appraisal of the goals. Indeed, even if the 169 targets are accompanied by 232 indicators supposed to give accurate indications about the necessary achievements, these are mostly not quantified. This brings serious struggles for governments and any other stakeholder to come up with the right metrics (Jones & Comfort, 2019). Moreover, the high number of goals and targets leading to even more calculations and quantifications coming with significant costs is certainly not helping (Jones & Comfort, 2019).

A third limit is the paradox existing between the different goals. Indeed, on the one hand, trade-offs ineluctably exist between the goals, making it very difficult to prioritize, particularly for the companies, and, on the other hand, the goals are supposed to be enforced together, as required by their interdependent status (Jones & Comfort, 2019). One meaningful example is the paradox between the economic growth under our current capitalist model of growth against the preservation of nature (Hickel, 2019; Jones & Comfort, 2019).

The next limit, mostly dedicated to the business world, states that many companies are tempted to engage the SDGs only at superficial levels, meaning that they address only the goals for which some kind of implementation has already taken place, and thus do not engage into goals that require further investments in the company (Jones & Comfort, 2019). In addition to the likely SDG wash⁶ accusations, the chosen goals tend to be similar among

⁶ SDG wash = Using the SDGs to market the good actions contributing to the SDGs while hiding the detrimental effect that some other actions may have on other SDGs (mainly associated to companies) (Roel Nieuwenkamp, 2017)

businesses, leaving other equally important goals behind (Jones & Comfort, 2019; Scott & McGill, 2018).

One last limit to highlight is the complexities linked to the regulations and policies between the countries. As a matter of fact, the UN calls for an international partnership for the SDGs, as demonstrated by one of the five pillars of sustainable development, namely “partnership”, but differences in national regulations and policies among countries, for example regarding infrastructures, make international collaboration a big challenge, even if strong international agreements already exist (Chakravorti, 2015).

This enumeration of limits is probably not comprehensive and should certainly not be generalized to each and every organization, but it still provides an overview of the most significant gaps of the SDG model. It is therefore extremely important to keep all this in mind for the rest of this document since the implementation of the SDG12 by the NGOs will inevitably be impacted by these limits.

1.3. Legal framework for sustainable development and the SDGs in Belgium

Before taking stock of the current progress regarding the SDGs in Belgium, let us briefly go through the history of sustainable development in Belgium, and set out the legal framework currently in force on sustainable development in Belgium. Even if the following actions are to be empowered mostly by governments, it is important to keep in mind that, as Belgian organizations have a lobbying power on these very governments⁷, NGOs are also definitely concerned by these legal requirements. Note that, in this section, all information have been found in the 2017 and 2019 official national reports of Belgium⁸ (Institut fédéral pour le Développement durable (IFDD), n.d.; Task force développement durable, 2019).

To begin with, Belgium took the lead on other UN members regarding sustainable development with a national strategy following the Rio conference of 1992 and a new law voted in 1997, forcing the federal administrations to elaborate Federal Plans for Sustainable

⁷ This claim is to be explained in a further chapter; the one about “*The Non-Governmental Organizations*”

⁸ See *appendix E* for more details

development on a 5 year-cycle basis. However, this enthusiasm for sustainable development very quickly slowed down, moving sustainable development to the back seat. Indeed, this very law stopped being applied in 2008, thus limiting the interdepartmental cooperation possibilities. However, Belgium still proposed a total of 9 federal reports on sustainable development spread over 18 years.

Furthermore, a big step forward was made in 2007, when sustainable development was added to the Belgian constitution under these words: *“In the exercise of their respective competences, the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions pursue the objectives of sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental aspects, taking into account the solidarity between the generations.”* (Legal Affairs and Parliamentary Documentation Department of the Belgian House of Representatives, 2020, p. 6).

Then, in 2017, two years after the implementation of the SDGs, different strategies were enforced to reach the 2030 Agenda, such as an institutional framework to promoting inter-sectorial work and participation toward the SDGs, a working group gathered by the Inter-Federal Statistical Institute with the objective of systematically monitor the progress made on the SDGs, an SDG Voices Campaign including civil society organization, private sector, and local authorities, and an SDG charter for international development was proposed to raise public and private awareness about the SDGs. In addition to that, the national strategy for sustainable development requested by the UN in 1992 was only officialised in 2017 in Belgium. Even if it may well come from a good intention, it failed to convince the majority, as the proposals were considered insufficient.

1.4. Progress to date in Belgium

The purpose of this section is not to give a detailed overview of every single action that has been put in place in Belgium regarding the implementation of the SDGs as the objective of the document is to focus mainly on the 12th, but rather to give a global overview of the direction in which Belgium is pointing at, regarding the goals as a whole. To do that, let us use the most recent- and thus relevant- official reports, namely the 2020 report on sustainable

development of the Cambridge University Press and the 2017 and 2019 federal reports on sustainable development disclosed by the Federal Planning Bureau⁹ (FPB).

Between the 2017 and 2019 federal reports of the FPB, we can draw the evolution in the implementation of each goal, since the method of evaluation is quite the same, at the difference that in 2019, one indicator per objective was added, increasing from 34 to 51 indicators in total. Looking at the 2017 report, 4 goals deteriorated sharply (SDGs 1, 3, 11, and 17) while only 3 of them improved (SDGs 6, 10, and 14). Between these two extremes, 3 showed a slight improvement and 3 others a moderate worsening, leaving 4 goals for which the evaluation is not stable or impossible to assess¹⁰ (Task force développement durable, 2017). Two years later, we can observe in the 2019 report that, unfortunately, the situation deteriorated in the case of 7 goals (SDGs 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 14), while it only improved for 6 goals (SDGs 1, 2, 11, 12, 15 and 16), with 4 goals for which no significant changes were observed¹¹ (Task force développement durable, 2019).

However, these results delivered by the FPB must be put into perspective, since they are quite different from those proposed by the Cambridge University Press, which provides a fairly succinct profile of each UN country (Sachs, J. et al., 2020). Indeed, in their 2020 report, as far as Belgium is concerned, they claim that SDG 5, 8, and 9 are on track and/or maintain SDG achievement, while they were supposed to have degressive results since 2017 according to the national analysis. As a matter of fact, there are no less than 12 improving goals against only one decreasing (SDG 13), leaving 4 goals with stagnating results. The divergences between the results of the FBP reports and this one may be explained by the time evolution between them but also by the independent status of the latter, as well as by its more superficial approach to the situation compared to the former ones.

Taking those three sources into account, the last one being far more encouraging than the two formers, Belgium seems to have already made a certain number of efforts, but these are seemingly not sufficient if the objectives are to be achieved by 2030. Moreover, the

⁹ The Federal Planning Bureau is an independent, public Belgian institute aiming at producing researches, analysis and forecasts about public policies in order to offer decision-making support to the government, the Parliament, social stakeholders and national and international institutions.

¹⁰ See *appendix F*.

¹¹ See *appendix G*.

existing reports only provide little information about the type and the proportion of organizations that contribute to these results.

1.5. Covid-19 crisis: impacts, challenges, and link with the SDGs

The year 2020 as well as the year 2021 up to now were and still are profoundly disrupted by the new coronavirus pandemic which led the entire world to adopt a new reality. Even if these changes linked to the Covid-19 crisis will not be taken into account in this document, the global and local consequences being still too ambiguous and unclear for now, as well as too broad, they should not be ignored. Indeed, they will probably largely impact how stakeholders will look at the SDGs in the coming years.

By now, scientists are only certain about three things. First, this pandemic has a global scale, and thus requires effective collaboration between every institution, scientist, company, etc (United Nations, 2020a). As a matter of fact, this call for solidarity to bring peace has a lot in common with the creation of the UN in 1945 (Ottersen & Engebretsen, 2020).

Second, the crisis affects simultaneously all spheres of life, namely health, education, and income. It turns out that these three elements constitute the basis for the global human development index, and that for the first time since its creation in 1990, this index may decline, causing an alarming global recession (Heggen et al., 2020; PNUD, 2020).

Third, scientists claim that a “back to normal” will not be possible, since this normality is the very one that led the world to this pandemic (PNUD, 2020). Moreover, the impacts of this crisis are here to stay, so it is important to build the response around them, not against them (Shane, 2020).

As far as the SDGs are concerned, the opinions regarding their reception of the pandemic are quite diverse. Indeed, as abovementioned, it makes clear that the achievement of the SDGs is severely touched by the crisis everywhere in the world (Macht et al., 2020; PNUD, 2020; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). Multiple goals are thus retreating, the most alarming being, in my opinion, the first one, no poverty. Indeed, no part of society and the world has been spared by the increase in poverty, and estimations even count the number of people going back into poverty to half a billion people (PNUD, 2020). Moreover, this increase

in poverty acts as a catalyst in the deterioration of other goals. We are thus witnessing a dramatic decline in the access to health (SDG3), as multiple vaccination campaigns and medical interventions have been postponed, in the access to education (SDG4), since most children of the world have been deprived of education, or in the access to work (SDG8), since dismissals and the digital divide led millions of people into unemployment (PNUD, 2020; The Lancet Public Health, 2020). On the other hand, SDG12 about sustainable consumption and production, looks set to benefit from the pandemic, mainly through the general and probably lasting shortening of supply chains (Hasanli & Safarova, 2020). These sudden and unexpected developments had the effect of changing the priorities of each objective somewhat. Indeed, the crisis has undoubtedly highlighted the weaknesses of our current system, which has put the prominence of certain objectives into perspective. Thus, we can observe a renewed interest in social objectives such as education, to the detriment of objectives focused on the economy (Macht et al., 2020). In addition, secondary topics are gaining considerable importance both for the fight against Covid and for the achievement of the SDGs, such as technological connectivity (Macht et al., 2020).

In an even more positive vein, some also see in the pandemic an opportunity to realize the SDGs, as long as it is seen as a catalyst for progress, and that SDGs are considered as perfectly relevant in and capable of taking up this challenge. (Ottersen & Engebretsen, 2020; PNUD, 2020; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). Besides, many researchers compare this pandemic to a wake up call to become aware of the major problems we are currently facing around the world (Macht et al., 2020; Shane, 2020; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). Another contribution related to the opportunity that the SDGs represent to recover from the crisis is that they have all the elements to ensure a sustainable change. The rationale behind this is that if we are going to change, we might as well use the SDGs to make this change as sustainable as possible and therefore as positive as possible for our planet and our society (Dhawan, 2021; Macht et al., 2020; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). However, it is worth mentioning a paradox that emerges from this statement, namely the need to invest in the very short term to overcome the pandemic and the desire to make longer-term investments in health in general (Shane, 2020). Fortunately, both can be done in a sustainable way.

One last input about the positive relation between COVID-19 and the SDGs is that some writings argue that the achievement of the SDGs, which is intended to lead to more stable and

resilient economies and societies, will undoubtedly enable us to better combat, and perhaps even avoid, new crises in the future (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). As claimed by the UN Secretary-General, “Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.” (The Lancet Public Health, 2020). Nevertheless, some still take the opportunity to expose the shortcomings and the fragility of the SDGs and the way in which organisations are addressing them (van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020).

In any case, the literature seems to agree on the fact that SDGs are indissociably linked to the Covid-19 response. Indeed, international collaboration and partnership between every stakeholder are at the core of the SDGs, while at the same time putting forward the countries and the individual in their uniqueness. It turns out that the solution to the pandemic answers to the same necessity (Heggen et al., 2020; Ottersen & Engebretsen, 2020; PNUD, 2020; The Lancet Public Health, 2020; van Zanten & van Tulder, 2020). In this respect, SDGs are not to be revised at all because of the pandemic, on the contrary, they are more relevant and urgent than ever for the future of the world (Ottersen & Engebretsen, 2020).

CHAPTER 2 – FOCUS ON ONE SPECIFIC GOAL: SDG12

Linked with what has been stated in the previous chapter, it turns out that the question of whether NGOs contribute to the SDGs remains somewhat unanswered for now, and thus constitutes a great opportunity for further research (Pacheco-Vega, 2010). This is precisely what this work aims to bring a new contribution to, as stated in its introduction. However, since SDGs’ willingness is to cover all the most important sustainable topics in the world, the domain of research resulting from it is extremely large and, and thus would request a much more comprehensive work than this one. This is against this background that I decided to focus only on one of the 17 SDGs: the number 12 on sustainable production and consumption. The present chapter will thus detail the rationale behind this choice, as well as the current situation regarding the implementation of SDG12, the interactions occurring between this goal and all the other ones, and the existing framework aiming at implementing this very goal.

The objective of this chapter is to set the general context of SDG12, to be able, further in this work, to confront all this global information to the reality of Belgian NGOs.

2.1. Why choose SDG number 12?

In order to understand the justifications for the choice of SDG12, it is essential to know exactly what this objective is all about. As a matter of fact, beneath SDG12 lies a dozen of targets that make it possible to address the issue as comprehensively as possible, as well as 13 indicators aiming at measuring these targets¹². Thus, this objective aims at dealing with subjects such as food wastes and losses, wastes in general, the use of natural resources and chemicals, and sustainable tourism, while involving companies and procurement, and raising awareness and disclosing information about all these topics (Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, 2016; The Danish Institute for Human Rights, n.d.; United Nations, 2015).

That being said, I chose SDG12 for two different types of reasons: some personal motivations, which are backed by scientific, objective ones. To begin with, this topic of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) appeal to me personally, as a citizen, since it is maybe the most accessible goal to act on as individuals. Indeed, food waste and the use of natural resources, in the garment industry for example, is something everyone lives on a daily basis. In this respect, with the increasing awareness about sustainable development, this topic of SCP is becoming more and more widespread in the habits of Belgians through concepts such as recycling, circular economy¹³, product-service system¹⁴, or short food supply chains. In addition to that, this subject has a special meaning for me since I had the opportunity to work in a start-up company whose activity was precisely based on a sustainable mode of production.

¹² The official list of the targets and indicators of SDG12 can be found in *appendix H*

¹³ Circular economy = “a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and product as long as possible” (European Parliament, 2018).

¹⁴ Product-Service System = “tangible products and intangible services designed and combined so that they jointly are capable of fulfilling specific customer needs” (Schroeder et al., 2019).

However, these personal motivations are obviously not sufficient to ensure this choice is the most appropriate and relevant one for this work. In this respect, here are some other, more theoretical, and documented reasons to choose SDG12. Firstly, this goal is one of the most challenging of all the SDGs in the current world, since it has huge repercussions on other critical problems such as pollution, global warming, freshwater scarcity or hunger (Batalhone & Clement, 2018; Lemaire & Limbourg, 2019; Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2016; Yue et al., 2020). Within the themes addressed by the SDG, the largest contributor to these issues is unquestionably the food industry, and in particular the logistic activities (Gasper et al., 2019; Sala & Castellani, 2019). Indeed, this major sector is responsible for one of the biggest categories of waste: food wastes. Actually, around a third of all the food production is lost or wasted, mainly in developed countries (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019; Lemaire & Limbourg, 2019). Unfortunately, it does not get any better, since, on the one hand, the global consumption of material, as well as its inherent environmental impact, are increasing with time (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019; Lemaire & Limbourg, 2019; Sala & Castellani, 2019), and on the other, a significant gap regarding SCP implementation in Europe still remain (Amos & Lydgate, 2019). Taking this into consideration, as well as the fact that the measurements and the reporting of achievements regarding this objective are particularly poor, even more than for the other goals, the urgency to take better account of this objective seems obvious (Gasper et al., 2019; Sachs, J. et al., 2020; Scott & McGill, 2018).

Fortunately, one of the reasons why I chose this particular goal is that there is much hope for improvement, for instance regarding all the job and the technological innovation opportunities that sectors such as renewable energies recycling or responsible consumption offer (Batalhone & Clement, 2018; Gasper et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2020).

Moreover, the balanced position of SDG12 between social, environmental, and economic concerns puts it in a very enviable position of reconciler of economic growth, preservation of the environment, and satisfaction of social needs (Batalhone & Clement, 2018; Gasper et al., 2019).

2.2. Situation in the world and in Belgium

To further understand the rationale behind the Belgian NGOs' actions, it is relevant to learn where this country stands at the world level as well as at the country level regarding SCP for the moment.

A first statement is that, on a global scale, even if every kind of organization or individual can contribute to SCP, it turns out that companies play a significant role in the achievement of SDG12. Indeed, businesses, in addition to their status of big consumers of products and natural resources, are often the ones that are the most influential in setting the rules, standards, and practices regarding SCP (as labelling for example). Their influence is no surprise since SDG12 is considered as one of the three most important goals for companies, with two-thirds of them citing this goal as a priority (Batalhone & Clement, 2018; Scott & McGill, 2018).

A second aspect of the global situation of SDG12 is the existence of a great, and thus sometimes confusing and misleading, amount of information regarding SCP of products, in labels, logos, reports, or even in declarations. (Batalhone & Clement, 2018) However, quite paradoxically, the accuracy, covering and measurability of SDG12 indicators turn out to be particularly bad, as mentioned above. The reason for that is that member states of the EU are expected to develop their own complementary indicators (Gasper et al., 2019). As far as Belgium is concerned, three indicators matching the main challenges of the country regarding this goal have been developed: "inner consumption of material", "recycling of wastes" and "hazardous waste" (Task force développement durable, 2019).

Then, the current world situation deplores a blatant increase in consumption, as aforementioned, which is proving to be faster than demographic and economic growth (Nations Unies, 2019). In addition to that, as one can imagine, this consumption is outrageously higher in high-income countries compared to low-income countries, with a level of consumption 13 times higher for the former (Nations Unies, 2019).

Nonetheless, the world is still acting in favor of SCP, since in 2019, around a hundred countries adopted measures and politics regarding SCP, and 303 politics and instruments were adopted around the world the same year to guide and assist the population on the path to SCP (Nations Unies, 2019). One of the most relevant examples would be INFOOD, the

International Network for Food Data Systems, which provides, among others, a database of all the existing trade names of products around the world (FAO, 2020a).

In line with the global situation, some good points, and others less good weight in Belgium's scales. To begin with the main negative one, Belgium's domestic material consumption is higher than the European average (United Nations High Level Political Forum, 2017).

However, to counterbalance this bad result, Belgium scores better for its own indicators for SDG12. In this respect, the indicator "inner consumption of material" improved between 2017 and 2019, while the indicator "production of municipal waste" was also improving in 2017, presenting thus an amount of waste below the European average, until it was replaced in 2019 by the indicators "recycling of wastes" and "hazardous waste"; the former progressing in the good direction in 2019 while the second did not show any significant change that same year (Service Public de Wallonie, 2020; Task force développement durable, 2017, 2019; United Nations High Level Political Forum, 2017).

Speaking of recycling, Belgium can be proud to be among the best students in Europe with a total of 80% of recycled waste, while the European average barely reaches 64%. An explanation can be provided in the estimable promotion of circular economy and the display of leadership of the federal and regional authorities in Belgium (United Nations High Level Political Forum, 2017).

One last positive aspect of the Belgian setting is the provision of several tools and databases to guide and assist the population on the path to SCP. For example, the previously mentioned INFOODS offers access to a special database about the Belgian food composition (FAO, 2020a).

2.3. Interactions between SDG12 and the other goals

As explained multiple times in this document, the SDGs have been developed by the UN with the idea of integration and interconnectedness between the goals, i.e. that the goals have some kind of positive influence on each other. This expectation for positive correlation

in the results between the goals is called a synergy and finds itself in opposition to the trade-off, namely the situation in which the correlation between the goals is negative.

As far as SDG number 12 is concerned, it seems that this rule of integration is very far from being respected since this goal is particularly associated with trade-offs. In fact, SDG12 can be found in each of the 5 most important trade-off pairs, meaning that improving the results of SDG12 has an outstandingly high probability of leading to degradations in five other objectives: SDGs 10, 1, 6, 3 and 4 (from the highest to the lowest probability). Note that most of them are social-related goals. (Lemaire & Limbourg, 2019; Pradhan et al., 2017; Stafford-Smith, 2014). One explanation for this surprisingly high quantity of negatively correlated social goals concerning SDG12 would be that most of those trade-offs are related to the paradigm according to which social welfare can only be possible with economic growth, while SDG12 precisely fights against this very paradigm (Pradhan et al., 2017). Looking at the situation in Belgium, the most important trade-off is no longer the pair SDG12-SDG10, but rather the pair SDG12-SDG3, which is in 4th position at the world level (Pradhan et al., 2017)

However, SDG12 can still have a positive impact toward other goals, for example by contributing to limiting other trade-offs that exist among other goals. This is the case for instance for the trade-off that occurs between SDG2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) and SDG15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss) (Schröder et al., 2019).

Furthermore, even if the relations with other goals are particularly disastrous, this is not the case if we look at the internal interactions of SDG12. If we look at the 11 targets of this objective, they present a particularly high level of synergies between them, which means that increasing one of the targets of SDG12 presents a high probability to be beneficial for other targets of this goal (Pradhan et al., 2017).

2.4. Areas for improvement and frameworks for the implementation of SDG12

In the precedent sections and chapters, it appears that a rather mixed picture concerning the implementation of SDG12 emerges. Some rather positive aspects, such as the positive results already achieved in Belgium, but also with still a lot of gaps to fill in, at the global as well as at the country level. This last section about SDG number 12 aims at highlighting the ways of improvement proposed in the literature, as well as some of the existing programs and initiatives to show that real solutions exist to fill in these gaps.

Firstly, from an operational point of view, the fight against wastes and losses (especially regarding food) stands in the foreground. In this respect, it is essential to improve the data collection and the sharing of knowledge about wastes and losses, as well as to elaborate efficient strategies and to take action regarding these issues (Maximov, 2014). It will be further emphasized that NGOs constitute ideal partners to work on these particular processes, as well as to act for better coordination between all these policies, strategies, and initiatives, as it represents a *sine qua non* condition for the successful implementation of SDG12 (Maximov, 2014; Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture, 2018).

Then, always with this idea of integrated goals, even if, as stated in the previous section, SDG12 is mostly associated with trade-offs, there are still some actions developed for other goals that may contribute to significant improvement regarding SCP. Here are some of these possible actions: adapt and enhance the investments and funding structures, reinforce the innovation systems, ameliorate the access to markets for smallholders, or use social security tools to improve productivity and revenues (Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture, 2018).

Hopefully, in order to implement all these actions, multiple frameworks have been developed by many different organizations. Unfortunately, their large number makes it impossible to mention them all in this work, so let us focus on a selection to give a good idea of their diversity. Let us begin with the 10 Year Framework Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP), which is a global framework of action aiming at enhancing international cooperation to improve quickly and efficiently the SCP (Farah,

2013). The particularity of this framework is its theoretical compatibility with any kind of organization or institution.

Apart from this 10YFP which comprehensively encompasses SCP, taking into account all types of organization, it turns out that the other frameworks tend to tackle the subject in a more targeted way, either by focusing on a particular subject, or on a particular stakeholder, or a particular geographical area. In this respect, the *Sustainability Map* has been developed by the International Trade Centre's (ITC) Trade for Sustainable Development Programme to enable users to have a better comprehension of sustainability initiatives (Batalhone & Clement, 2018).

Then, some frameworks also focus on the companies, as it is the case with the *IFPRI*¹⁵ *Food Losses methodology*, which helps businesses to improve the measurement of food losses across their whole value chain as well as the inherent economic losses (FAO, 2020b). A second example is the *Guidelines for providing product sustainability information*, jointly proposed by EU Environment, the 10YFP, and ITC aiming at, as its name suggests, providing consumers with information about sustainability to help them make better informed sustainable choices (Batalhone & Clement, 2018).

As it was already the case for the *IFPRI Food Losses methodology*, other frameworks focus on food waste and losses in particular. Two other examples can thus be emphasized: the *FLW*¹⁶ *Protocol and standard*, which objective is to improve the guidance on measurement and quantification of food waste and losses in every organization and countries with a multi-stakeholder approach (FAO, 2020b), and the *Save Food initiative*, which is a global initiative led by the FAO and Messe Düsseldorf aiming at reducing the food wastes and losses in general (FAO, n.d.).

Finally, as already discussed in the second section of this chapter about the current situation in Belgium, multiple actions are being developed, including frameworks, such as, among many others, the Hands-on Guide for Sustainable Purchases initiated through the collaboration between the different Belgian governments, or the *GO4CIRCLE business federation for circular economy* developed at the federal level for three years (2017-2020) to

¹⁵ IFPRI = International Food Policy Research Institute

¹⁶ FLW = Food Loss and Waste

deal with recycling problems caused by bad product designs (United Nations High Level Political Forum, 2017). Indeed, the circular economy turns out to be a very useful principle for the improvement of SDG12, since it helps reducing overconsumption, wastes and losses, as well as allowing better management of natural resources and creating a large number of jobs, in addition to being accessible to all stakeholders (Schroeder et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 3 – THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

They may have been previously mentioned several times already, but we still do not know exactly what an NGO is, even if it turns out to be of the utmost importance, since NGOs are precisely the type of organization that is to be analysed regarding its implementation of the SDGs. This chapter aims precisely at filling this gap through a definition of what an NGO is, through the study of the meaning of NGO in the unusual Belgian setting, as well as through a comprehensive overview of the role of NGOs first in the economy, in particular regarding sustainable development, and second in the SDG implementation.

3.1. Definition of a Non-Governmental Organization and legal framework

The very first step of this chapter about NGOs is to bring a clear definition of this kind of organization. In this respect, multiple sources are to be used to determine the outlines and characteristics of NGOs in Belgium.

First of all, the Council of Europe brings some contribution to the definition of NGOs by providing recommendations to European governments on minimum standards, policies, and practices to be taken into account in their own legislation. The Council of Europe thus recommends NGOs to be independent (namely not depending on public authorities) and voluntary, as well as to pursue mostly not-for-profit objectives (Conseil de l'Europe, 2008).

In the Belgian regulation, the proposed definition of NGOs fits well with these European recommendations, as it defines NGOs as *“organizations whose main social object is the*

*development cooperation, and which can be agreed by the minister and benefit from subventions from the Belgian Development Cooperation for their development cooperation activities; these organizations defining autonomously their social object, activities and organization mode*¹⁷ (Loi Relative à La Coopération Au Développement, 2013). The not-for-profit and the independency conditions are in theory well respected. However, as it is going to be emphasized just after, in practice, this independence condition may seem to be unmet, due to the lever governments have on NGOs regarding the subventions.

In this respect, the Belgian regulation determines three different entities with legal personality that follow these criteria, namely the non-profit association (ASBL in French), the international non-profit association (AISBL in French), and the foundation (*Code Des Sociétés et Des Associations*, 2019). This fits well with the recommendations of the Council of Europe supporting that NGOs can bear different names, such as associations, charities, foundations, or non-profit companies (Conseil de l'Europe, 2008).

Finally, according to this same Belgian code, those three entities must follow selfless purpose, meaning that they do not defend their own interests, but the collective ones, and also pursue activities that constitute its own object, namely that the profit of these activities must not be used for something else than the object of the NGO. Once again, the Council of Europe recommends the very same things, i.e. these activities to be linked to sustainable subjects, treating environmental, social and economic concerns and to be not-for-profit oriented (Conseil de l'Europe, 2008).

3.2. Situation in Belgium

In Belgium, the variety of types of NGOs, funding sources, and fields of action reflect well the multi-ethnic and multilingual context of the country, as well as its overlapping government structure. In this respect, on the one hand, this makes Belgium the perfect place

¹⁷ Original text in French: « les organisations qui ont comme principal objet social la coopération au développement et peuvent être agréées par le ministre et bénéficier de subventions de la Coopération belge au Développement pour leurs activités en matière de coopération au développement; ces organisations définissent de manière autonome leur objet social, leurs activités et leur mode d'organisation » (Loi Relative à La Coopération Au Développement, 2013)

to analyse the diversity of NGOs' implementation processes regarding SDGs, since all these characteristics may have a different impact on the way NGOs consider the SDGs, but on the other hand, as it will be further explained, this variety brings a great deal of complexity for NGOs. From this piece of reflection, this section will aim to bring snippets of answers to the question "Is this variety inherent to Belgium positive for NGOs regarding their intentions concerning the SDGs, or, on the contrary, is it rather detrimental for them?".

3.2.1. NGO types and field of action

First of all, in Belgium, a categorization of the NGOs has to be made, since the funding sources will differ accordingly, and thus their relationship toward the SDGs.

The first one is the difference between the local NGOs and the international ones. Obviously, the local NGOs, mostly called non-profit associations, act in the country where they are established, while the international ones, the non-profit international associations, focus on foreign countries, most of the time located in the south part of the world (Suárez, 2016). According to Agyemang et al. (2019), Belgium has a long tradition of an international donor, and with the global trend for government to contract out the delivery of foreign aid, international NGOs tend to become more and more important (Suárez, 2016). However, these last years, the Belgian government made cuts in the budget, leading to a slight decrease in international aid (CNCD & 11.11.11, 2018).

Then the second categorization differentiates the project NGOs from the program NGOs, where the first ones aim at developing quite short projects with funding granted for a maximum of 2 years, and the second ones relatively longer projects, with a component in the North and the South (Molenaers et al., 2014). In general, the balance between both types of NGOs in the country remains stable, with more or less the same amount of NGOs in both categories (Molenaers et al., 2014).

Furthermore, regarding the domain in which the Belgian NGOs are active, the most important of them is the one of civil society strengthening, with about 50% of such-focused NGOs, followed by the domains of agriculture, healthcare, and education (Molenaers et al., 2014). However, one must admit that the sustainable production and consumption topic, namely the one associated with goal number 12, is not belonging to the prevailing subjects for

Belgian NGOs. But as explained further in the document, it does not mean that it was that difficult to find a sufficient number of NGOs tackling this topic.

3.2.2. *Funding sources*

One of the necessary conditions for NGOs to be named as such is the non-profit dimension of their activities. In this respect, NGOs have no choice but to resort to different external funding sources in order to carry out their projects.

In Belgium, one of the main sources of funding comes from the Belgian government in the form of subsidies. Before going any further, it must be stressed that the aforementioned necessary independence condition of NGOs does not mean that public authorities cannot choose to bring assistance to NGOs (My World Abroad, 2013). However, NGOs must be able to freely decide whether to accept and receive this help or not (Conseil de l'Europe, 2008). That being said, one particularity in the Belgian field is the presence of multiple governments (one for each of the 3 different regions and the 3 communities and one for the federal state) which leads to multiple funding incentives, sometimes considered as conflicting (Molenaers et al., 2014). However, these subsidies are regulated by the King under strict conditions, as stated in the 1999 law about Belgian international cooperation and the 2013 law about development cooperation (Loi Relative à La Coopération Au Développement, 2013; SPF Affaires étrangères, 2016). For instance, the Belgium State is not allowed to finance entirely an NGO project, the most frequent contribution being 80% of the total funding of the project (ULB-Coopération, 2017).

In addition to these subsidies, NGOs have several other financing options, either inside Belgium, with fundraising, foundations participation¹⁸, donations, grants, charity campaigns, private sector support, National Lottery support, or even economic activities, provided that the income from these activities is not distributed to the members or founders of the NGO, or outside, at the European level, with funds from the European Union (Conseil de l'Europe, 2008; Nadia Molenaers et al., 2011; O'Brien, 2017; *The Changing Role of NGOs and Civil Society*

¹⁸ As a reminder, a foundation is considered as a type of NGO, so it is not excluded that some NGOs contribute to the funding of other NGOs.

in Financing Sustainable Development, 2014; ULB-Coopération, 2017). A brief insight back at the donations is necessary to make clear that this assistance is partially driven by the belief that local organizations have a better ability to deal with local needs than governments. The constant professionalization of NGOs strengthens this belief even more (Suárez, 2016).

3.2.3. *Fragmentation*

The description of the Belgian NGOs scene would not be complete without mentioning its unusually fragmented context, which may deeply impact the implication of NGOs toward the SDGs. By fragmentation one mean the fact that too many donors bring too small amounts of money to too many different projects and countries (Molenaers et al., 2014). This is the case in Belgium, and even if this could bring some benefits such as better flexibility. Indeed the literature agrees that fragmentation tends to rather reduce efficiency, because of the high administrative and operation costs that fragmentation implies (Molenaers et al., 2014; Nadia Molenaers et al., 2011).

As a matter of fact, this high Belgian fragmentation is not surprising if we look at the socio-cultural and political background of the country; 3 official languages, 3 regions, 3 communities, multiple ethnic groups, religious orientations, or different ideological pillars (catholic, socialist and liberal). This fragmentation is part of the Belgian landscape and is thus very important to take into account when analysing NGOs' activities since the aforementioned high diversity of types, goals, and funding sources is directly linked to it. For instance, from a political point of view, catholic organisations will tend to emphasize the number of partners and countries of intervention, and from a geographical point of view, liberal and socialist NGOs will rather put countries of Latin America forward (Molenaers et al., 2014; Nadia Molenaers et al., 2011).

3.2.4. *Relation with other stakeholders*

Considering the variety of funding sources and the fragmentation that prevails in Belgium, it is not surprising to learn that Belgian NGOs are involved with a multitude of stakeholders. All these relationships are often vital for NGOs, since they determine the aid

allocation (Agyemang et al., 2019; Molenaers et al., 2014). Besides, the number and the involvement of stakeholders are growing day by day, which makes them increasingly important for NGOs (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017; Hénon et al., 2014)

First of all, despite the independent nature of NGOs, the Belgian government is closely linked to NGOs, especially regarding its subsidizer role (Molenaers et al., 2014). This working partnership with politicians, political parties and parliaments turns out to be two-sided, the first one being quite successful, with mutual benefits to both NGOs, thus having a strong lobbying power on public authorities, and governments, and gaining an enhanced international legitimacy, among others (Cumming, 2009; Nadia Molenaers et al., 2011). The second side is more similar to a burden for NGOs, since they are strongly dependent on government subsidies, as stated in the previous sections, contrary to the independence condition advocated by the law (Contor, 2016). Moreover, NGOs maintain another kind of relationship with the government, as they are considered as intermediaries between the latter and the citizens (Justaert, 2018).

Then, when talking about citizens, these represent another important stakeholder for NGOs. Indeed, in addition to their position as the main beneficiary group of NGOs' actions, the citizens also play a great role in the funding of these activities, individuals even being one of the largest sources of funding (Hénon et al., 2014). In this respect, NGOs are working to raise awareness and educate citizens to obtain this funding, as well as to convince volunteers to help them in their mission, while taking advantage of the high level of public trust they enjoy (Agyemang et al., 2019; Justaert, 2018).

Another crucial stakeholder for NGOs is the Belgian Directorate General of Development Cooperation (DGD), namely the Belgian Federal Administration which deals with the different aspects of Belgian development cooperation. This organism should be in charge of organizing and coordinating sustainable development actions of Belgian actors, and in particular taking care of subsidies (Molenaers et al., 2014). However, multiple stakeholders deplore the lack of coordination and communication between actors of sustainable development, including NGOs (Molenaers et al., 2014; Nadia Molenaers et al., 2011).

The most essential stakeholder for Belgian NGOs may be all their NGOs counterparts, as they constitute a precious source of funding, knowledge, or network. Indeed, NGOs often dedicate a part of their funding to other organizations, the collaboration being far more

important than the competition (O'Brien, 2017). Then, multiple conferences, consortia or databases provided by NGOs or intermediary organizations allows other NGOs to acquire deep knowledge, new practices, improved services, and strong network; this increasing proportionally to the density of NGOs in the country (Molenaers et al., 2014; O'Brien, 2017; Rousseau et al., 2019; Suárez, 2016).

Apart from these stakeholders, without entering into the details, we can also mention the media, the Belgian federations, or the for-profit companies that also inevitably play a role in the activities of the NGOs in Belgium (Agyemang et al., 2019; Molenaers et al., 2014; Rousseau et al., 2019).

3.3. The role of NGOs for the economy and sustainable development

Due to their non-commercial nature, the role of NGOs in the economy is inevitably intrinsically linked to sustainable development. Indeed, the ecological and social dimensions can be observed in more or less all of their initiatives, even purely economic or political ones. Although the resources of NGOs remain relatively limited, their flexibility, manoeuvrability, neutrality, solution-oriented mind-set, and quality of work enables them to be active and make a difference in a large variety of sustainable issues (Justaert, 2018). As a matter of fact, the role of NGOs can be divided into three families of actions, namely actions addressed to the political world, to the civil society, and to populations in the need.

Firstly, as far as the political setting is concerned, NGOs can act in multiple ways, beginning by sharing their accurate knowledge about local, federal and international situations acquired through scientific research and reports (Arranz & Danalache, 2016; Justaert, 2018; Rousseau et al., 2019; United Nations Global Compact et al., n.d.). This knowledge also allows NGOs to acquire a certain lobbying power enabling them to have a say in policy developments and negotiations, whether locally or internationally. Indeed, their expertise is often required by public authorities to help them generate and pass environmental legislation, and afterwards, NGOs also have significant influence to make their advocacy for or against public policies weight in the balance (Agyemang et al., 2019; Justaert, 2018; Nadia Molenaers et al., 2011; Pallas & Urpelainen, 2011; United Nations Global Compact

et al., n.d.). This lobbying power will be all the more efficient when NGOs partner with local companies under “green alliances” aiming at increase the environmental performance, as well as their political influence (Hege & Demailly, 2018; Rousseau et al., 2019). However, every NGO is not enthusiastic about this collaboration with the private sector, reproaching them their profit-oriented mission, as well as their lack of technical knowledge, of understanding about the intercultural challenges, of neutrality and legitimacy (Pohu, 2017).

Always related to political world, another role of the NGOs is to monitor international organizations and state actions, to voice unsustainable initiatives or activities, or to promote sustainable ones, acting as watchdogs of sustainable actions (Pallas & Urpelainen, 2011; Rousseau et al., 2019). Quite surprisingly, this monitoring request comes mostly from states themselves, as they see there an opportunity to enhance their legitimacy by receiving a stamp of approval, and possibly get precious material payoffs (Pallas & Urpelainen, 2011).

A second important role of NGOs toward the economy, and sustainable development in particular, is also the most obvious one, namely providing aid to the populations or territories in the need through projects they conduct on their own (Suárez, 2016; Hénon et al., 2014). Thus, hundreds of millions of people benefit from this aid, be it locally, nationally, or internationally, in fields such as human rights or ecology (Agyemang et al., 2019).

Finally, the last family of actions consists of raising awareness about the aforementioned roles, as well as about the current economic, environmental, and social situation. In this respect, NGOs cooperate with the media and organize sensibilization campaigns to change the public mentalities and educate about the issues they fight against. Another role is to convince these citizens to contribute to their cause, be it financially or by working as volunteers for them (Arranz & Danalache, 2016; Justaert, 2018; Rousseau et al., 2019).

3.4. The role of NGOs in the achievement of the SDGs

Based on what has just been explained, it seems obvious that NGOs are intimately linked to SDGs because of their sustainable focus. However, these are only speculations, since it appears that the literature on this very link remains particularly sparse.

As a matter of fact, since the SDGs aims at encompassing the most significant sustainable topics in the world, it seems coherent that the roles of NGOs fall within the framework of the SDGs since they address the very same issues related to sustainable development. Thus, fulfilling their missions means in most cases acting in favour of SDGs, whether it is voluntary or not (Hege & Demailly, 2018). Therefore, thanks to their adaptability to the rapidly changing world, NGOs turn out to be crucial actors in translating the international commitment toward the SDGs into specific national and local actions (Hassan et al., 2018; Hege & Demailly, 2018).

Taking all this into account, NGOs fulfil four main roles in the implementation of SDGs: putting pressure on governments, raising public awareness, holding companies accountable for their actions toward the SDGs, and integrating the SDGs in their own activities. As a matter of fact, these four roles appear to be quite similar to the “classical” roles previously described. This supposes some kind of overlap between the inherent objectives of NGOs and the one linked to the SDGs, which could let one think that NGOs only face little difficulty to implement the SDGs. One might think that NGOs would be the most involved in SDG implementation for this reason, but we will soon see that it is not that simple.

First, and foremost, regarding these roles that NGOs plays toward the SDGs, they put pressure on governments to force them to include the goals into their policies. Then, they also monitor and advocate their transparency and ambitions about these goals (Hassan et al., 2018; Hege & Demailly, 2018; Pacheco-Vega, 2010). To fulfil this role, NGOs have several options, such as following and participating in the SDG implementation processes, putting the SDG framework forward to reinforce their allegations, or using the SDG indicators to monitor progress. Regarding these indicators, it is important to note that NGOs are not exempt from the aforementioned limitation according to which, in the few cases where data is available, indicators frequently turn out to be too expensive and time-consuming for NGOs, not to mention their large and potentially confusing number. Besides, NGOs also have strong interests in forming coalitions with NGOs from other sectors or with businesses to give their demands even more weight, while at the same time implementing themselves SDG17 on cooperation between all stakeholders in the fulfilment of the SDGs (Hege & Demailly, 2018).

Secondly, as previously explained, NGOs have a considerable role to play in raising public awareness about important topics for them, including the SDGs. The aim is to communicate about the SDGs to a broader audience, and thus encourage the citizens to contribute

individually to these goals. The rationale behind this is that the more people demand about some kind of SDG implementation, the more pressure there will be on governments to act in favour of SDGs (Hassan et al., 2018; Hege & Demailly, 2018; Pacheco-Vega, 2010).

Thirdly, there is no doubt that companies have a very important role to play in the implementation of SDGs, in particular regarding their financial contribution¹⁹. In this respect, one of the missions of NGOs will be to hold the businesses accountable for their actions toward the SDGs through partnerships, education about sustainability, or monitoring of these actions (Hassan et al., 2018; Hege & Demailly, 2018; Pacheco-Vega, 2010).

Fourthly and finally, NGOs may also integrate the SDGs in their own missions or even base their action directly on the SDGs in order to contribute personally to the fulfilment of these SDGs. Once again, since the collaboration with external stakeholders is of the utmost importance for NGOs, multi-stakeholder partnerships involving private companies, government, and representative of the scientific world are often set up by NGOs to bring sustainable impact one step further (Hassan et al., 2018; Hege & Demailly, 2018).

To get a bit deeper in the question of the implication of NGOs in the implementation of the SDGs, a study realized in 2017 demonstrated that European NGO awareness for the SDGs was notably low, with 46% of the respondents being aware of their country's implementation plan (Together2030, 2017). This shows that SDGs do not represent a significant challenge for NGOs so far. Moreover, this same study indicates that the type of NGO also plays a role in its commitment toward the SDGs. Indeed, development NGOs would be more involved than others, since they were already mobilized around the MDGs, unlike the national social NGOs. Two explanations for this low commitment are, on the one hand, that since NGOs did not wait for the SDG framework to act on sustainable development, by following other, often more ambitious frameworks. In this respect, they do not see much interest in these new goals, except for the fact that it is a strong tool to bring collaboration between stakeholders from every sector and places, and thus to increase the influence toward sustainable development (Hassan et al., 2018; Hege & Demailly, 2018; Sustainable Brands, 2016). On the other, for NGOs, the question of the funding sources uncertainty still arises (Hassan et al., 2018).

¹⁹ More information about the role of businesses in the achievement can be found in *appendix I*.

PART II – PRACTICAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The first part of this work aimed at drawing attention to what has already been done or researched in the scientific community regarding the sustainable development goals, and in particular in the field of sustainable production and consumption, which is the subject of the 12th SDG. In parallel, a strong highlight has been made on the role and involvement of NGOs in the SDGs, as well as on the current situation in Belgium. All these insights allowed to get pieces of answer to the research question, from a theoretical point of view.

Now, in this part, the goal is all different. It aims at challenging all these theoretical studies and reports in order to find out what is really happening on the spot, in Belgian NGOs. The goal is not to contradict what has been developed before, but rather to confront and compare the results of scientists with the perception of NGOs workers.

To do that, this part is divided into four different chapters, as mentioned in the introduction. The first one, “research methodology”, aims at reminding what the research question is about, as well as at detailing the process of the data collection and analysis. Then, the second one, “Profile of the NGOs”, gives an overview of the profile of the NGOs and their internal functioning. Thirdly, the chapter “SDGs in Belgian NGOs” explains how NGOs deal with and use the SDGs. Finally, the “Focus on SDG12 in Belgium” chapter reviews 3 of the 10YFP programmes to assess NGO involvement in the SCP.

The terms "research question" have been mentioned several times now, but it would be pertinent to mention it here again, before going further into the practical analysis:

Which role do Belgian NGOs play in the achievement of SDG12 about sustainable production and consumption?

1.1. The qualitative analysis

1.1.1. Why does a qualitative analysis fit best with this research?

The choice to start with a qualitative study rather than a quantitative one is not random. Indeed, in view of my subject, I immediately thought that it was more appropriate to question a relatively small sample of NGOs, which would allow me to propose a more detailed questionnaire, and thus have the opportunity to make a more complete analysis on a wider variety of themes. Moreover, I needed substantiated answers to understand in depth how NGOs deal with all the topics of the 10YFP.

As for the choice of using a questionnaire rather than an interview, it is less obvious. Firstly, the structure of the 10YFP, which is composed of lists of criteria that expect a "yes, no, justification" response, does not particularly lend itself to a semi-structured interview.

Secondly, given the complexity and the voluntary depth of the questionnaire, it would have been necessary to give respondents the questions in advance, so that they could have looked for the information beforehand since it is not necessarily straightforward. The idea of a questionnaire, therefore, seemed more convenient than interviews.

1.1.2. Questionnaire creation – link with the 10YFP

The creation of the questionnaire constituted a big step in the practical analysis. The questionnaire to be as complete as possible, while still accessible for every type of NGO, big or small. In order to get this completeness, the idea was to find an existing framework on SDG12 which would be exhaustive enough to deal with every aspect of the goal, while being ideally applicable to every type of organization. It turned out that such an interorganizational and international framework was indeed existing, answering to the name of the *10-Year Framework of Programmes* (10YFP).

First of all, it is primordial to get to know a bit better about the NGOs I am working with. This is why a whole part of the questionnaire is only dedicated to this exploration. Since the answers to these questions are logically the same for every member of the organisation, this part is put aside in a separate document, so that only one person in the organisation fills it in.

Then, as developed in the first chapter of the literature review, sustainable development is at the core of the sustainable development goals. This is why I chose to ask a set of questions related to the attachment Belgian NGOs have toward this concept. Then comes a range of questions related to the involvement of Belgian NGOs toward the SDGs as a whole process. Finally, the last questions are about the SDG12 in particular, based on the 10YFP.

The latter is a global framework developed and recommended by the United Nations. It all began at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg where all the Heads of States created the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (Farah, 2013). In this plan, where one can read:

"Encourage and promote the development of a 10-year framework of programmes (10YFP) in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems" (World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002)

First, based on that statement, the *10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns* was created in 2012, during the Rio+20 conference (High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, n.d.). This is a global framework of action aiming at enhancing international cooperation towards sustainable consumption and production (SCP) (Farah, 2013). The particularity of this framework is to deal exhaustively with every aspect of SCP, and to be implementable everywhere in the world, in every kind of organization. Thus, an Ivoirian small business can use this framework the same way companies or governments in Europe do. Even individuals should be able to carry out personal actions thanks to the toolkit "Anatomy of Action" of UNEP²⁰ (One Planet Network, n.d.-b).

Then, in order to implement this 10YFP, several means have been developed by UNEP, such as a trust fund and an information platform called One Planet Network (Farah, 2013; High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, n.d.).

Finally, regarding the content of the 10YFP, it has been divided into six different programmes, aiming at covering at best all the SCP topics. These six programmes are listed hereunder, as well as a short description of the main topic each of them is dealing with.

²⁰ UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme

- **Sustainable public procurement** – deals with any initiative related to sustainable public procurement. (One Planet Network, 2016e)
- **Sustainable tourism** - deals in particular with the use of plastics in tourism or recycling, for example. (One Planet Network, 2016f)
- **Consumer information for SCP** – deals with the lifespan of products, raising awareness of sustainable consumption and production, the importance of consumer relations, or even communication channels. (One Planet Network, 2016a; United Nations Environment Programme, n.d., 2017a)
- **Sustainable buildings and construction** – deals with the recovery of construction waste, sustainable policies related to construction, promotion of sustainable housing, for example. (One Planet Network, n.d.-a, 2016b)
- **Sustainable food systems programme** – deals with the involvement of marginalised people and consumers in general in food systems, the influence of the NGO on food policies, the use of labels, the importance of small-scale providers, access to healthy food, for instance. (One Planet Network, 2016c; United Nations Environment Programme, 2020)
- **Sustainable lifestyles and education** – deals with awareness-raising for sustainable lifestyles, education of young people in particular, meat consumption, waste sorting, responsible shopping, slow fashion, the importance of regular physical activity, use of sustainable transport, local consumption, etc. (One Planet Network, 2016d; United Nations Environment Programme, 2017b)

The last part of the questionnaire about SDG12 has been constructed based on these six programmes. However, it is appropriate to take a critical look at this framework, which is not perfect. It is deemed to be international, applicable to all kinds of organisations, and encompassing the entire SDG12 as it was developed by the UN to specifically address all aspects of the SCP. However, on the other hand, this variety of topics is so vast that some programmes come to focus more on other SDGs than on the 12. By the way, the 10YFP claims indeed that it also takes into account the SDGs 4, 8, 9, 11, and 17 (U. N. Environment Programme, 2017). This is the reason why we will only deal with 3 of the 6 programmes, the ones that are most related to responsible production and consumption.

Moreover, the leading organizations for each programme are different. This is a good thing in the sense that each programme is developed in collaboration with specialists in each domain. At the same time, this leads to a lack of uniformization throughout the framework, since each programme is developed independently from the others and since no official exhaustive list of the actions for each programme exists. This means that each programme has its own structure, its own way of presenting its recommendations and documents, being therefore difficult to work equally on each programme.

The final questionnaire sent to the NGOs is in *appendix J*, and is divided into two parts; a general part to be filled in only by one person in the organization, and the more detailed one to be filled in by the most people possible according to the size and availability of the NGO²¹. All the answers to these questionnaires for the 20 NGOs can be found in the external appendixes document. All analysis that will follow up to now is based on these answers.

1.2. Data collection

1.2.1. Organisations' selection

In parallel with the creation of the questionnaire, another key question had to be tackled, namely the choice of the targeted respondents. In the case of my research, this choice was obvious, since its goal is to investigate the role of Belgian NGOs in the achievement of SDG12. My research was naturally directed towards NGOs based in Belgium that had a link, direct or not, with sustainable production and consumption (SPC).

As stated in the third chapter of the literature review, I based my research on a certain definition of an NGO, which is quite wide and general, as the Belgian legislation allows a great deal of flexibility about this designation. This is why a lot of NGOs in my database are legally considered as non-profit associations (ASBL) and sometimes do not consider themselves as NGOs, even if they fall within the definition of an NGO that I have chosen to use.

²¹ The questionnaires can be found in English in *J*, but with French-speaking NGOs, I sent a French translation.

1.2.2. Stages of the data collection

The data collection in itself began by drawing up an almost exhaustive list of as many organisations as possible falling within the above-mentioned criteria. To find such NGOs, I consulted lists of organisations active in sustainable development, such as the list of The Shift members (The Shift, 2020), of the CNCD members (CNCD-11.11.11, n.d.), of the recognised NGOs by the Belgian government (FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, 2016), or of the ACODEV members (ACODEV, n.d.). In addition to that, there are also some NGOs that have been added in the database to the best of my knowledge.

The next stage consisted of contacting these NGOs by email. For some of the NGOs, phone or video calls followed, with one or several members of the organization in order to provide them with further information on the research. One month after sending the 1st email, I proceeded to phone calls to the organisations which did not answer, and then I sent a second email if no one picked up. As the exchanges went on, I was able to extend my database with some additional members, or even with new organisations recommended by the first ones.

In order to come up with the most appropriate and relevant questionnaire for the organization, one step of the discussion was to discover which of the six programmes in the 10YFP did best fit with their activities. For that, a short description of the programmes was provided, and if necessary, a phone call was made. Regarding the completion of the questionnaire, I let the choice for the organisation to fill in the questionnaire on their own based on a word document, or through a video call. Once members of the organizations received the questionnaires, they had to fill it in within 30 days, ensuring that all the questionnaires would be handled before mid-April 2021.

1.2.3. Results of the data collection

In total, 60 NGOS have been contacted, among which 20 have accepted to participate in the research. Among these 60 NGOs, 35 are located in the Brussels-Capital region, 18 in the Walloon region, and the other ones (7) in the Flemish region²².

²² The complete list of all the contacted NGOs can be found in appendix K.

Regarding the answers to the collaboration request, 20 NGOs accepted to fill in the form, be it orally during a video call or on their own via a word document. Regarding the distribution of these NGOs, 6 of them are located in the Walloon region, 13 in the Brussels-Capital Region, and 1 in the Flemish region.

What is important to highlight here is that several NGOs did agree to participate in the research in the first place, but then changed their mind when they saw the length and the complexity of the questionnaire. Indeed, the most frequent reason for NGOs to refuse to take part was the lack of time they could free up, the small number of staff, and the length of the questionnaire has cooled more than one, unfortunately.

As the exchanges progressed, I also had to change my expectations regarding the number of respondents for each NGO. At first, I was expecting at least three members of each NGO to answer the questionnaire, in order to get several points of view inside the organisation. However, because of the aforementioned lack of time, as well as because of the small size of many NGOs, with sometimes only part-time workers, I ended up asking to make as many members as possible fill in the questionnaire, according to the ability of the NGO.

1.3. Limits of the data collection

At the end of the data collection process, it is crucial to realise that there are a number of biases that need to be taken into account when analysing the results.

Firstly, as clearly pointed out in the previous section, only a few NGOs in my database were located in the Flemish region, namely 7 out of 60. From these 7 NGOs, only 2 of them responded favourably. One reason for this low number is the language barrier; I do not speak Dutch, unfortunately. This means that all the exchanges and the questionnaires directed to Flemish NGOs were made in English, and not in Flemish, which undoubtedly played a role during the exchanges. Contacting the Flemish NGOs in Dutch would probably have led to other results. Maybe I might also have unconsciously favoured NGOs whose websites were in French, my mother tongue, which is another possible bias.

Secondly, while searching for relevant NGOs to contact, there is inevitably a number of NGOs which would have been suitable for the research but which I did not find or not thought of. However, the high number of NGOs contacted allowed me to reduce this bias quite a lot.

Thirdly, as detailed in a further section, the programmes are not equally represented among the NGOs. For example, the programme about the sustainable lifestyle is much more represented than the one about sustainable construction. This is mainly due to the selection of NGOs in the first place based on my own conception of SCP.

After, another bias to take into account is the contact method. Indeed, I noticed during the contact phase that emailing the NGOs or calling them did not lead to the same results. What was working best was to call them after having sent an email. In the same vein, the response mode to the questionnaire probably also brings a bias. On the one hand, answering the questionnaire with the respondent by video allows to get maybe more relevant answers, but do not let time to the respondents to properly think about and properly develop their responses. On the other hand, letting the respondents answer the questionnaire on their own includes the risk of misunderstanding, but allows them to document their answers.

Fifth, the size of the NGOs also played a big role in the way they answered the questionnaire, and this constitutes a major bias in the research. Indeed, as previously explained, small organisations often employ very few people, and not only full-time ones, which prevents them to make the questionnaire filled in by three different members. Then, this leads to a discordance in the number of respondents for each NGOs, leading in turn to a lesser diversity of opinions and points of view in some NGOs.

Finally, the use of the “NGO” terminology also constituted a limit in the research in the sense that a number of small non-profits did not consider themselves as NGOs, and thus, were really reluctant in participating in the research, thinking they did not fit with the kind of organization I was looking for. As a matter of fact, any non-profit with no link with any governmental organization is considered as an NGO for this research, and thus was a potential candidate, but this was sometimes a bit tricky to explain.

1.4. Data analysis method

The first step was to transcribe the interviews of those who preferred to respond orally to the questionnaire. The next step was to compile all the answers received in word or pdf format into a single excel file in order to have an overview of all the information. As the questionnaire was structured to correspond to the three main chapters of the theoretical part (SDGs - SDG12 - NGOs), the practical analysis part is also divided according to these three main themes. However, for more coherence and fluidity, the order of the parts was changed. We will thus start by drawing up a portrait of the NGOs of the sample, then analyse their involvement in the SDG system in general, and end with their involvement with SDG12.

As far as the analysis of the results is concerned, the answers were gathered in one document, but put together in different sheets according to their theme: general questions, sustainable development, the SDGs in general, and then the 6 programmes of the 10FP.

The analysis was then carried out theme by theme, comparing the NGOs' responses with those of other NGOs, as well as with the theoretical information gathered during the scientific research. Within each theme, the answers were analysed either question by question, or by small groups of closely related questions. By moving forward theme by theme in a systematic and structured way, it was possible to provide a progressively more and more complete answer to the research question.

CHAPTER 2 – PROFILE OF THE NGOS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 20 Belgian NGOs brought a positive answer to my collaboration request and went all the way through this collaborative process. These NGOs are the ones highlighted in green in *appendix K*. With these results in mind, this section aims at highlighting the diversity of the sample of NGOs by presenting their main characteristics. To do that, let us base ourselves on the general part of the questionnaire proposed to the NGOs on the one hand, and on the structure used in point 2 of chapter 3 of the theoretical presentation on the other hand. All this section will further be used to better understand the position of the NGOs toward the SDGs, and in particular toward SDG12.

2.1. NGO type and field of action

The first characteristic of NGOs that was developed in the theoretical part was their country of action, namely if they operate locally or internationally. In the case of our NGOs, it turns out that the vast majority focuses its action in Belgium, and often even in a relatively small area. Among the 20 NGOs, 14 are active only in Belgium, 2 extend their activities to other European countries (DETIC and Espace Environnement), and the 4 remaining focus their activities in the developing countries, mainly in Africa (Solsoc, Miel Maya Honing, ISF and Close the Gap). Compared to the theoretical balance claiming almost perfect equity between international and national NGOs, the sample seems to be far more active in Belgium.

We can probably explain this result by two different factors. First, by the large number of small and medium organizations (this point will be addressed later), and second by the fact that, as explained at the very beginning of this work, sustainable production and consumption is a very much embedded issue in the developed world, including Belgium. NGOs already have plenty of work in Belgium before going to other countries.

Second, without much surprise, the field of action of the 20 NGOs does not fit with the theoretical results, namely that Belgian NGOs mainly focus on civil society, agriculture, health, and education. Indeed, the very purpose of this work is to focus on responsible production and consumption, which is not a favourite topic of Belgian NGOs. However, what is extremely interesting is the variety of fields of activity of the sample, even for NGOs that are supposed to have this common attraction for SCP. This shows that SCP is a very wide topic that can be implemented in a surprisingly large range of activities. As presented in Table 1, there is a big tendency for these NGOs to have a direct link with either environment or food. It does not stop there. Indeed, we can find other kinds of fields such as detergents, adapted work, socio-economic justice, education, or paper. This shows the multidisciplinary and federative aspects of SCP. Another interesting point is that none of the NGOs described themselves as specifically active in the field of SCP. Through their answers, we understand that SCP is more of an effect of their activities than a real purpose, as it will be further detailed while discussing the SDG12.

Thirdly, an important characteristic of NGOs which has a strong impact on many other aspects such as their finances or their activities is the size. The size of an NGO can be evaluated

NGO NAME	FIELD OF ACTIVITY
Brufotec	Advice on food safety
Close the Gap	Sustainable recycling of e-waste
Detic	Detergents, cosmetics, adhesives, aerosols and biocides
Ecoconso	Impact of consumption on health and the environment.
Espace Environnement	Environment, Spatial and Urban planning, Heritage, Health in housing, Sustainable housing
Fairtrade Belgium	Fair Trade
Fristouille	Sustainable food
Goods to Give	Redistribution of non-food products
HerwIn	Social and circular economy
Inter Environnement Wallonie	Environment
Ingénieurs sans frontières (ISF)	Social responsibility, drinking water, energy, waste
Manufast	Adapted work
Miel Maya Honing	Development cooperation, beekeeping
Nature Attitude ASBL	environmental education and lifelong learning
Oxfam-Magasins du monde	Socio-economic justice and fair trade
Papier.be	Paper
Quinoa	Education for global citizenship and solidarity
Réseau Idée	Information and diffusion in environmental education
Share food	Food waste
Solsoc	Development cooperation

Table 1 – Fields of activity of each NGO

according to several criteria, such as the number of salaried employees or the annual budget. Regarding the number of salaried employees first, we can see in Table 2 that it is evenly spread, from NGOs with no employee to NGOs with more than 50 employees. In addition to the number of employees, you should know first, that it is very frequent that employees are only working part-time, and second, that most of the NGOs in this sample also rely on the help of many volunteers, which also has to be taken into account in the computations. However, since the number of volunteers often greatly varies, it is particularly arduous to add this component to the analysis. What could be done is to cite Oxfam-Magasins du monde as the one with the most volunteers (around 3000) (Oxfam-Magasins du monde, n.d.), and ISF as the one with the biggest ratio of volunteers/employees (with 1 employee for around 50 volunteers) (Claude Jussiant, for ISF). This great diversity in this sample confirms well the theoretical claim of diversity in the Belgian landscape.

Now, let us see if the budget component transcribes the same conclusion. You will find in Table 3 a similar distribution as the employees, but this time with the budget. Note that the budget is a piece of information that not all NGOs were willing to display, hence the smaller number of NGOs in the table. For most of the NGOs, these results are consistent with the number of employees, namely the bigger budget, the more employees NGOs have.

Number of salaried employees ²³	Name of NGOs with this number of salaried employees	Number of NGOs
0 or 1	Papier.be, Fristouille, ISF	3
Between 2 and 5	Brufotec	1
Between 6 and 10	Goods to Give, Miel Maya Honing, Detic, Share Food, Nature Attitude	5
Between 11 and 20	Ecoconso, Herw!n Quinoa, Réseau IDée, Fairtrade Belgium, Solsoc	6
Between 21 and 50	Close the Gap, Espace Environnement, IEW	3
More than 50	Oxfam, Manufast	2

Table 2 – Classification of the NGOs according to the number of salaried employees they employ

Annual budget in € ²⁴	Name of NGOs with this range of budget ²⁵	Number of NGOs
Less than 300k	Goods to Give, Papier.be	2
Between 300k and 500k	Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Quinoa	3
Between 500k and 3mio	Close the Gap, Detic, Espace Environnement, Fairtrade, IEW, Herw!n	6
More than 3mio	Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Solsoc	2

Table 3 – Annual budget for each NGO (within the limits of available information)

With this information, we are now able to classify NGOs into three categories: small, medium, and large NGOs. The dispersion is fairly even, again reflecting the wide diversity of NGOs in this sample.

Small NGOs	Medium NGOs	Large NGOs
Papier.be, Fristouille, Brufotec, Goods to Give, Miel Maya Honing, Nature Attitude	Detic, Share Food, ISF, Ecoconso, Réseau IDée, Fairtrade Belgium, Quinoa, Herw!n	Close the Gap, Espace Environnement, IEW, Oxfam, Manufast, Solsoc

Table 4 – Classification of the NGOs according to their size (based on a mix of budget and number of employees)

One last element to confirm this diversity is the age of all these NGOs. Actually, the oldest NGO, Manufast, was created in 1970 while the youngest was created just 5 years ago, in 2016 (Share food). The average creation date is 1989, with quite a uniform distribution, which shows that our sample is composed of NGOs created in a large variety of years.

2.2. Funding sources and fragmentation

Here is probably the most important question of the general questionnaire addressed to the NGOs: “What are the NGO's main sources of funding”. Indeed, we saw in the theoretical part that Belgian NGOs depended greatly on many kinds of subsidies, at the risk of jeopardising their independence from government bodies. The answers of the surveyed NGOs are

²³ No matter if it is fulltime or not, or permanent or open-ended contract. Volunteers are not included

²⁴ The budget is the one given by the NGO representative without having specified the year, so we suppose it represent the budget for either the year 2019, 2020 or 2021.

²⁵ Only NGOs willing to give this piece of information

confirming this tendency, as shown in Table 3, since half of the cited funding sources are indeed subsidies. The characteristic fragmentation regarding the Belgian government is also perfectly clear, as there are subsidies from regions (Brussels region and Walloon region), the communities (French community), and the federal authorities. In addition to that, subsidies are also granted by the Wallonia Brussels Federation (which is considered as a community), by the Belgian Development Cooperation (which depends on the federal public services), Actiris for employment (which is linked to the Brussels region), and by the cities. Obviously, it is a real maze for NGOs. Moreover, as if that was not enough, most NGOs do not stop at just one type of grant, but call on several bodies, sometimes up to five. The fragmentation is therefore a reality for Belgian NGOs, as confirmed in the following paragraph²⁶.

Then, apart from the subsidies, donations are the second preferred option for Belgian NGOs, followed by calls for tenders, membership fees, and owned funds. This is again quite in line with the theory, as calls for tenders and donations in the top 5 of the most used funding

	Funding sources	NGOs
Subsidies	Brussels region subsidies (incl. ECMS)	Brufotec, Oxfam, Réseau IDée, Solsoc
	Wallonia Brussels Federation subsidies	Ecoconso, Nature attitude, Oxfam, Quinoa, Réseau IDée, Solsoc
	Convention-cadre Walloon Region	Ecoconso
	Walloon region subsidies (incl. Maribel and APE)	Espace Environnement, IEW, Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Réseau IDée,
	Belgian Development Cooperation (DGD) subsidies	Fairtrade, Miel Maya Honing, Quinoa, Solsoc
	Cities subsidies	ISF
	Federal subsidies	IEW, ISF
	European subsidies	ISF
	French community subsidies	IEW, ISF
	Employment subsidies (incl. Actiris)	Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Oxfam, Solsoc
	Membership fees	Detic, Papier.be, Herw!n
	Animation	Ecoconso
	Call for tender	Ecoconso, Espace Environnement
	Public market	Espace Environnement
	Fairtrade label	Fairtrade Belgium
	Own funds	Fristouille, Miel Maya Honing
	Crowdfunding	Goods to give
	Financial partners	Goods to give
	Donations	ISF, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Réseau IDée, Solsoc
	Company sponsoring	ISF
	Socialist Joint Action	Solsoc
	Fondation Roi Baudouin	Solsoc

Table 5 – List of the main funding sources for NGOs

²⁶ The topic of aid fragmentation for Belgian NGOs has already been studied by Molenaers et al (2014) and published in the journal "Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations"

sources. Moreover, support of the private sector and UE subsidies complete this top 5 and are still represented in the sample.

To come back on the fragmentation, it should be noted that, although fragmentation at the political level is perfectly apparent and present, the responses of the NGOs practically never addressed or revealed any ethnic, religious, or ideological fragmentation.

2.3. Relation with other stakeholders

The last point before diving into the SDGs is the relation NGOs maintains with the outside world. Because of the impressive number of collaborative relationships for almost each NGO of the sample, the exhaustive list of these links can be found in *Appendix L*.

Apart from the relationship they maintain with the governmental bodies, as already largely discussed, NGOs are theoretically linked with many different stakeholders, starting mainly with citizens, the DGD, and other NGOs. When having a look at the sample, we immediately notice that this is a rather simplistic view of the variety of links that exist in reality.

First, regarding the aid recipients, it turns out that these are not always citizens, but sometimes also companies, as it is the case for Brufotec, Detic, or Herw!n. In a more general approach, companies play a big role in many NGOs, especially for Close the Gap, Goods to Give, and Share food, for which companies are the main providers of the goods they deal with.

To come back to citizens, they still take up a lot of space in most of the NGOs, whether as a target audience for awareness-raising, as it is the case for 9 NGOs in the sample²⁷, or as an information provider, training organizers, job creators, or product sellers.

Then, only a low number of NGOs maintain a relationship with the DGD (Solsoc, Miel Maya Honing, and Quinoa), which is quite surprising regarding the high commitment of almost every NGO toward sustainable development, and regarding the role of sustainable development action coordination the DGD is in charge of. The commitment to this organization is thus maybe a bit overestimated in the theory.

²⁷ The list of all activities developed by the NGOs of the sample can be found in *appendix M*.

However, what is really well emphasized by scientists and which is perfectly translated in the real world is the link NGOs maintain with other NGOs. The number of interactions among them is remarkable! Let us take some examples of the sample to illustrate this. First, general assembly of Ecoconso is composed among others of Espace Environnement, IEW, Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Réseau IDée. In turn, Ecoconso is a member of Réseau IDée, in the same way as Nature Attitude, Espace Environnement, IEW, and Quinoa. Another example is the one of Sylvie Meekers, director of IEW, who has previously worked for FostPlus, which has been founded by Detic. As a matter of fact, the interconnectedness of most of the NGOs in the sample shows how important NGOs are to each other. This is a strength they use day after day in their sustainable mission.

In addition to these main links, some others are not that obvious, as it is the case with Herw!n, who maintain a link with the magazine Flair, or with Solsoc, who works with trade union institutions and universities. The variety of stakeholders is thus a fundamental characteristic of NGOs.

CHAPTER 3 – SDGs IN BELGIAN NGOS

3.1. The place of sustainable development

As explained in the very first chapter of this dissertation, sustainable development is at the core of the SDGs, as they are basically developed in order to achieve global sustainable development. Another input of the theoretical part is that NGOs are linked by definition to sustainable development. We will see that even if this claim is true for most NGOs, sometimes, it can be a bit trickier than that. Actually, we can class the different NGOs according to the importance they grant to sustainable development. We can thus differentiate four different approaches toward sustainable development: not important – important but not as the main driver – essential/at the basis of the activity – in disagreement with the very principle. This categorization can be found in Table 6.

As we can see, most of the NGOs base their activities or at least take into account sustainable development (85% of the NGOs), which is well in line with the theory. However, what is much more interesting is to look at the first and the last category.

Approach toward sustainable development	NGOs
Not important	Brufotec
Important but not as the main driver	Herwin, IEW, ISF, Manufast, Réseau IDée, Share Food, Solsoc
Essential/at the basis of the activity	Close the Gap, Detic, Ecoconso, Espace environnement, Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, Goods to give, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be
In disagreement with the very principle	Nature attitude, Quinoa

Table 6 – Approach of the NGOs toward sustainable development

First, Brufotec describes the place of sustainable development in its activity as “not very important at the business level²⁸” (Anonyme, for Brufotec). Yet, the core activity of Brufotec is to advise companies about food safety, which is still, in my opinion, quite a sustainable activity. This leads to the conclusion that all NGOs in this sample are linked, in one way or another, to sustainable development, and thus that all of them have a potential interest or benefit to work with the SDGs. This will be discussed later.

In the meantime, we should have a look at the point of view of Nature attitude and to a lesser extent but with the same idea, Quinoa. Actually, both agree on the term “sustainable”, but not on the “development”. Indeed, for Nature attitude, talking about development goes against the very definition of sustainable development, since it is not possible to enjoy the present without damaging the future if we continue to maintain increasing development. In that sense, Nature attitude focuses on degrowth and on a societal paradigm shift, which goes much further in its approach than “simply” talking about sustainable development. In the words of a member of Nature Attitude, “[sustainable development] has been misused and has led to a form of 'green capitalism', the belief that appropriate technological development would be without harmful consequences for nature and mankind.²⁹” (Anonyme 2, for Nature Attitude). Even if Quinoa does not go that far in the justification, Hélène Debaisieux (for Quinoa) still mentions the questionability of the very term “development”, in which the NGO does not find itself, as a post-development NGO.

²⁸ Original quote: « peu importante au niveau business » (Anonyme, for Brufotec)

²⁹ Original quote: « [le développement durable] a été galvaudé et a abouti à une forme de « capitalisme vert », la croyance qu'un développement technologique adapté serait sans conséquences néfastes pour la nature et l'homme. » (anonyme 2, for Nature attitude)

Even if all the other NGOs seem to be on the same wavelength, it is still interesting to highlight the views of two of them; Réseau IDée and ISF. The first states two things. On the one hand, the use of the term sustainable development has become an obligation, as it has "almost become a common name that is innocently integrated into all approaches in schools and associations that constitute our audience³⁰". (François Beckers, for Réseau IDée). On the other hand, the concept of sustainable development, or "how to reconcile economic growth with environmental and societal issues", places the economy on the same level as the other two, with nature considered as a resource object. In their view, this vision of development must be questioned, and is also very well in line with the one of Nature Environnement.

And finally, ISF brings the last contribution to this concept of sustainable development by saying that it is necessary to remain pragmatic when it comes to applying the concept of sustainable development in disadvantaged populations, where the question of what is appropriate comes before the one of sustainability (Claude Jussiant, for ISF).

It is important to remember that the approach of NGOs to sustainable development is fundamental to understand their position on the SDGs.

3.2. Meaning of the SDGs for Belgian NGOs

In the theoretical part, the different actions NGOs are theoretically able to put in place in order to develop the SDGs were discussed. How does it work in reality? Do they really engage toward the SDGs towards these actions? In order to understand what the actual contribution of NGOs to the SDGs is, let us start by looking at whether or not NGOs take the SDGs into account in their activities and how.

To begin with, it turns out that the NGO members are mostly well aware of the existence of the SDGs, regardless of whether the NGO implements them or not. Actually, only two respondents out of 27 never heard about them. Nevertheless, does it mean that NGOs take the SDGs into account? Actually yes, since to the question "Does the NGO you work for takes

³⁰ Original quote: « [développement durable] est quasiment devenu un nom commun qui est intégré innocemment à toute les démarches dans des écoles et associations qui constituent notre public » (François Beckers, for Réseau IDée)

the SDGs into account in its activities?³¹ The answer is YES for 70% of NGOs. Looking just at this result, it seems like NGOs are well involved in the implementation of the SDGs. Are they really? Let us have a look at the elements NGOs put in place to take these SDGs into account.

First, it appears that most NGOs have no specific budget or funding allocated to the implementation of the SDGs. While looking at the sample, of the 14 NGOs working with the SDGs, only 1 of them have a special budget and/or funding for SDG *implementation*: Manufast, which allocated last year a budget of 50.000€ for the application fees for implementing the SDGs, and this year a special budget of 18.000€ for a dedicated consultant for the implementation of the SDGs. However, the funding from Bruxelles Environnement used for that is not especially dedicated to SDGs. I insist on the word “implementation”, because some other NGOs also spend parts of their budget on SDGs, but through projects that take these SDGs into account, and not for the administrative implementation of the goals. This is the case of IEW, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be or Solsoc. This precision will make sense when we consider the way NGOs integrate the goals. For all the other NGOs, the implementation does not require a specific budget or funding, but rather is an integral part of the projects. We, therefore, note that among all the specific funding possibilities at the national or international level listed in Annex D, none are used by Belgian NGOs.

Second, even if the “financial” aspect of the SDGs implementation remains quite weak in the NGOs of our sample, this is less the case of the collaborative aspect that is already more developed. Actually, this does not seem so surprising given the importance of collaboration in the voluntary sector. Looking at the numbers, among the 14 NGOs taking the SDGs into account, 8 are collaborating with other organizations for the implementation of the SDGs (Detic, Ecoconso, Herw!n, IEW, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be and Solsoc), while the remaining 6 are not (Close the Gap, Fairtrade Belgium, Goods to give, ISF, Manufast and Quinoa). As for the partners themselves, they belong to a wide variety of groups. Indeed, there are consumer, sectoral (APB), business (UWE, FEB, VOKA), and NGO associations (CNCD), universities (ULB, VUB, KUL), governmental (Enabel, APEFE) and advertising bodies (JEP), trade unions, mutual insurance companies, public services (OVAM, Poison Control Centre), training centres (Cifal), other NGOs, economic partners, banks (BBL),

³¹ See the Detailed questionnaire in *appendix J.b*.

the World Fair Trade Organisation, the Federal Council for Sustainable Development, the Belgian Fair Trade Federation and the Fair Trade Advocacy Office.

One collaboration that came up several times was with Associations21, which is a French-speaking Belgian platform that acts as a dome for sustainable development to facilitate consultation between associations, stimulate joint actions, and promote the transversality inherent in sustainable development (Associations21, 2021). This organisation is worth mentioning, as Réseau IDée and Espace environnement are also part of it, although they do not take the SDGs into account. This shows once again that taking the SDGs into account is not a necessary condition for being active in the field of sustainable development.

So far, therefore, only about half of the 14 NGOs are showing concrete signs of involvement toward the SDGs. Let us see how this number evolves when we take a look at how they are tracking their progress in implementing the SDGs. Here, we can categorise the NGOs into three different groups according to whether they have SDG-specific performance indicators in place, whether SDG-related indicators exist but are not SDG-specific or whether no SDG-related performance measures exist. In the first group, we find only Fairtrade Belgium, which uses a framework to report on the Fairtrade premium according to the SDGs, and Oxfam-Magasins du monde, which reports on the forecasted results and indicators with performance scores by objective. Then, in the second category, we find Close the Gap (who uses SDGs-related but not identical indicators), Detic (who measures the benefits of actions on a project by project basis), Papier.be (who conduct surveys about the perception and the impact of their products) and Solsoc (who uses the Outcome mapping method). Finally, the remaining NGOs do not measure any performance indicator related to the SDGs. At the end of this paragraph, we see that this information on performance indicators does not really help to reinforce the idea that NGOs are active in the implementation of the SDGs, on the contrary.

A final criterion for determining the extent to which Belgian NGOs are involved in the implementation of the SDGs is to observe their approach to the goal integration methods they use. Once again, the behaviour of the NGOs can be split into three categories. The first group does not put in place anything special to integrate the SDGs into its activities. This behaviour is followed by 6 NGOs (Ecoconso, Fairtrade Belgium, Goods to give, IEW, Papier.be and Quinoa). The second group works more by assimilating objectives into existing projects, i.e. they choose and use the objectives that fit their activities without changing anything in them.

This is the case of Detic, ISF, Manufast, Miel Maya Honing, and Solsoc. Actually, this way of doing is very much similar to SDG-washing, except that it does not result in hiding less glorious actions as is the case in companies. Finally, the last group has the characteristic of integrating the SDGs into the actions while questioning the latter, so that they can best meet the expectations of the SDGs. Only 3 NGOs went that far in the integration: Close the gap (who engage into the B-Corp certification), Herw!n (who base its communication on the SDGs) and Oxfam-Magasins du monde (who structures its programmes according to specific goals). Again, we see that only a very small part of the sample has taken the implementation far enough for them to be really taken into account in the activities.

Now, in order to get a more global view of the NGOs' behaviour toward these 4 criteria, let me present them in a table (Table 7), in which NGOs get a cross if they commit to the most binding action, namely if they have a special budget and/or funding for SDG implementation, if they collaborate with other stakeholders for SDG implementation, if they have SDG-specific performance indicators in place and if they adapt their activities in order to integrate the SDGs. This table visually highlights what has already been stated before, namely that although they claim to work with the SDGs, it can be seen that out of these 14 NGOs, 10 meet either none of the criteria or only one. This demonstrates that the NGO approach to the SDGs remains relatively superficial. Only 3 NGOs in the sample stand out with a deeper implementation: Herw!n, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, and Solsoc. Interestingly enough, none of these are considered as "small" ones. Thus, the size of the NGO might influence the level of implementation conducted. However, the argument does not hold enough to confirm this hypothesis.

To conclude this section, it is clear that although NGOs indicate that they take the SDGs into account in their activities, in the end, only a very few of them integrate them in depth into their activities and management. However, we saw in the section on NGOs' approach to sustainable development that this is certainly not due to a lack of compatibility between the objectives of their activities and the objectives of the SDGs. So what can explain this low involvement of NGOs, which are nevertheless considered to be the ideal candidates for developing the SDGs? Let us try to answer this question by analysing the advantages and disadvantages that NGOs find in the UN programme.

NGO ³²	Close the Gap	Detic	Ecoconso	Fairtrade Belgium	Goods to give	HerwIn	IEW	ISF	Manufast	Miel Maya Honing	Oxfam-Maisons du monde	Papier.be	Quinoa	Solsoc
Special budget/funding									X					X
Collaboration with other stakeholders		X	X			X	X			X	X	X		X
Specific performance indicators				X							X			
Adaptation of activities to fit the integration	X					X					X			

Table 7 – The involvement of each NGO toward the 4 criteria.

3.3. Incentives for the implementation of the SDGs

First, let us have a look at the reason why the 14 NGOs decided to take the SDGs into account in their activities. Predictably, as depicted in Table 8, the most common reason is that the SDGs provide a framework for structuring and simplifying the discourse of NGOs, both in terms of sustainable development and in terms of interpreting the impact of projects. Directly related to this, we find the fact that the SDGs represent a common agenda for other organisations around the world, that it increases the credibility of the NGO as well as the stakeholder confidence, and that it helps to communicate with other stakeholders and to better report. In fact, these are the main objectives of the SDGs, so it is good to see that it looks to be successful. On the other hand, we also find in second place a rather unexpected reason which is that the SDGs have become a kind of obligatory passage for NGOs if they want to have access to funding. Of course, only four NGOs raised this point, which is not enough to

Advantages	NGOs
Credibility	Detic
Simplification/structure of the discourse	Detic, Fairtrade Belgium, HerwIn, ISF, Papier.be
Stakeholder confidence	Detic
Reporting	Fairtrade Belgium
Common/global agenda	Fairtrade Belgium, ISF, Manufast
Communication	Goods to give
Funding	ISF, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Quinoa

³² This table does not include NGOs that said they did not take the SDGs into account

Table 8 – List of advantages NGOs find in the implementation of the SDGs

generalise. However, it certainly partly explains why some NGOs choose to use the SDGs only as a front, as is the case for 10 out of the 14 NGOs working with the SDGs.

3.4. Barriers to the implementation of the SDGs

The first thing to note when looking at the drawbacks in Table 9 is that the list is much longer than the list of benefits. This will most likely provide further explanation for the low involvement of NGOs in the SDGs. The reasons why the NGOs decide not to get deeply involved in the SDGs can be divided into two categories: the reasons linked to practical issues and the ones linked to conceptual issues. First, regarding the conceptual issues, since we saw earlier that some NGOs were already in disagreement with the concept of sustainable development, it was predictable to see a number of NGOs in disagreement with the very principle of the SDGs. However, what is more surprising is that one fourth of the NGOs has an issue with the very concept of the SDGs, which is quite a lot. The main arguments in that sense can be summed up as the attempt of the SDGs to systematise, homogenise and parcel out the world according to a simplistic and inappropriate vision of sustainable development. Indeed, it is as inconceivable to put the economy and the environment on the same footing, as it is to put the privileged populations of the North and the disadvantaged populations of the South on the same footing. Moreover, the SDGs' obsession with sequencing the world into discrete problems runs counter to the holistic principle of sustainable development.

Then we find more practical reasons, and also more conventional ones, namely that SDGs are too complex, too numerous, too theoretical, too vague, or too general. These are criticism that comes up very often, as explained in the first chapter of the theoretical part. In addition to that, we find drawbacks that are much more related to NGOs, such as the lack of time, the maladjustment to small structures, or the use of other frameworks. The first translates the fact that NGOs have more urgent responsibilities than the SDGs, but by still staying in the scope of sustainable actions. The second brings another argument in favour of the hypothesis suggested at the end of the section about the meaning of the SDGs for NGOs, namely that the size of NGOs might have an influence on the level of implementation it is able

to conduct. Small NGOs find it more difficult to use the SDGs. The third emphasizes the fact that a lot of NGOs did not wait for the SDGs to start working on the topics of the SDGs.

One last reason brought to explain the low commitment to the SDGs is the lack of awareness about the goals. However, this statement contradicts the finding made earlier that the vast majority of NGO members interviewed were aware of the existence of the SDGs.

Finally, it is interesting to note that no one has addressed the problem of the paradoxes that may exist between the objectives.

	Drawbacks	NGOs
Practical level	Existence/use of other frameworks/definitions	Close the Gap, Nature attitude
	High number and high complexity	Fairtrade Belgium
	Too theoretical	Ecoconso, ISF
	Not adapted for small structures	Ecoconso, Miel Maya Honing
	Time-consuming/not the priority	Espace Environnement, IEW, Miel Maya Honing, Share food
	Lack of awareness	Fairtrade Belgium, ISF
	Too vague, too general	Herw!n
Conceptual level	Loss of the holistic aspect of sustainable development	Detic, Quinoa
	Not suitable/priority in poor populations	ISF
	Just a trend with no real action behind	Oxfam-Magasins du monde
	Against placing the economy on the same level as social and environmental issues	Réseau IDée
	Institutional and lock-in approach to change	Quinoa

Table 9 – List of drawbacks NGOs find in the implementation of the SDGs

All this shows that the SDGs, although claiming to be an accessible and suitable framework for everyone and every type of organisation, is, in fact, not necessarily so. As far as the Belgian NGO world is concerned, there is a very low rate of serious involvement in the SDGs (with 3 NGOs seriously involved, 11 NGOs using the SDGs without being seriously involved, and 6 NGOs not using them at all).

CHAPTER 4 – FOCUS ON SDG12 IN BELGIAN NGOS

This last part of the analysis is going to fully focus on SDG12. As explained in the first chapter of this practical analysis section, the questions related to the SDG12 have been developed based on the 10YFP. Again, the questionnaire can be found in *Appendix J*. This framework is divided into six different programmes, among which three of them will provide the structure for the construction of this section. Indeed, as aforementioned, some of the programmes are more related to other SDGs than to SDG12. It is the case for the 1st programme on sustainable public procurement, the 2nd programme on sustainable tourism and the 4th programme on sustainable building and constructions. Since the NGOs of the sample are specifically linked to SCP, it seems coherent that most of these NGOs are not active in the themes of these three programmes. With this in mind, we will base our analysis on the other three programmes, which are very much in link with SCP.

Let us first have a quick look at the distribution of the programmes that the NGOs chose to address. Indeed, the NGOs do know best which issues are of most concern to them, and so it was up to them to choose which programmes they would respond to. This distribution is presented in *appendix N*. As aforementioned, we can see that the programmes 1, 2, and 4 are underrepresented, with respectively 5, 2, and 4 NGOs working on these topics. In comparison, Programme 3 on consumer information for SCP gathers 14 NGOs and both Programme 5 on sustainable food system programme and Programme 6 on sustainable lifestyles and education gather 15 NGOs. It should also be noted that all NGOs without exception work on at least one of these three programmes, but that none of them work with this framework.

The aim is to assess, for each programme, to what extent NGOs contribute to it through their actions. To do that, we are going to analyse how each NGO deals with each programme.

4.1. Programme 3 – consumer information for SCP

Consumer information on SCP is part of the activities of 14 NGOs in the sample, namely Brufotec, Close the Gap, Detic, Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Fairtrade, Fristouille, Herw!n, Manufast, Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be and Quinoa.

For the ease of the analysis, the topics addressed in the questionnaire are gathered into four themes, namely the product life extension, the kind of information provided, the consumer relationships, and the distribution channels. These four themes are going to be analysed in turn, with the aim of highlighting to what extent NGOs are active in each domain.

4.1.1. Product life extension

The first topic tackled in the 3rd programme is the product life extension. In order to understand in which respect NGOs are involved in this practice, four aspects of product life extension going to be analysed in turn.

First, programme 3 insists on the collaboration with other stakeholders in order to extend the life of the products. Two groups of stakeholders are in the front line: consumer organizations, with the aim of developing product purchase and use guides and to encourage testing campaigns and product reports to include life extension criteria; and knowledge centres and universities, in order to gather data on product use. Regarding the first group, Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Espace Environnement are the only ones to collaborate with consumer organization. Oxfam-Magasins du monde collaborates with Ressources for second-hand clothes sale, and Espace Environnement with Ecoconso for the product purchase and use guides development. Regarding the second group, we find again Oxfam-Magasins du monde, who collaborates with IGEAT (part of ULB), and also Detic and Close the Gap who collaborates with VUB and Academics for Development.

The second aspect is to conduct awareness-raising campaigns in favour of product life extension. Here, three NGOs stand out. Ecoconso develops articles, documents, animations, and conferences about this topic; Herw!n organizes frippery days and constantly communicates on fair trade fashion; and Oxfam-Magasins du monde carries out educational work. In addition to that, we also have Close the Gap, who “always stresses the importance of product life extension for ICT equipment” (Marnick Vanlee, for Close the Gap). Even if this is not pure sensibilisation, I still believe this answer has its place among the previous ones.

Thirdly, the 3rd programme insists on the referencing of innovative commercial practices regarding product life extension. Among the 14 NGOs of this programme, 8 are working on

this aspect³³, all with different perspectives according to their activities. This shows again the variety of the sample, as well as the very wide scope of the 10YFP. The following are some of the innovative practices identified: the business model of Close the Gap, the referencing of suppliers or craftsmen about local products or reuse and repair initiatives by Espace Environnement, the recuperation and redistribution of small glass container system of Manufast, the work on raw material and circular economy of Oxfam-Magasins du monde, and, lastly, the platform of local producers of Nature attitude. This NGO also introduces a map of the Responsible Consumer Network and works on local sourcing, second-hand, non-calibrated foods, and local and seasonal vegetables. In this sense, Nature attitude is the one compelling the most different innovative practices. However, it should be noticed that none of these NGOs goes beyond their own sphere of activity when listing existing innovative practices.

Finally, according to the 10YFP, product life extension should include the provision of e-learning tools. Three NGOs offer this kind of online material: Detic, Espace Environnement and Oxfam-Magasins du monde (again). In addition to that, Ecoconso also organize learning activities on product life extension, but not online.

We can say that even if product life extension is not the main theme of the NGOs of the sample, it is still a subject that is regularly addressed. In fact, there are only 5 NGOs out of the 14 that have not implemented anything in this area. Then, another 4 NGOs are only active on one of the four aspects (Herw!n, Manufast, Nature Attitude, and Papier.be), which is not particularly significant. Nevertheless the 5 remaining NGOs work at least on two aspects, with even Oxfam-Magasins du monde working on the four aspects. Therefore, more than one third can be considered as active in product life extension.

4.1.2. Provided information regarding SCP

The second topic in consumer information is the percentage of products for which we can find information about their sustainability. This theme is much more general than the one of product life extension, so this is not really surprising to see that 8 NGOs out of 14 actually

³³ These 8 NGOs are Close the Gap, Detic, Ecoconso, Espace environnement, Manufast, Nature Attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Papier.be

provide such information. It should be noticed that among the 6 remaining NGOs, 3 justify this lack of information simply because they do not sell any real products.

Among the 8 NGOs that provide such information, we find: Close the Gap (who provide an online tool to assess the ecologic impact of working with them), Fairtrade Belgium (through their Fairtrade label for 100% of their products), Herw!n (also for 100% of their products), Manufast (who provide a digital platform to track the producers), Miel Maya Honing (for which 100% of the products come from fair trade), Nature attitude (who explains its sustainability on its website), Oxfam-Magasins du monde (who works with validated partners and fair trade products and who is a member of the WFTO), and Papier.be (for which this information is at the core basis of their activities).

4.1.3. Consumer relationship

The third topic is based on the relation organisations maintain with the consumers. This topic is treated according to two criteria, namely whether or not the organization encourages consumers to play a role in SCP and whether or not the organization implements actions aimed at establishing a long-term relationship with consumers.

The fact is that 12 of the 14 NGOs are indeed encouraging customers to play a role in SCP. The only ones that do not are Brufotec and Manufast, who do not maintain any contact with the customer because of the nature of their activity. In Table 10, the different actions implemented by NGOs are listed, and we can see that the most common practice is to raise awareness directly to the consumer. Then, actions such as maintaining an online presence, take communication initiatives, or organizing training and workshops are also popular among NGOs. However, we have to stay critical with this compartmentalization, since we can presume that awareness-raising is probably used by some NGOs as a global term, even if in practice, they conduct more specific activities, such as organizing training. So what should be remembered is that almost all NGOs are doing something about this issue.

Now, regarding the long-term relationship creation with the consumers, the results are much less unanimous. Actually, only 7 out of 14 NGOs implement specific actions in order to gain a long-term relationship with their consumers. Regarding these actions, it is clear that having an online presence is the preferred method for NGOs (see Table 11).

Actions to make consumers act for SCP	NGOs
Awareness-raising / information sharing	Close the gap, Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Herw!n, Oxfam-Magasins du monde
Communication initiatives	Detic, Herw!n, Oxfam-Magasins du monde
Online presence	Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, Papier.be, Quinoa
Programme Fairtrade@work	Fairtrade Belgium
Participation in “Fair trade communes”	Fairtrade Belgium, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde
Training, workshops, animations	Fristouille, Nature attitude, Quinoa
Eco-travel organization	Papier.be
Volunteering	Quinoa

Table 10 – List of actions developed by NGOs to encourage consumers to play a role in SCP.

Actions to establish long-term relationship with the consumer	NGOs
Online presence / newsletter	Ecoconso, Fairtrade Belgium, Nature attitude, Papier.be
Events, workshops	Ecoconso, Quinoa
Awareness campaign	Oxfam-Magasins du monde
Programme Fairtrade@work	Fairtrade Belgium
Quality of the product	Miel Maya Honing
Working with citizens	Nature attitude, Quinoa

Table 11 – List of actions developed by NGOs to establish a long-term relationship with consumers

4.1.4. Communication channels

The last topic of the 3rd programme deals with the way organisations go about communicating with consumers, more specifically, what communications channels they use, and who they collaborate with for their communication strategy.

As far as the communication channels are concerned, it turns out that almost all NGOs use at least two communication channels, except for Espace Environnement, who only communicates via direct meeting with the consumers, and Brufotec, who do not communicate at all with the consumers, as already mentioned. Interestingly enough, apart from those two, all NGOs use at least one digital communication channel (social media, website, newsletters).

What is extremely interesting is to see once again how much collaboration is important for NGOs. Indeed, all NGOs apart from Brufotec maintain some collaboration link with other organization for their communication. Thus, we find that NGOs collaborate with the Belgian

NGO federation (Close the gap), with Enabel (Close the gap), with sectoral associations (Detic), with the media (Ecoconso, Herw!n, Nature attitude), with other NGOs (Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Herw!n, Manufast, Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be), with influencers (Fairtrade Belgium), with youth movements (Fristouille), with partner companies (Fairtrade Belgium), consumer associations (Herw!n), with the Belgian Fair Trade Federation (Miel Maya Honing), with mutual insurance companies (Nature attitude), and with the Belgian federations (Quinoa). So again, we observe a very wide variety of collaboration links that makes one of the specificities of NGOs.

To conclude this section on the 3rd programme about consumer information for SCP, we can say that even if for most of the NGOs, even if this topic is not their main activity, the one for which they exist, we realise that consumer information is a big part of their activity. The only point in which they are less invested is the product lifetime extension. This topic is particularly specific, so it is quite normal that fewer NGOs are really invested in it.

4.2. Programme 5 – sustainable food system programme

13 NGOs out of the 20 of the sample have a link with the topic of sustainable food systems. These NGOs are Brufotec, Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, Goods to give, Herw!n, Manufast, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Réseau IDée, Share food and Solsoc. Once again, we can gather the different points mentioned in this programme into 6 main themes: the collaboration NGOs maintain to work on sustainable food systems, the actions they implement regarding the consumers, the internal tools they use, their approach regarding the most marginalized actors, their actions regarding malnutrition and the influence they have at the political level.

4.2.1. Collaboration links

The first aspect of the collaboration is to see whether NGOs take part in a multilateral framework regarding sustainable food systems. It runs out that 6 of the 13 NGOs take part in such initiatives. Ecoconso and Espace Environnement are members of the Walloon network for sustainable food; Goods to give and Share food collaborate with organisations that collect

and redistribute unsold products (such as Happy Hours Market); Réseau IDée works with the magazine 'Symbioses'; Manufast created a cooperative for the integration of producers, transformers and clients (Sociago); and Espace Environnement also takes part to many initiatives such as the European project 'AD-In' or the work on the Charleroi food belt.

Then, the 5th programme advocates partnering in particular with the scientific and political worlds in order to make steady progress towards more sustainable food systems. Many NGOs follow this recommendation, be it on purpose or not. This is the case of Brufotec, Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Fairtrade Belgium, Herw!n, Manufast, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Solsoc. Among the political partners, we find the Walloon network for sustainable food (which is a member of the Walloon council for sustainable food), Wallonia, Brussels Environment, the Belgian Cabinet, local authorities, Enabel, the DGD, AFSCA, or trade unions. On the scientific side, the list is much shorter, since not a single NGO mentioned any scientific institution.

To put it in a nutshell, NGOs prove once again how important collaborative relationships are to them. The scientific world, on the other hand, is clearly left out, unfortunately, which suggests that they do not matter as much as they seem to think of themselves.

4.2.2. Consumer involvement

This section is going to deal, on the one hand, with the way NGOs involve the consumers in sustainable food systems, and on the other on the actions undertaken to educate them.

First, let us have a look at the extent to which consumers are involved in the actions of NGOs in relation to sustainable food systems. As a matter of fact, 6 NGOs out of 13 actually involve the consumers. The means used to do so are always the same: either through training (as it is the case for Espace Environnement, Fristouille and Réseau IDée) or through awareness campaign (as Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, and Fairtrade Belgium). In addition, Oxfam-Magasins du monde involves many volunteers for its "fair trade breakfasts".

Second, one of the general missions of the 5th programme is to ensure that consumers are educated about sustainable food systems. For that, it turns out that in addition to the 6

NGOs who met the previous criterion, which is obviously also meeting this one, 2 others also act for this education: Ecoconso and Share food.

To conclude, even if these criteria are not as popular as those on collaboration, they are still reasonably represented.

4.2.3. Internal tools

We now come to probably the most theoretical set of criteria. Here, we talk about indicators, innovative funding models and products, investment evaluation, and communication tools. These elements aim at evaluating the internal investment for sustainable food system implementation.

The first aspect is to learn whether or not NGOs measure their performances about their actions toward sustainable food systems. And the answer is quite balanced: 6 NGOs do use indicators while 7 do not. For the formers (Fairtrade Belgium, Goods to give, Herw!n, Manufast, Miel Maya Honing, and Oxfam-Magasins du monde), several indicators are generally taken into account, including: number of products redistributed, number of disadvantaged beneficiaries reached, number of distribution platforms, number of donators, number of producers in short circuits or number of tons of CO₂ spared in transportation.

Then, another element that is highlighted by the 5th programme is the development of innovative funding models and/or innovative products in order to improve sustainable food systems. First, for 8 of the NGOs, the answer is clear, they do not work with such models or products. Then, regarding the funding models, Goods to give asks a solidarity contribution of 10% of the value market of the product to each recipient partner association, and Manufast launched a crowdfunding campaign. Finally, the three remaining NGOs developed innovative products. Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Fairtrade Belgium implemented the fair trade model, and Solsoc follows the social and solidarity economy principles.

Thirdly, we go up a notch in complexity by now talking about the 5th programme's willingness for organisations to use concepts such as cost accounting to identify cost-effective investments in food and agriculture. Obviously, this criterion is beyond the scope of NGOs. Indeed, only one NGO can tick this box: Manufast, who uses Odoo to this end.

Finally, we will discuss the use of specific tools for communication about the sustainability of food products and services. In this respect, 6 out of the 13 NGOs of the sample propose such tools. Here, we talk mainly about labels that NGOs put forward. Thus, we find among the responses the Fairtrade label (Fairtrade Belgium), the fair trade label (Miel Maya Honing), the BIO label (Miel Maya Honing and Oxfam-Magasins du monde), the Oxfam brand (Oxfam-Magasins du monde), the WFTO and “Solidaire” label (Oxfam-Magasins du monde), and the "produits du terroir", "produits paysans" and "produits locaux" labels (Solsoc). In addition to that, Manufast uses the digital way to inform its customers and Ecoconso uses multiple certified environmental labels.

At the end of this set of criteria, it is quite tricky to take stock of the level of involvement of our sample toward the internal tools. Indeed, for almost every aspect, the level of implementation is just under half (except for the third which is clearly lower). So yes, less than half is not glorious, but if we look at it objectively, it still represents almost half of the NGOs that respect a particularly precise criterion involuntarily.

4.2.4. Focus on marginalized actors

The 5th programme places great emphasis on under-represented groups. We are going to have a look first at efforts NGOs make to involve the marginalized actors, and second at the actions they enforce to grant some market share to small suppliers in particular.

As far as the first point is concerned, no less than 11 NGOs are putting something in place (everyone apart from Brufotec and Fristouille). The list of these actions is so diverse that it would be too long to mention them all here. Thus, the list can be found in *appendix O*. What can be pointed out, however, is the surprisingly high commitment toward this criterion. Actually, this is even the main activity of several NGOs such as Manufast.

Regarding the second point dedicated to the granting of some market share to small suppliers, even if the commitment is a bit lower, it is still noteworthy: 9 out of 13 NGOs. Here again, the specific actions are displayed in *appendix O*. And once again, some NGOs have made it their hobbyhorse of this topic, such as Fairtrade Belgium or Oxfam-Magasins du monde.

4.2.5. Malnutrition

Another topic mentioned in the 5th programme is malnutrition. To fight against that, organizations should improve the production, distribution, and consumption of sustainable products on the one hand, and fight against malnutrition through school meals on the other.

Let us first have a look at the first aspect, the production, distribution, and consumption of sustainable products. 9 NGOs are involved in this action: Brufotec, Ecoconso, Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, Goods to give, Manufast, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Solsoc. Some of them even dedicate their action especially in this respect, such as Goods to give or Oxfam-Magasins du monde. Among the implemented actions, we also find consultancy activities (Brufotec), training (Fristouille), awareness-raising activities (Fairtrade Belgium), or the organisation of organic farmers' markets (Brufotec).

Then, the 5th programme wants to tackle malnutrition through school meals. It turns out that despite the specific nature of this criterion, 5 NGOs are actually active in the school world. Ecoconso does it through the Network of Walloon actors for sustainable food; Fristouille implements training in schools; Manufast delivers organic and small producer meals to schools, and Oxfam-Magasins de monde and Réseau IDée collaborate with schools about sustainable food.

It turns out that even if NGOs are less committed to malnutrition than to marginalized actors, they still have a particular attraction to the subject.

4.2.6. Influence at the political level

The last topic of the 5th programme that I would like to highlight is the way NGOs use their influence at the political level regarding sustainable food systems. Unfortunately, only a few of them are politically involved; 4 out of 13. Among these, we find Fairtrade Belgium (who uses its influence in relation to Living Wage, Human Rights Due Diligence and Unfair Trading Practices), Miel Maya Honing (who denounces bad beekeeping practices), Oxfam-Magasins du monde (who work on Unfair Trade Practices, Human Rights Due Diligence, and accord Mercosur) and Solsoc (who does a lot of different things, such as supporting rural trade unions or supporting mechanisms for consultation and impact of local public policies).

To conclude this programme in a few words, we can say that NGOs seem to be very much involved in sustainable food systems since nearly half of them are almost always able to answer positively to each criterion, without prior knowledge of these criteria.

4.3. Programme 6 – sustainable lifestyles and education

The 6th and last programme of the 10YFP about SCP is the one gathering the most NGOs, with 15 out of the 20 in the sample. These are Brufotec, Detic, Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, Goods to give, ISF, Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be, Quinoa and Réseau IDée.

The topics of this programme can be split into five main themes, namely the specific changes in consumer behaviour that can be promoted, the tools to achieve this, the transport, the product life cycle, and the internal tools used for sustainable lifestyles and education.

4.3.1. Change in consumer behaviour

This first theme will be structured in a slightly different way than the others. Here, we simply want to learn whether or not NGOs promote certain lifestyle and consumption habits. Thus, Table 12 showcases the NGOs who promote: reduction in the consumption of meat and animal products; growing of one's own food; a more responsible personal purchasing, slow fashion, a regular physical activity; sustainable investments; and local consumption.

The first thing to highlight while looking at Table 12 is that most NGOs are involved in at least one of the possible changes proposed by the 5th programme. Only Brufotec and Goods to give do not implement any of these changes. On the other hand, some are involved in a lot of these changes, as it is the case for Ecoconso, Nature attitude, Quinoa and Réseau IDée. On average, NGOs are involved in 3 of these 7 changes, which can be considered a good result, knowing that again, no NGO specifically aims to follow the 10YFP.

And secondly, we can also look at each change independently. While doing that, we clearly notice that some of the changes are way more popular among NGOs than others, as it is the case for “responsible personal purchasing” and “local consumption”. On the opposite, we can

see that “regular physical activity” does not seem to be an important topic for NGOs, as only one is actually implementing actions to promote it (Nature attitude).

NGOs	Meat & animal products	Growing of own food	Responsible personal purchasing	Slow fashion	Regular physical activity	Sustainable investments	Local consumption
Brufotec							
Detic			X				X
Ecoconso	X	X	X	X		X	X
Espace Environnement			X				X
Fairtrade Belgium				X			
Fristouille	X						X
Goods to give							
IEW			X			X	X
ISF		X					X
Miel Maya Honing							X
Nature attitude	X	X	X	X	X		X
Oxfam-Magasins du monde			X	X		X	X
Papier.be			X				
Quinoa	X	X	X	X		X	X
Réseau IDée	X	X	X	X		X	X
Total NGOs	5	5	9	6	1	5	11

Table 12 – List of changes in customer behaviour promoted by each NGO

4.3.2. Tools for change in consumer behaviour

Now that we know in which changes NGOs are mainly involved, let us have a look at the tools NGOs can implement in order to promote these changes, and more specifically, the tools used to integrate sustainable lifestyle principles and practices in society, to spread best practices regarding sustainable lifestyles, to give individuals the means for sustainable lifestyle adoption, and to educate young people about sustainable lifestyles. Given the results of the previous section, it is most likely that such tools are indeed implemented.

First, it turns out that every NGO but 2 (Brufotec and Goods to give) work on the integration of sustainable lifestyle principles and practices in society. Among the means put forward, we find consulting activities (Detic), awareness-raising and communication activities (Detic, Ecoconso, ISF), charter development (Detic), training (Fristouille, ISF, Quinoa, Réseau IDée) or thematic files (IEW). The public concerned by these tools is very broad. We find the school world (Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Réseau IDée), industries and companies (Detic, Ecoconso, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde),

the general public (Detic, Ecoconso, Nature Attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde), administrations (Ecoconso, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Réseau IDée), marginalized actors (Nature attitude) and medias (Réseau IDée).

Second, the spread of good practices is also very much developed by NGOs, since 11 of them are implementing something in this respect. Only Brufotec, Fairtrade Belgium, Goods to give, and IEW are not concerned by this. The tools implemented are the following: social media (Ecoconso, Réseau IDée), Brussels Environment publications (Fristouille), the “Education for Global Citizenship and Solidarity” programme (ISF), training and animations (ISF, Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Quinoa), awareness-raising activities (ISF, Oxfam-Magasins du monde) and practical information sheets (Miel Maya Honing).

Third, the 5th programme also tries to give individuals opportunities and means to adopt these sustainable lifestyles. Without entering too much into the details, only 2 NGOs are not developing this aspect of sustainable lifestyles (Papier.be and Goods to give), but otherwise, this is also a very much implemented topic. As a tool to achieve this objective, NGOs are unanimous that training and awareness-raising activities are the most useful.

Fourth, a strong emphasis is placed on the education of young people regarding sustainable lifestyles. In fact, this is already the second programme in which the theme of youth is present, which shows well its importance in the 10YFP. Here, 8 NGOs show an interest in the education of young people: Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, ISF, Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be and Quinoa. Strangely though, these are not all the same ones as for the school meals topic in the 5th programme. This is probably due to the fact that for some NGOs, working in a school environment does not necessarily mean working directly with children. In any case, we still have these 8 NGOs who work for the education of young people, and this again mainly through training and awareness-raising activities, sometimes directly in schools.

To conclude this section, obviously, it is important for NGOs to find ways to change consumers' habits towards more sustainable lifestyles. This hypothesis had a good chance of being verified in view of the results of the previous section, but in this case, they even went beyond expectations. Indeed, there was almost unanimous consent for all four topics.

4.3.3. Transport

The next theme of the 6th programme is transport, including public transport and the so-called “clean vehicles”. The aim here is to discover how NGOs are working to promote such means of transport. For both aspects, we will see that there are two ways of understanding these actions: internal or external. This means that either NGOs promote the use of these means of transportation inside their organization, typically for their members, or outside their organisations, to the general public.

First, 7 NGOs out of 15 implement actions regarding the promotion of public transports. Among these, 4 decided to focus on the support for public transport costs for members, either by taking part in or by covering all of the costs into account (ISF, Detic, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, and Quinoa). For the 3 others (Ecoconso, Espace Environnement and IEW), they focus on training, awareness-raising, and animations activities to encourage the general public to switch to public transport.

Second, regarding the clean vehicles, one NGO is active internally (Detic), while 3 act more externally (Ecoconso, IEW, and Nature attitude). As far as Detic is concerned, it put bicycles at disposal of the members, and also promote homeworking. Then Ecoconso and IEW promote clean vehicles through information, articles, and animations. Finally, Nature attitude goes a step further by promoting a sobriety approach, by first promoting local trade and the relocation of everyday activities.

Even if the number of NGOs involved in this theme is not that high, the actions taken are particularly binding and also quite specific, which put this number in perspective.

4.3.4. Product life cycle

Then, let us have a look at a particularly important topic: the product life cycle. Why is it so essential? Because this is the only topic of the 10YFP for which an indicator has been implemented by Belgium regarding SCP. Remember, in the second chapter of the literature review, we learned that countries had the responsibility to develop their own indicators for SDG12. One in the three of Belgium is “the recycling of waste”, which is part of this product life cycle theme. Here, two topics are covered: waste sorting and single-use products.

First, the 6th programme wants to promote organizations to act for waste sorting. In this respect, 10 NGOs are developing such actions: Brufotec (via training), Detic (via its communication and its position of founder of Valipac and FostPlus), Ecoconso (via articles, animations, and calls for projects), Espace Environnement (via prevention and composting activities), ISF (via waste collection, sorting and recycling projects), Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde (via awareness-raising activities), Papier.be (via its communication), Quinoa (via its local alternatives project and training) and Réseau IDée.

Then NGOs should also work to condemn single-use products. 7 NGOs actually follow this recommendation. The main actions undertaken in this respect are: initiate a pilot project to reduce single-use plastics (Detic), proposing animations and articles (Ecoconso), providing advice (Espace Environnement), promoting circular economy (IEW), favouring a zero-waste mindset and raising awareness about the impact of individual doses (Nature attitude), focusing on sustainable consumption (Oxfam-Magasins du monde) and using reusable tableware at public events (Quinoa).

4.3.5. Internal tools

Finally, as it was the case in the 5th programme, the 6th programme also promotes the use of more technical tools to measure and assess the progress in sustainable lifestyles and education. Thus, this section will look at the development of tools to promote sustainable lifestyle, measurement methods, and common frameworks linked to sustainable lifestyles.

The development of tools aiming at promoting sustainable lifestyles is the first topic. 11 NGOs out of the 15 are implementing such tools indeed³⁴. Since a lot of tools have already been highlighted earlier, we will here focus only on the ones that have not been mentioned yet, namely web site edition (Detic), online tutorials and videos (Ecoconso, Fristouille), a platform of local producers (Nature attitude), didactic gardens in permaculture (Nature attitude), attendance at exhibitions (Oxfam-Magasins du monde), virtual trunks (Réseau IDée)

³⁴ These NGOs are: Detic, Ecoconso, Espace Environnement, Fairtrade Belgium, Fristouille, ISF, Nature attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Papier.be, Quinoa and Réseau IDée.

and documentation centres (Réseau IDée). The least we can say is that NGOs do not lack imagination when it comes to promoting their ideas.

Secondly, it is about measuring the impact of all these actions. 11 NGOs use specific methods to do it, and most of the time, they do not use just one, as it can be seen in *P*. Once again, there is a whole range of tools, it is therefore too long to go through everything. We will therefore be satisfied with the fact that this quantity proves once again that practically all NGOs are active in the field of sustainable lifestyles.

Finally, organizations are asked to work towards a common framework of understanding for sustainable living. This information can also be found in *Appendix P* because, again, there is too much insight to describe everything. However, it should be highlighted that 12 NGOs are working with such common frameworks; all of them except Brufotec and Goods to give. This is maybe the ultimate evidence of the involvement of NGOs toward sustainable lifestyles. This high number should be taken with a grain of salt, as the presence of some irrelevant answers suggests that the question was not clear and understandable enough for NGOs.

4.4. Conclusion and limits

This last section of the practical analysis aims at determining whether or not, with all the input of the three programmes, NGOs play a role toward SCP in Belgium. To do that, here is a table gathering every main theme of the 3 programmes (Table 13), and where NGOs are given a colour according to their commitment to each theme. Green means that they act for or correspond to at least half of the criteria proposed by the 10YFP for this theme. Orange means that they act for or correspond to at least one criterion, but less than half of them. Red means they are not acting for or corresponding to any of the criteria of the theme. And grey means they are not involved in the program itself.

From a purely analytical point of view, when computing the percentage of green cases for each programme, the results are quite homogeneous: 60% for the 3rd programme, and 67% for the 5th and 6th programmes. These percentages are calculated without taking into account the grey cases since they are not supposed to be active in the programme in question.

NGOs	Product life extension	Information provided	Customer relationship	Distribution channels	Collaboration links	Action implemented	Internal tools	Marginalized actors	Malnutrition	Political involvement	Consumer behaviour	Tools for behaviour change	Transport	Product lifecycle	Internal tools
	Programme 3				Programme 5						Programme 6				
Brufotec															
Close the Gap															
Detic															
Ecoconso															
Espace Environnement															
Fairtrade Belgium															
Fristouille															
Goods to give															
Herw!n															
IEW															
ISF															
Manufast															
Miel Maya Honing															
Nature attitude															
Oxfam-Magasins du monde															
Papier.be															
Quinoa															
Réseau-IDée															
Share food															
Solsoc															
Total	5	8	7	13	12	8	6	12	10	4	5	14	8	11	12
Percentage of "green" cases	60%				67%						67%				

Table 13 – involvement of NGOs regarding the main topics of Programmes 3, 5 and 6 of the 10YFP.

What does this percentage mean? Basically, it means that without even being aware of the existence of this 10YFP, which includes the most crucial issues regarding SCP, Belgian NGOs active in SCP meet more than half of the 10YFP criteria. Thus, they have a strong positive impact on SCP in Belgium. How do we know where these percentages stand compared to other SDGs or other organisations? Even if it is not possible to know without a benchmark, for this analysis, more than 50% is considered as a good score. Therefore, we can say that NGOs score particularly well regarding SCP in Belgium, and thus have a big positive impact on it.

Two other aspects to take into account, and which comfort us in this result is the accuracy of the programmes' topics, coupled with the small size and level of specialisation of NGOs. Indeed, these aspects are clearly obstacles to achieving such a score since the perfect fit is even less likely to be reach. The 60 and 67% thus carry even more weight knowing this.

Looking more specifically at the three programmes, we can see that Programme 3 about consumer information about SCP is a bit weaker than the two others. One explanation for that could be that some of the NGOs do not propose any consumption product, and thus do not feel legitimate to talk about certain topics, as it is the case for Ecoconso or Fristouille.

Then, considering the NGOs, some are clearly more involved than others, as it is the case for Oxfam-Magasins du monde, who checks each and every box. Ecoconso, Fairtrade Belgium, Miel Maya Honing, Nature attitude, and Quinoa are not bad at all either. Returning to Table 4, it is interesting to note that the size of the NGO does not seem to play a particular role in meeting the criteria. Indeed, Nature attitude and Miel Maya Honing are small NGOs while Oxfam-Magasins du monde is a big one.

With regard to the content of the topics, it should be pointed out that they are not all suitable for NGOs. For example, the principles of cost accounting seem to be beyond the competence of NGOs, especially small ones. Moreover, some criteria do not apply to developing countries, such as clean vehicles. These elements should be taken into account while evaluating the percentages as well. What should also be noted is the fact that NGOs are much more into action, and much less into measurement, reporting and indicators, which are often implemented only by obligation in order to receive funding.

Now let us take a more general look using the theoretical elements. First, the literature review pointed out a big promotion of circular economy at the Belgian level. The fact is that not a single NGO explicitly mentioned the expression “circular economy”. However, a lot of them are actually working on it, even if they do not specifically name it. Among these NGOs, we can mention Close the gap, Goods to give or Nature attitude. In particular, NGOs are particularly active in recycling, mostly through awareness raising activities, which shows that NGOs more than likely play a role in Belgium's good recycling results. The same applies in the reduction of the consumption habits, which are part of the circular economy theory, and in which NGOs are quite active as well. However, the results at national level do not appear to be as conclusive at the moment. What is certain, though, is that for NGOs, circular economy is more about a whole philosophy rather than an add-on activity. It seems so innate for them that it does not even seem important to mention it. This shows one of the big differences between the non-profit world and the business world. This also brings up the fact that NGOs certainly do not need the SDGs to act in favour of sustainable development.

Secondly, the importance of the collaboration for NGOs mentioned in the literature review is indeed proving to be a reality for Belgian NGOs, as already mentioned. Indeed, the variety and number of stakeholders with which NGOs have links in reality shows their dependence on them. However, it should be noted that the academic world has a very limited place. Even if no reason is given either on the academic side or on the NGO side, the strong links maintained by NGOs with many sectoral, consumer and governmental associations may provide an answer, as they take on the role of academic researchers and specialists.

Then, we mentioned in the theory a study demonstrating on the one hand the rather low awareness of NGOs toward the SDGs' national implementing plans. In practice, this fits quite well with the rather superficial commitment of NGOs toward the SDGs. On the other hand, 70% of the NGOs still take the SDGs into account, even if it is superficial, and 93% of the respondents know about the SDGs. This means that even if this awareness is not specifically directed toward the national plan, NGOs and their members are really well aware of the SDGs.

Finally, as far as the area of improvement toward the SDGs mentioned in the literature review is concerned, the contribution of NGOs to them is quite blended. First, regarding the sharing of knowledge, the access of smallholders to the market, and the reinforcing of the innovation systems, it makes no doubt that NGOs are playing a positive role in their improvement. Then, NGOs are much weaker in implementing strategies to taking action, in adapting and improving funding structures, or in using social security tools to improve productivity and revenues. This is where we realise that the improvements that need to be made in Belgium can also be directed at NGOs, because they are lagging behind in a number of areas. At the same time, we have the right to ask ourselves whether it is really necessary for them to make these changes when they are already achieving excellent results in terms of sustainable development. This suggests that these improvements are not primarily of concern to NGOs, but rather to companies, since these actions would be a first step towards a sustainable transformation of their activities for them.

A lot of elements have been brought here, but it is crucial to take a step back and outline some limits that must be taken into account in the previous statements. Firstly, some themes are more specific or harder to implement than others. This might lead to disproportionality between the weight of the themes, with some boxes "easier" to check than others.

Then, the decision of only considering only three of the 6 programmes of the 10YFP might alter the results. The choice was between omitting information about the SCP or adding irrelevant information because related to other SDGs. I opted for the first option.

Third, as already discussed, the dependence of the NGOs toward governmental funding help is obvious. Government bodies thus have a big role in the NGOs activities, which is at odds with the requirement that NGOs be independent of government. On the other hand, it should be reminded that most of the NGOs in the sample do not necessarily define themselves as such, but rather as non-profit organisations. Whether this is intended or not, they thus take the necessary distance from this condition.

The last limitation is that the topics themselves have been chosen arbitrarily according to the information found on the official 10YFP web site (U. N. Environment Programme, 2017). The reason for that is the lack of any official list of criteria, mostly due to the independent aspect of the programmes and the lack of uniformization mentioned in the first chapter. In the same range of ideas, the categorization of the topics into themes has also been made on a purely arbitrary basis.

All this is to say that although NGOs contribute fully to the SDGs by their nature and actions, which are fully in line with what the SDGs advocate, the goals are not of much use to them in taking action for sustainable development. Indeed, it is in their nature to do so, and for the most part they have been doing just fine without the targets since before they were created. In fact, all signs point to the fact that the SDGs are more of a tool to convert sceptical organisations to sustainable development and to accompany them in their transition, but they are not very useful when organisations are already intrinsically involved in all these actions, as is the case for NGOs. As a result, NGOs play a very important role in the transition to sustainable development, which is the aim of the SDGs, but do not have a serious role in the implementation of this particular framework, as they neither do not really use it, or need it.

In conclusion, to answer the research question in a nutshell, let us say that Belgian NGOs have a big role to play in the outcomes intended by SDG12, but that from the point of view of the use of SDG12, their role is much more limited.

CONCLUSIONS

Research question and action plan

The objective of this dissertation was to study the role played by Belgian NGOs in the implementation of the SDG12 about sustainable consumption and production. To a lesser extent, this also provided answers to secondary questions such as the contribution of Belgian NGOs to the realisation of SDG12 at the global level, the impact of the use of SDG12 on the activities of these NGOs or the use of a framework such as the SDGs to deal with SCP.

Obviously, three major concepts are thus at the basis of this research: the SDG framework, SDG12 in particular, and Belgian NGOs. With this approach in mind, I developed a theoretical analysis based on theoretical elements and official studies on the one hand, and a qualitative field study to put the theoretical results into perspective on the other.

Main findings

The 17 SDGs were created in 2015 by the UN as a result of the international community's desire to have a measurable, clear, action-oriented and widely accessible global framework. Although it was theoretically likely that Belgian NGOs would feel attracted to such a framework corresponding to their values, in practice, it is not so straightforward. Admittedly, sustainable development is most often at the basis of the activities of the NGOs in the sample of 20 NGOs who agreed to take part in the research, but involvement in the SDGs remains very superficial, mainly based on an assimilation approach. However, the SDGs are often too complex and restrictive for small Belgian NGOs, and on the other hand, the very concept of the goals is questioned by not less than a quarter of the NGOs, criticising their overly capitalist approach. Moreover, the use of this framework seems to be a must for receiving funding.

Thus, 70% of the NGOs in the sample do indeed use the SDGs in their activities, which shows the high awareness level about the SDGs in NGOs, but very few of them are deeply

implementing them, as the U.N. advocate's . However, this does not mean that NGOs have no impact on the actual results targeted by the goals. Indeed, it turns out that they simply did not wait for the SDGs to undertake actions that the goals advocate. Therefore, NGOs are indeed raising public awareness and holding companies accountable for their actions, as advised by the SDGs. Simply, NGOs do all this naturally, they don't need a framework telling them how to do it. One caveat is that the NGOs in the sample make very little use of their political influence, contrary to what the theoretical research suggests.

Returning to the mere implementation of the SDGs, NGOs are particularly active in one area in particular: collaboration with other stakeholders. Even if the stakeholders themselves are not necessarily all the same between theory and practice, this common feature suggests a clear point of compatibility between NGOs and the SDGs. Unlike the subject of funding, where the theory touts an arsenal of funding support for the implementation of the goals that is not valued at all in practice by Belgian NGOs. This is quite surprising given the large number of sources of funding sought by NGOs, as both theory and practice attest. We would indeed be entitled to think that if multiple national and European sources of funding are called for, why not global ones? Especially since many NGOs claim to use the SDGs specifically for the access they provide to funding.

For multiple reasons such as the increase in consumption in developed countries or the low level of commitment toward SCP in Belgium for now despite the great deal of effort they put in it, I chose to focus my research on SDG12 about sustainable consumption and production. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, there is no source that explicitly addresses the link between this goal and the associative world. However, there is a global framework of action aiming at enhancing international cooperation toward SCP, and which is theoretically applicable to any type of organisation, including NGOs: the 10 Years Framework of Programmes (10YFP) the U.N. proposes. Three of these programmes are particularly interesting and are therefore used to assess the level of commitment of the NGOs in the sample toward SCP: programme 3 about consumer information for SCP; programme 5 about sustainable food systems; and programme 6 about sustainable lifestyles and education.

Note that none of the NGOs in the sample use this 10YFP, and very few of them use another framework. But even without being aware of the 10YFP, my research shows that 60% of NGOs with a link to programme 3 meet more than half of the criteria proposed by the

10YFP. For programmes 5 and 6, this percentage even rises to 67%. This demonstrates that Belgian NGOs active in SCP do not need a specific framework to positively impact the most pressing SCP issues according to the U.N. . A clarification to be made here is that these results do not depend on the size of the NGOs, which means that regardless of size, any organisation is capable of addressing urgent SCP issues.

Now, looking at each programme independently, the research shows that some topics are covered more often than others. In the third programme, we observe that providing consistent information regarding SCP and maintaining consumer relationship is of greater importance to NGOs than developing strong communication channels or product-life extension. As far as the 5th programme is concerned, the theme of collaboration is still very much alive among NGOs, as well as the one of the involvement of marginalized actors into sustainable food systems. Which is a good thing, as it is one of the areas of improvement highlighted by the scientific world. Then, some topics are fairly represented; though not in a remarkable way, such as the implementation of actions aiming at involving the customer or at tackling malnutrition, or the use of internal tools. Finally, as aforementioned, the topic of the political influence remains still very weakly addressed by Belgian NGOs. As for programme 6, unanimous consent is present for the use of tools designed to change consumer behaviour, and only slightly fewer NGOs are also working to develop internal tools for sustainable lifestyles and education improvement. Both include elements of innovation systems, which are very much promoted by the scientists. And lastly, some topics are less carried out by the NGOs in the sample, such as the promotion of alternative or greener means of transportation, or of changes in consumers' behaviour, as well as the use of product life cycle principles.

It can be inferred from these results that NGOs are generally more inclined to invest in action-oriented rather than administrative criteria. This reinforces the argument that NGOs are turning their backs on the SDGs due to the time implementation and monitoring take.

With regard to areas of improvement, Belgian NGOs are very active in smallholders' access to the market and in the development of innovation systems, as explained above. However, there is still a long way to go for NGOs, as they are not working on the implementation of strategies, the adaptation and improvement of financing structures, and the development of social security tools. However, this statement needs to be put into perspective, as NGOs are not as relevant to these issues as companies are. In my opinion,

NGOs. The only thing that NGOs could do to get a foothold in these issues would be to increase their involvement with companies to put more pressure on them. This would be an indirect but potentially game-changing influence.

To conclude in a few words, I would like to say that Belgian NGOs have indeed a great role to play in improving the SCP, and thus SDG12, through their daily activities, as they correspond particularly well with the elements advocated by the 10YFP. Moreover, in addition to their individual role, NGOs also have an equally important collective responsibility through all the collaborative links they maintain, whether to develop their own actions or to assist and support other actors in their transition to more SCP. On the other hand, the role of NGOs in the implementation of SDG12 remains very poor and superficial, for the simple reason that NGOs do not need to be guided along the path of sustainable development; they know perfectly well how to do it without being told how. Thus, in my view, the U.N.'s claim that the SDGs and the 10YFP in particular are perfectly suitable for any organisation is wrong, as Belgian NGOs voluntarily deviate from them, not least because of a lack of fit between their activities and the requirements of these frameworks.

Suggestions for future research

During this work, several elements emerged as possible avenues for future research.

Firstly, it is interesting to simply look at the other SDGs to approach NGO involvement from another angle, and thus understand the influence of the business sector.

Then, the aim here is to understand the role that NGOs play in the achievement of SDG12. Future research could look at the relative influence of NGOs compared to other organisations or other NGOs, for example according to their size or country of action.

Third, NGOs active in developing countries criticized SDG12 for its low adaptability to low-income environments. A definite step forward could therefore be made in seeking and improving the unconditional application of SDG12.

Finally, since NGOs have an impressive number of collaborative links, it might be interesting to reflect on the extent to which NGOs could use or are using these links to respond to SDG17: partnerships for the goals.

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APPENDIXES

A. Organs and programmes of the UN.

The UN is constructed around six main organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. The General Assembly gathers members of the 163 Member States to deliberate and represent and make policies in the UN. Then, the Security Council is responsible for international peacekeeping security. The third organ, the Economic and Social Council, aims at coordinate, discuss and make recommendations about the social, environmental, and economic issues. This organ is also the one responsible for the implementation of the international Sustainable Development Goals (see section 1.2.). After that, the Trusteeship Council's objective is to supervise and prepare some territories for independence and autonomy. Then, the main judicial organ of the UN is the International Court of Justice. And finally, the Secretariat is in charge of the different programs and policies administration, with, as leader of the UN administration, the General Secretary, the actual one being Antonio Guterres (United Nations, n.d.-a).

In addition to these six organs, multiples programs, funds, and specialized organizations, with each, their administration and budget, constitute the United Nations. To mention just a few, the United Nations Environment Programme, the UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization or the International Trade Center are some of those programs (United Nations, n.d.-a).

B. Major differences between the MDGs and the SDGs

- The SDGs act at a much larger scale than the MDGs. Indeed, the SDGs cover a broad range of social, environmental, and economic issues where the MDGs mostly focused on the social aspect (ONU, n.d.; Wysokińska, 2017).
- The SDGs aim at dealing with root causes, not just symptoms of those problems, and emphasize the interactions between them (ONU, n.d.; Wysokińska, 2017).
- Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are characterized by a much more international and collaborative aspect, whether it is for the negotiations for the implementation of the goals, which implied the 193 UN state members, the civil society, and a high representation of the scientific and corporate world, whereas the MDGs were created by a group of experts behind closed doors, or for the implementation of the goals, for which every single country of the world is expected to act equally, and not as a “donor-recipient” model between developed and developing countries (Division de la communication stratégique & Département de l’information, 2015; ONU, n.d.; Williams et al., 2019; Wysokińska, 2017).

C. Official list of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts³⁵

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

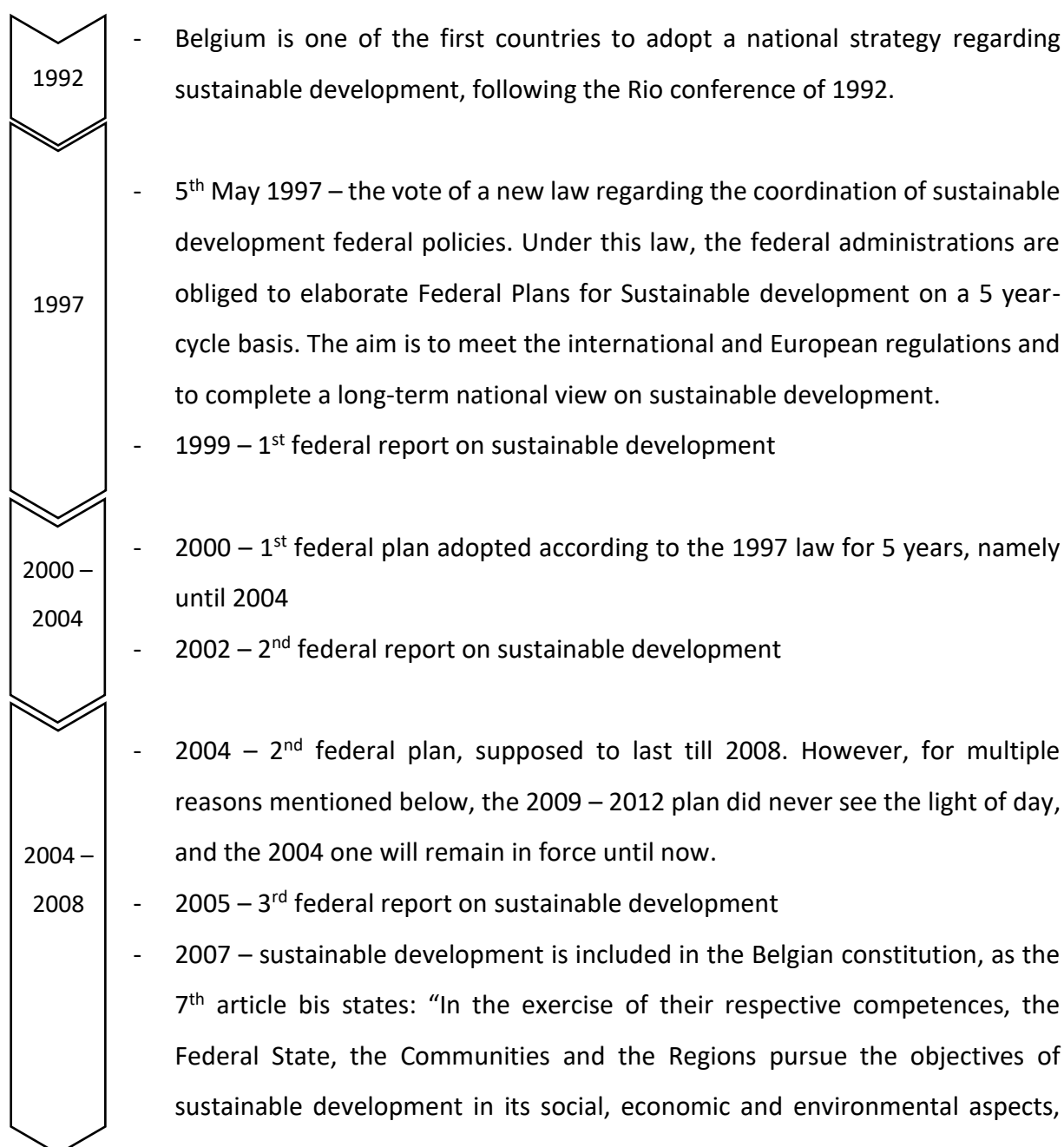
³⁵ Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

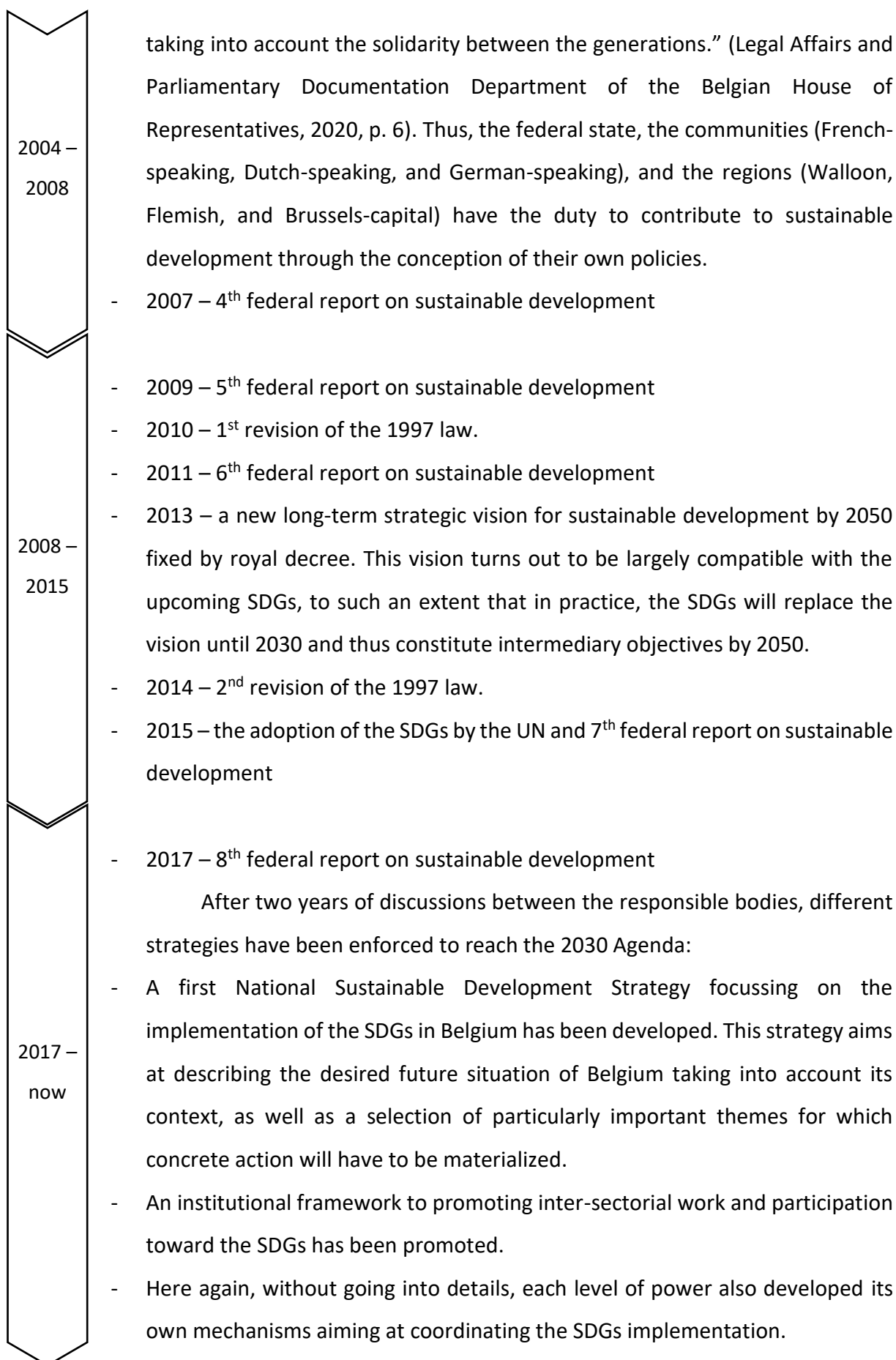
D. SDGs funding mechanisms

- Already existing before the implementation of the SDGs, the **Official Development Assistance**, launched in 1962, is a governmental aid aiming at promoting the economic development of developing countries (Organisation for Economic & Co-operation and Development, n.d.). Even if this assistant will not suffice to fund the development targeted by the goals, it will remain effective and play a crucial role in the attraction of other forms of fundings (Wysokińska, 2017).
- The **Action Platform Financial Innovation** is a platform initiated by the UN Global Compact gathering finance practitioners and experts from various disciplines to develop innovative financial instruments that would ultimately attract institutional investors (United Nations, 2020b).
- The **Addis Adeba Action Agenda** was enforced during the third international conference for the financing for development in Ethiopia (Division de la communication stratégique & Département de l'information, 2015). This agenda provides a global framework gathering about a hundred measures aiming at developing sustainable finance and development. The goal is to implement policies that would increase financial investments for the private and the public sector (United Nations, n.d.-b).
- As previously mentioned, the **private sector** handles trillions of dollars around the world, and as the people in charge of such a huge amount of money, the Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) plays a crucial role in the funding of the SDGs (United Nations, 2020b). This is why the UN Global Compact called for a **CFO Taskforce for the SDGs**. The functioning of this platform would be quite similar to the one of the Action Platform Financial Innovation in the sense that it would be a place of mutual sharing between CFOs and multi-field specialists. However, the final objective would be somehow different in the sense that here, mostly private capitals and investments toward sustainable development are to be discussed (United Nations, 2020b).
- The collaborative movement **Positive Impact Initiative** has been launched by the United Nations Environment Programme - Finance Initiative. It consists of a framework aiming at identifying, promoting, and communicating investment positive impact to the attention of financial institutions (United Nations, 2020b).

- At a national level, the Belgium legislation also contributes the SDG funding. Indeed, since 2013, the **Institut de la Francophonie pour le Développement Durable IFDD** grants subsidies to any organization promoting sustainable projects (Task force développement durable, 2019).

E. Evolution of the legal framework on sustainable development in Belgium from 1992







- A specific working group has been gathered by the Inter-Federal Statistical Institute with the objective of systematically monitor the progress made on the SDGs
- An SDG Voices Campaign including civil society organizations, private sector, and local authorities, as well as an SDG charter for international development have been proposed to raise public and private awareness about the SDGs.
- 2019 – 9th federal report on sustainable development

F. 2017 review of Belgium's progress towards SDGs – 34 indicators

SDG ¹	Indicateur	Domaine	Objectif / cible	Évaluation
	1. Risque de pauvreté ou d'exclusion sociale ²	Humanité	10,55 %	
	2. Surendettement des ménages	Humanité		
	3. Obésité des adultes	Humanité		
	4. Surface en agriculture biologique	Humanité		
	5. Décès prématurés dus aux maladies chroniques	Humanité	68,6 par 100 000 <65	
	6. Fumeurs quotidiens	Humanité	13,1 %	
	7. Décrochage scolaire	Humanité	0 % (18-24)	
	8. Formation tout au long de la vie	Humanité		
	9. Ecart salarial entre les hommes et les femmes	Humanité	0 %	
	10. Femmes parlementaires	Humanité	50 %	
	11. Nitrates dans les eaux de rivières	Planète		
	12. Consommation d'eau	Planète		
	13. Energies renouvelables ²	Prospérité	18 %	
	14. Intensité en énergie ²	Prospérité	79,9 tep/mn €	
	15. Taux de chômage	Prospérité		
	16. Jeunes non scolarisés et sans emploi ni formation	Prospérité		
	17. Transport de personnes en voiture ²	Prospérité	65 %	
	18. Recherche et développement	Prospérité	3 % PIB	
	19. Indice de Gini ²	Prospérité		
	20. Risque de pauvreté ²	Prospérité		
	21. Logement inadéquat	Prospérité		
	22. Exposition aux particules fines	Prospérité	10 µg PM _{2,5} /m ³	
	23. Consommation intérieure de matières	Planète		
	24. Déchets municipaux	Planète		
	25. Victimes de catastrophes naturelles	Planète	1,97 par 100 000	
	26. Emissions de gaz à effet de serre non-ETS ²	Planète	51,8 Mt CO ₂ -eq.	
	27. Pêche durable	Planète	100 %	
	28. Surface marine en zone Natura 2000	Planète	10 %	
	29. Surface terrestre en zone Natura 2000	Planète		
	30. Populations d'oiseaux des champs	Planète		
	31. Sentiment de sécurité dans l'espace public	Paix		
	32. Confiance dans les institutions	Paix		
	33. Aide publique au développement	Partenariats	0,7 % PIB	
	34. Aide publique au développement aux pays les moins avancés	Partenariats	50 % ADP	

G. 2019 review of Belgium's progress towards SDGs – 51 indicators

SDG	Indicateur	Composante	Objectif	Évaluation
1 – Pas de pauvreté – Éliminer la pauvreté sous toutes ses formes et partout dans le monde				
	1. Risque de pauvreté ou d'exclusion sociale*	Sociale	10,55%	–
	2. Très faible intensité de travail*	Sociale	↘	+
	3. Surendettement des ménages	Sociale	↘	–
2 – Faim "zéro" – Éliminer la faim, assurer la sécurité alimentaire, améliorer la nutrition et promouvoir l'agriculture durable				
	4. Obésité des adultes	Sociale	↘	0
	5. Consommation de viande	Environnementale	↘	+
	6. Surface en agriculture biologique	Environnementale	↗	+
3 – Bonne santé et bien-être – Permettre à tous de vivre en bonne santé et promouvoir le bien-être de tous à tout âge				
	7. Espérance de vie en bonne santé	Sociale	↗	0
	8. Décès prématurés dus aux maladies chroniques	Sociale	68,6 par 100.000 <65	–
	9. Fumeurs quotidiens	Sociale	13,1%	–
4 – Éducation de qualité – Assurer l'accès de tous à une éducation de qualité, sur un pied d'égalité, et promouvoir les possibilités d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie				
	10. Décrochage scolaire	Sociale	0% (18-24)	–
	11. Formation tout au long de la vie	Sociale	↗	0
	12. Maîtrise insuffisante de la lecture	Sociale	↘	0
5 – Égalité entre les sexes – Parvenir à l'égalité des sexes et autonomiser toutes les femmes et les filles				
	13. Écart salarial entre les hommes et les femmes	Sociale	0%	–
	14. Inactivité professionnelle en raison de responsabilités familiales	Sociale	↘	–
	15. Femmes parlementaires	Sociale	50%	–
6 – Eau propre et assainissement – Garantir l'accès de tous à l'eau et à l'assainissement et assurer une gestion durable des ressources en eau				
	16. Nitrates dans les eaux de rivières	Environnementale	↘	+
	17. Nitrates dans les eaux souterraines	Environnementale	↘	–
	18. Consommation d'eau	Environnementale	↘	+
7 – Énergie propre et d'un coût abordable – Garantir l'accès de tous à des services énergétiques fiables, durables et modernes, à un coût abordable				
	19. Logements sans chauffage adéquat	Sociale	0%	–
	20. Énergies renouvelables*	Environnementale	18,3%	–
	21. Productivité de l'énergie	Economique	11,1 €/kep	–
8 – Travail décent et croissance économique – Promouvoir une croissance économique soutenue, partagée et durable, le plein emploi productif et un travail décent pour tous				
	22. Taux de chômage	Sociale	↘	0
	23. Jeunes non scolarisés et sans emploi ni formation	Sociale	↘	+
	24. Accidents de travail	Sociale	0	–
9 – Industrie, innovation et infrastructure – Bâtir une infrastructure résiliente, promouvoir une industrialisation durable qui profite à tous et encourager l'innovation				
	25. Transport de personnes en voiture*	Economique	67,4%	–
	26. Transport de marchandises par la route*	Economique	62,9%	–
	27. Recherche et développement	Economique	3% PIB	+

SDG	Indicateur	Composante	Objectif	Évaluation
10 – Inégalités réduites – Réduire les inégalités dans les pays et d'un pays à l'autre				
	28. Risque de pauvreté	Sociale	↘	–
	29. Intensité du risque de pauvreté	Sociale	↘	0
	30. Inégalités de revenu: Indice de Gini	Sociale	→/↘	+
11 – Villes et communautés durables – Faire en sorte que les villes et les établissements humains soient ouverts à tous, sûs, résilients et durables				
	31. Logement inadéquat	Sociale	↘	–
	32. Exposition aux particules fines	Environnementale	10 µg PM _{2.5} /m ³	+
	33. Pollution sonore	Environnementale	0	–
12 – Consommation et production responsables – Établir des modes de consommation et de production durables				
	34. Consommation intérieure de matières	Economique	↘	+
	35. Déchets dangereux	Environnementale	↘	0
	36. Recyclage des déchets	Economique	↗	+
13 – Mesures relatives à la lutte contre les changements climatiques – Prendre d'urgence des mesures pour lutter contre les changements climatiques et leurs répercussions				
	37. Emissions de gaz à effet de serre non-ETS*	Environnementale	51,2 Mt CO ₂ -eq.	–
	38. Victimes de catastrophes naturelles	Sociale	1,98 par 100.000	0
	39. Contribution au fonds climat international	Gouvernance	↗	0
14 – Vie aquatique – Conserver et exploiter de manière durable les océans, les mers et les ressources marines aux fins du développement durable				
	40. Pollution aux hydrocarbures	Environnementale	0	+
	41. Pêche durable	Environnementale	100%	–
	42. Surface marine en zone Natura 2000	Environnementale	10%	+
15 – Vie terrestre – Préserver et restaurer les écosystèmes terrestres, en veillant à les exploiter de façon durable, gérer durablement les forêts, lutter contre la désertification, enrayer et inverser le processus de dégradation des terres et mettre fin à l'appauvrissement de la biodiversité				
	43. Surface terrestre en zone Natura 2000	Environnementale	↗	0
	44. Forêts avec le label FSC	Environnementale	↗	+
	45. Populations d'oiseaux des champs	Environnementale	↗	–
16 – Paix, justice et institutions efficaces – Promouvoir l'avènement de sociétés pacifiques et ouvertes à tous aux fins du développement durable, assurer l'accès de tous à la justice et mettre en place, à tous les niveaux, des institutions efficaces, responsables et ouvertes à tous				
	46. Sentiment de sécurité dans l'espace public	Sociale	↗	+
	47. Indice de perception de corruption	Gouvernance	↗	0
	48. Confiance dans les institutions	Gouvernance	↗	0
17 – Partenariats pour la réalisation des objectifs – Renforcer les moyens de mettre en œuvre le Partenariat mondial pour le développement durable et le revitaliser				
	49. Aide publique au développement	Gouvernance	0,7% rmb	–
	50. Aide publique au développement aux pays les moins avancés	Gouvernance	50% APD	–
	51. Dette publique*	Economique	↘	0

* Évaluation des données de l'Indicateur 51.

H. Official list of the targets and indicators of SDG12

Goal description	Target	Description	Indicator
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.	12.1	Implement the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries.	12.1.1 Number of countries developing, adopting or implementing policy instruments aimed at supporting the shift to sustainable consumption and production
	12.2	By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.	12.2.1 Material footprint, material footprint per capita and material footprint per GDP 12.2.2 Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP
	12.3	By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.	12.3.1 (a) Food loss index and (b) food waste index
	12.4	By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment.	12.4.1 Number of Parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement

			12.4.2 (a) Hazardous waste generated per capita; and (b) proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment
	12.5	By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.	12.5.1 National recycling rate, tons of material recycled
	12.6	Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.	12.6.1 Number of companies publishing sustainability reports
	12.7	Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.	12.7.1 Degree of sustainable public procurement policies and action plan implementation
	12.8	By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.	12.8.1 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment
	12.a	Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production.	12.a.1 Installed renewable energy-generating capacity in developing countries (in watts per capita)
	12.b	Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that	12.b.1 Implementation of standard accounting tools to monitor the

		creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.	economic and environmental aspects of tourism sustainability
	12.c	Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account their specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities.	12.c.1 Amount of fossil-fuel subsidies per unit of GDP (production and consumption)

(The Danish Institute for Human Rights, n.d.)

I. The sustainable development goals and the private sector.

Definition of the private sector

Let us start with the definition of the private sector proposed by the Cambridge Dictionary: “businesses and industries that are not owned or controlled by the government” (Cambridge University Press, 2020). This turns out to be a clear definition from a serious institution, but also a very broad one. To be more specific, look at the definition given by Investopedia: “The private sector is the part of the economy that is run by individuals and companies for profit and is not state-controlled. Therefore, it encompasses all for-profit businesses that are not owned or operated by the government” (Investopedia Staff, 2020). In this definition, a distinction is made between the for-profit businesses and the not-for-profit businesses, where only the former belongs to the private sector. In the two following sections, the use of the words “businesses” and “companies” will always refer to organizations belonging to the private sector.

The role of businesses in the achievement of the SDGs

When still United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon claimed: “Business is a vital partner in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Companies can contribute through their core activities, and we ask companies everywhere to assess their impact, set ambitious goals, and communicate transparently about the results” (Agarwal et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). Why do companies exactly play a so important role in the achievement of the SDGs?

In fact, the most important thing to know about the relationship between companies and SDGs is that it is a double-sided one. Indeed, the SDGs definitely need the companies to be achieved, but these companies may substantially benefit from the implementation of these goals too.

On the one hand, in the literature, many reasons can be found regarding the positive role of companies in the SDGs implementation and sustainable development actions in general (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; Dyllick & Muff, 2013). The most important ones can be summarised in two points. Firstly, companies have the capacity to finance the implementation of the SDGs, where governments are not able to do so

(Chakravorti, 2015). Secondly, companies can act in all the areas targeted by the SDGs and are not reduced to acting only in the area of economic growth (United Nations, 2020b).

On the other hand, the benefits of the implementation of the SDGs for the companies as one way to make the world more sustainable are also largely discussed (United Nations Global Compact et al., 2015). Among the most significant benefits for companies, literature tells us that implementing the SDGs can increase the number of opportunities tenfold thanks to the high value of this promising sustainable development market (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; Chakravorti, 2015; United Nations Global Compact & Volans, 2017). It can also have a very positive impact on a company's reputation (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; Chakravorti, 2015; Dyllick & Muff, 2013), on its investment returns (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; GRI et al., 2018; United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-a) and its competitiveness (Chakravorti, 2015; Dyllick & Muff, 2013). Other benefits must be mentioned, such as a possible increase in efficiency and innovation (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-a), a likely reduction of business costs and risks (Chakravorti, 2015; Dyllick & Muff, 2013) and a more than probable long-term growth (Chakravorti, 2015; United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-a). Furthermore, all these benefits will likely lead to better retention and attraction of talents, clients, or investors (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017; Dyllick & Muff, 2013). What better than this quote from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, to sum up all these benefits?

“Pursuing sustainable development makes firms more competitive, more resilient, and nimble in a fast-changing world and more likely to win and retain customers. It can also help them find and keep some of the best brains on the market. Besides, it can make them more attractive to investors and insurers, while reducing their exposure to regulatory and other liabilities.” (Agarwal et al., 2017, p.10)

In order to make the companies actually benefit from all that, the UN launched in 2000 (so before the SDGs began) an initiative called the United Nations Global Compact, aiming at calling companies from all over the world to align their operations and their strategies with a set of 10 principles (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-b, 2017). Those principles, determined by the United Nations Global Compact, deliver a universal definition of a responsible company based on the respect of fundamental responsibilities in the areas of

human rights, labor, environment, and corruption (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-a, n.d.-c, 2017). Nowadays, more than 16 000 companies and non-business organizations take part in this initiative, across over 160 countries (United Nations Global Compact, n.d.-a, 2017).

The two-folded symbiosis between business and the SDGs described above may only work if there is a sufficient collaboration with other stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, multilateral institutions, and entrepreneurs (Agarwal et al., 2017; Gasper et al., 2019; Global Compact LEAD & Best Practice Institute, n.d.; The Belgian Development Cooperation & The Shift, n.d.). Indeed, the sustainable efforts have to be conducted at all levels of the economy, at both micro (characterized by businesses) and macro (representing the governments), and most importantly, every level has to be connected, for example regarding the performance measures, to get significant improvements (Dyllick & Muff, 2013).

Does the type or the size of the company matter in the achievement of the SDGs?

According to the United Nations Global Compact (n.d.), each and every company has a role to play in the implementation of the SDGs, with no specification about its size, sector, or type. However, it turns out that even if we consider this statement as being true, the contribution may vary depending on the size and the type of company. Indeed, a large listed company will not face the same difficulties as SMEs³⁶ while implementing the goals.

The major constraint faced by SMEs, and not by large companies, is the question of the resources at disposal to engage in sustainable actions, be it monetary resources or know-how (Craig Smith, 2013; United Nations Global Compact, 2017). Indeed, SMEs are often lesser-resourced, which could, in turn, bring to other obstacles such as difficulties in the reporting process (United Nations Global Compact, 2017), or the impossibility to scale the efficiency gains as the large companies usually do (Craig Smith, 2013).

However, being an SME also brings some advantages regarding sustainability such as better flexibility and better responsiveness (Lemaire & Limbourg, 2019). Additionally, SMEs do not need to worry too much about communicating their sustainable commitments, since their reputation is not really at stake, unlike big companies (Craig Smith, 2013). This reason,

³⁶ SME = Small and medium-sized enterprises.

coupled with the resource-scarcity of SMEs and the closer involvement of the higher management in the company, forces them, in the right sense of the word, to focus more on the substance of their sustainable actions, which leads to getting a more sustainable image than their larger counterpart (Craig Smith, 2013).

Regarding the listed companies, in addition to the higher resources at disposal, being one of them may also offer other benefits, such as a better product conservation time, better traceability, or better management of the complexity of sustainability (Lemaire & Limbourg, 2019; United Nations Global Compact, 2017). However, we must keep in mind that managing sustainability across the entire supply chain of multinational companies is still complex, even for the most experienced managers (United Nations Global Compact, 2017).

To conclude this appendix on the private sector and its role in the SDGs, it must be said that companies, whatever their size or type, have a very important role to play in the 2030 agenda, but also that it is in their interest to invest in the SDGs since they too can derive many benefits from them.

J. Questionnaires for the NGOs

J.a. General questionnaire

General questionnaire



First of all, I would like to thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire, which will be extremely useful in my research.

In order not to waste too much time for each respondent, I simply suggest that this short questionnaire about the functioning of the NGO in general be filled in by one person.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Let's start with some personal questions. These are intended to identify the profile of the respondents, but the answers are not essential to the research. So, if you prefer to remain anonymous, you can simply proceed to the next step.

- Name:
- Email address:
- Would you like to receive the results of my work once it is completed? Yes ☐ No ☐
If yes, please enter your email address.
- Phone number:

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE NGO

About the NGO you work for:

1. What is the name of the NGO?
2. In what field/sector of activity is the NGO active?
3. Could you describe the activities of the NGO? (mission, type of projects, social/environmental/political commitments...)
4. In which country or countries is the NGO active?
5. How long has the NGO been in existence?
6. What is the organisational structure of the NGO?
7. How many people does the NGO employ? What type(s) of contract(s) are involved?
8. What is the budget allocated to projects related to sustainable production and consumption in this NGO?

9. What are the NGO's main sources of funding, and what percentage of the total amount received by the funding sources do they represent respectively?
10. How is the value created within the NGO defined? How is it measured?
11. Does the NGO maintain collaborative links with organisations or companies? If so, could you name them and explain what these collaborations consist of? By collaboration, we mean a reciprocal relationship between the two parties that allows each party to benefit from the relationship.
12. What means does the NGO use to measure its performance? What indicators?
13. How does the NGO measure its economic performance?
14. How does the NGO measure its environmental performance?
15. How does the NGO measure its social performance?
16. What is the NGO's annual budget?

I would like to thank you very much for your help in my dissertation, it is very precious to me. If you have any questions about this questionnaire, or about my dissertation in general, please do not hesitate to contact me at m.lambert@student.uclouvain.be, I would be happy to discuss it with you.

J.b. Detailed questionnaire

NGO Questionnaire



First of all, I would like to thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire, which will be extremely useful in my research.

Please feel free to give comprehensive answers to the questions, and feel free to give your own opinion about the questions asked.

It is quite normal that you will not be able to answer all the questions, as some of them are focused on particular sectors or fields. Simply move on to the next question when you find yourself in this situation.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Let's start with some personal questions. These are intended to identify the profile of the respondents, but the answers are not essential to the research. So, if you prefer to remain anonymous, you can simply proceed to the next step.

- Name:
- Email address:
- Would you like to receive the results of my work once it is completed? Yes ☐ No ☐
- If yes, please enter your email address.
- Phone number:

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

About your background and your position within the NGO:

1. What is your current position within the NGO?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. What was your professional background before you took up this position?
4. What training have you received?
5. What motivated you to work for an NGO? And for the NGO where you are currently working?

QUESTIONS CONCERNING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

According to the Brundtland Report, published in 1987 and serving as a reference in the field, "sustainable development" is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"³⁷.

³⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. World Commission on Environment and Development. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

1. With this definition in mind, how would you define the approach of the NGO in which you work concerning sustainable development?
2. How would you define the place of sustainable development in the NGO?
3. What has been the evolution of the NGO's approach to sustainable development over the past 6 years? By evolution, let us understand any changes that have taken place as a result of taking sustainable development into account in its activities.

My dissertation is mainly based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). These goals are 17 in number and were launched by the UN in 2015 to provide States, as well as businesses and any organisation, with a roadmap for action to address the greatest global challenges of our time by 2030. The 17 goals aim to improve the future by addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, peace, justice, and prosperity.

The following questions are based on the involvement of SDGs in the NGO where you work, as well as on your personal knowledge of SDGs.

4. Have you ever heard of SDGs? If so, in what context?
5. Have you ever been personally involved with SDGs? (during a mission, a conference, a project...)? If yes, explain in which context, and which SDGs were/are involved.
6. Does the NGO you work for take SDGs into account in its activities? If the answer is yes, do not answer questions 16 and 17. If the answer is no, go directly to question 16.

Yes ☐ No ☐

7. Which SDGs does the NGO take into account in its activities?
8. What budget is allocated to implement and monitor the progress of the SDGs?
9. Does the NGO receive specific funding to implement and/or monitor these SDGs? If so, from whom does the NGO receive this funding, and how much?
10. Does the NGO collaborate with other stakeholders in the implementation and/or monitoring of SDGs? Again, by collaboration, we mean a reciprocal relationship between the two parties that allows both parties to benefit from the relationship. If so, who are these stakeholders, and what is the nature of this collaboration?
11. Does the NGO maintain links (other than collaborative) with other stakeholders in relation to the implementation and/or monitoring of the SDGs? If so, who are these stakeholders, and what is the nature of these links?
12. What benefits does the NGO derive from the implementation and/or monitoring of the SDGs (e.g. in terms of funding, stakeholder relations, reputation, scope of action, procedures, etc.)?
13. What are the disadvantages of working with SDGs?
14. How does the NGO go about integrating SDGs into its activities? (Does it use a particular framework, does it work more by assimilating SDGs into existing projects...)?
15. How does the NGO go about measuring its performance in relation to SDGs?
16. Do you have an idea of the reasons why the NGO does not work with SDGs (too expensive? Use of another framework? Too much time needed? ...)

17. Why do you think the NGO you work for should/should not take SDGs into account in its activities?

QUESTIONS RELATED TO OBJECTIVE 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

In particular, my dissertation focuses on understanding the involvement of NGOs in relation to sustainable development objective number 12: "responsible consumption and production". This topic is followed, among others, by the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (10YFP) established in 2012 by the United Nations. The purpose of this framework is to provide a guide for organisations to help them implement SDG12. More specifically, the 10YFP divides its actions into 6 main programmes, namely:

- Sustainable public procurement
- Sustainable tourism
- Consumer information for SCP
- Sustainable buildings and construction
- Sustainable food systems programme
- Sustainable lifestyles and education

The following questions are based on the 10YFP guidelines and aim to understand the extent to which the NGO you work for is involved in the implementation of the SDG12, based on the recommendations of these 6 programmes.

PROGRAMME 1 - SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

1. How does the NGO go about generating CO2 savings? Does the NGO apply techniques such as "life-cycle costing" or "shadow pricing" to use public procurement as a lever for this purpose?
2. Is the NGO working on developing and implementing national action plans on sustainable public procurement? If yes, please provide details, as far as possible, of what these action plans consist of and the tools put in place to measure progress.
3. If the answer to the previous question was positive, to what extent have these plans been adapted to the sustainability of the post-COVID recovery plans?
4. If sustainable public procurement initiatives have already been put in place by the NGO, to what extent are they shared?
5. If good practices on sustainable public procurement have already been identified by the NGO, to what extent are they being shared?
6. Does the NGO participate in one or more sectoral initiative(s) organised by the Sustainable Public Procurement Programme, be it related to health, communication and information technology, construction, monitoring, or circular procurement?

7. Has the NGO set up its own group for responsible public procurement on its own initiative?

PROGRAMME 2 - SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, AND IN PARTICULAR THE ACTION "GLOBAL TOURISM PLASTICS INITIATIVE".

This programme is dedicated to organisations in the tourism sector, but their actions can be implemented by any organisation. This is why I would ask you to answer these questions even if you know that the NGO you are working for is not necessarily active in the tourism sector.

1. Does the NGO work against unnecessary plastic packaging? If so, in what way?
2. Is the NGO taking steps to switch from single-use models to reusable models or alternatives? If so, which ones? How long has this been going on?
3. Is the NGO taking steps to encourage the entire value chain to switch 100% to plastic packaging that is either reusable, recyclable, or compostable? If so, what are they?
4. Is the NGO working with other stakeholders to increase the recycling and composting rates of plastics? If so, what is the nature of these collaborations?
5. Does the NGO report publicly and annually on its progress in reducing single-use plastics and increasing the rate of reuse or recycling of the plastic packaging it uses?

PROGRAMME 3 - INFORMING CONSUMERS ABOUT RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

1. Does the NGO provide credible information about the sustainability of its products and services at the point of sale? If so, what percentage of these products and/or services is such information provided?
2. Regarding the extension of the life span of products, does the NGO collaborate with consumer organisations to develop guides on how to buy and use products? If so, with which ones do they collaborate?
3. With regard to product shelf-life extension, does the NGO collaborate with consumer organisations to encourage testing campaigns and product reports to include shelf-life extension criteria? If so, with which ones does it collaborate?
4. With regard to product life extension, does the NGO work to raise awareness campaigns about the concept of life-purchase?
5. With regard to extending the life of products, does the NGO promote and document innovative business practices? If so, how does it do so?
6. With regard to extending the life of products, does the NGO collaborate with knowledge centres or universities to collect data on product use? If so, with which organisations does it cooperate?
7. If the NGO offers online courses or training, does it include information on product life expectancy? If so, what kind of information?
8. Does the NGO actively encourage consumers to play a role in responsible consumption and production? If so, how does it do so?

9. Does the NGO implement actions aimed at establishing a long-term relationship with consumers? If so, how does it do so?
10. With regard to its communication with consumers, does the NGO use several different and complementary communication channels? If so, which ones does it use? What is the particular role that each plays?
11. With regard to its communication with consumers, does the NGO collaborate with other stakeholders to use joint communication channels?

PROGRAMME 4 - SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION

1. If the NGO you work for is involved in construction, does it work to recover construction and demolition waste? If so, what is the overall recovery rate of such waste?
2. Does the NGO in which you work promote frameworks for the implementation of sustainable building and construction policies? If so, how does it do so?
3. Does the NGO in which you work promote sustainable (including affordable and social) housing? If so, how does it do so?
4. Does the NGO you work for work on strengthening sustainability in the supply chain of buildings? If so, in what way?
5. Is the NGO you work for helping to promote knowledge sharing and awareness about sustainable buildings and construction? If so, what exactly does it do?

PROGRAMME 5 - SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS PROGRAMME

1. Does the NGO you work for use a multilateral framework in relation to food? If yes, which one? On what principles is it based?
2. If the answer to the previous question was yes, does the NGO coordinate with other organisations to ensure policy coherence?
3. Is the NGO involved in the creation of multi-stakeholder participatory mechanisms? If so, what is the objective? (knowledge sharing, policy coordination...)
4. Is the NGO working to involve the most marginalised actors in developing solutions for food systems? If so, how?
5. Does the NGO engage in discussions with the scientific and political community with the aim of making continuous progress towards more sustainable food systems? If so, with which party or parties is it in contact?
6. Does the NGO use indicators and/or models to measure the sustainability of food systems? If yes, which ones? And on what criteria are they developed?
7. Does the NGO work to influence sub-national and national policies regarding the sustainability of food systems along the value chain? If so, how is it doing so? What area(s) is it addressing? (agriculture, nutrition, environment, health, trade...)
8. Does the NGO work to establish links between agencies to help resolve conflicts and develop trade-offs between conflicting objectives? If so, which agencies are involved? Which conflicting objectives are involved?
9. Does the NGO use innovative funding models and/or products to support viable business models for NGOs? If yes, which model(s) and/or products are involved?
10. Does the NGO use concepts such as true cost accounting to identify profitable investments in food and agriculture? If so, what tools are used? For example, 10YFP suggests using TEEBAgFood.

11. Does the NGO promote the involvement of consumers in the food system as stakeholders? If so, how does it do this?
12. Does the NGO work to educate and provide information to consumers in order to change attitudes about food systems?
13. Does the NGO promote the use of tools to communicate about the sustainability of food products and services? (eco-labels, UNEP/ITC Guidelines...) If so, which ones does it promote?
14. Does the NGO work to offer small food suppliers a market share? If so, how is it doing this?
15. Does the NGO work to improve the production, distribution, and consumption of sustainable products and healthy meals? If so, how?
16. Does the NGO work to combat malnutrition through school meals? If so, how is it doing so?
17. In the face of the COVID crisis, how has the NGO changed its activities vis-à-vis food systems?

PROGRAMME 6 - SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND EDUCATION

1. Is the NGO you work for working towards a common framework for understanding sustainable lifestyles? If so, what is it doing to achieve this?
2. Is the NGO working to integrate the principles and practices of sustainable living into society? If so, which sector(s) of society is/are concerned by its actions? And what does this work consist of?
3. Is the NGO working to develop tools to promote sustainable lifestyles? If so, how is it doing this? What are these tools?
4. Does the NGO disseminate good practices regarding sustainable lifestyles? If so, how does it do so?
5. Does the NGO try to empower individuals to adopt sustainable lifestyles? If so, by what means does it do so? (education, awareness-raising, participation...)
6. Does the NGO measure and monitor the results of actions aimed at sustainable lifestyles? If so, how does it do so?
7. Does the NGO focus on educating young people about sustainable lifestyles?
8. Does the NGO work to reduce the consumption of meat and animal products? If so, how is it doing so?
9. Is the NGO taking action on waste separation, particularly with regard to organic waste? If so, how is it doing this?
10. Does the NGO work to promote the cultivation of its own food, at the individual level? If so, how is it doing this?
11. Does the NGO work to raise consumer awareness about more responsible personal purchases (repackaged, recycled, longer-lasting products, etc.)? If so, how is it doing this?
12. Does the NGO work to raise consumer awareness to promote "slow fashion", i.e. buying less and better quality clothes? If so, how is it doing this?
13. Does the NGO work to condemn common disposable products? If so, how is it doing so?
14. Does the NGO work to raise awareness of the benefits of regular physical activity? If so, how does it do this?
15. Does the NGO promote the use of public or shared transport? If so, how is it doing so?

16. Does the NGO promote the use of "clean" vehicles (electric, clean fuel, reduction in the number of kilometres, etc.)? If so, how is it doing this?
17. Does the NGO work to raise awareness of sustainable investment opportunities? If so, how is it doing so?
18. Does the NGO work to raise awareness of local consumption? If so, how does it do this?

In conclusion, I would like to thank you very much for your help in my thesis, it is very precious to me. If you have any questions about this questionnaire, or about my dissertation in general, please do not hesitate to contact me at m.lambert@student.uclouvain.be, I would be happy to discuss it with you.

K. Complete list of all the contacted NGOs

Name of the NGO	Answer to the collaboration request	Name of the person of contact
AlterBrussels asbl	No answer	
APAM	Negative answer	
Association Belge des Déchets Solides	Negative answer	
Autre Terre	Negative answer	
B.right	Negative answer	
Broederlijk Delen	No answer	
Brufotec	Positive answer	Anonymous
Casa Nicaragua asbl Pierreuse & Ailleurs	Negative answer	
CODEART ASBL	Negative answer	
Collectifs Stratégies Alimentaires (CSA)	No answer	
DETIC	Positive answer	Frédéric Warzée
Djapo	Negative answer	
Ecoconso	Positive answer	Dimitri Phukan
Education environnement	No answer	
Entranam	Negative answer	
Espace environnement	Positive answer	Serge Vogels
Essenscia	No answer	
European Textile Services Association	No answer	
EVA (Ethisch Vegetarisch Alternatief)	No answer	
FAIRTRADE BELGIUM	Positive answer	Nicolas Lambert
Food and pleasure	Negative answer	
FoodWIN	Negative answer	
Fost Plus	No answer	
Fristouille	Positive answer	Nicolas Bauwens
GASAP réseau des groupes d'achat solidaires de l'agriculture paysanne	No answer	
Goods to Give	Positive answer	Marie de Harenne
HERW!N	Positive answer	Linde Brewaeys
Humane Society International - Europe (HSI)	No answer	
IEW (Fédération InterEnvironnement Wallonie)	Positive answer	Sylvie Meekers
Ingénieurs sans frontières (ISF)	Positive answer	Claude Jussiant, Laurance Roland, Bindelle, Pierre Poncetlet, Jean-Jacques Carpentier
Institut des Affaires Publiques (IAP)	No answer	
La maison verte et bleue	Negative answer	
Le champ des cailles	Negative answer	

Le relais du triporteur	Negative answer	
Les amis de la terre	Negative answer	
Manufast	Positive answer	Olivier Van Cauwelaert
Miel Maya Honing	Positive answer	Mollie Schietecatte, Dirk Wils
Nature attitude	Positive answer	Anonymous 1, Anonymous 2
Oxfam, Magasins du monde	Positive answer	Sophie Tack
Pack2go	No answer	
Paper Chain Forum	Positive answer	Firmin François
Quinoa	Positive answer	Hélène Debaisieux
Recupel	No answer	
Rencontre des continents	Negative answer	
Réseau de consommateurs responsables (RCR)	Negative answer	
Réseau idée	Positive answer	François Beckers
Ressources	Negative answer	
Rikolto België	Negative answer	
Shake Eat	No answer	
Share food	Positive answer	Emmanuel Diese Loyamba
Solsoc	Positive answer	Stephan Regnard, Sylvie Demeester
Terre-en-vue	No answer	
Travie	Negative answer	
UTZ	Negative answer	
Valipac	Negative answer	
Verbond van Belgische Tuinbouwcoöperaties (VBT)	No answer	
Village liégeois	No answer	
Village N°1 entreprise	No answer	
WorldLoop - Close the Gap	Positive answer	Marnick Vanlee
Zero Waste Belgium	Negative answer	

L. List of the collaborative link the NGOs maintain with other stakeholders

NGO	Collaborative link with other stakeholders
Brufotec	Beneficiary companies; producers and transformers
Close the Gap	Donor companies; corporate and non-profit partners and network organisations for in-kind donation, financial donations, e-resource contributions, project adoptions; local service partners (working as intermediaries between Close the Gap and beneficiary organisations)
Detic	Member companies; network of national sectoral associations of EU member states; European umbrella associations (as a member); FostPlus and Valipac (as founding member); Essenscia
Ecoconso	Les amis de la terre, Education Environnement, Espace Environnement, Inter-environnement Bruxelles, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Réseau Idée, Réseau des consommateurs responsables, Ressources (members of their general assembly); IEW, réseau Idée, Association 21, la Fesefa, AchACT (as a member); collaboration with ad hoc partners; special committees (as an expert)
Espace Environnement	Clients; funding partners
Fairtrade	Users of the Fairtrade label
Fristouille	Rencontre des continents (knowledge sharing)
Goods to give	Donor companies and beneficiaries
Herw!n	Recupel, Ovam (for the governance), Conscious Consumption network
IEW	Members of IEW (for partnerships)
Ingénieurs sans frontières (ISF)	Companies (for donations); technical-financial collaborations
Manufast	FEBRAP (as a member); other adapted work companies (mutual aid)
Miel Maya Honing	Economic sales partnership; Oxfam-Magasins du monde and Oxfam-Solidarité (for common programmes); CARI; Tdc Enabel; Via don Bosco
Nature attitude	CIEP-MOC; Natural parcs, trainers; ethical providers
Oxfam	Oxfam -Belgique, CNCD-11.11.11, achACT, RESAPI, EFTA (as a member); Oxfam Fair Trade (as the president); World Fair Trade Organization (as member of the board of directors); European Fair Trade Advocacy Office
Paper Chain Forum	Good Planet
Quinoa	Rencontre des Continents, Début des Haricots, FIAN, ...
Réseau-idées	120 network members; IEW, Fédération des Employeurs des Secteurs de l'Education permanente et de la formation des adultes, Associations21, Walloon network for sustainable energy access, Ecoconso (as a member)

Share food	Voluntary shops
Solsoc	Civil society organizations; trade union institutions; mutualities; local partners; other NGOs; universities

M. List of the activities undertaken by NGOs

Activities	NGOs
Awareness and mobilization	Brufotec, Ecoconso, Fairtrade Belgium, ISF, Miel Maya Honing, Nature Attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Quinoa
Legal assistance	Brufotec, DETIC
Business consulting	Brufotec
Collection and redistribution of products	Close the Gap, Good to Give, Share Food
Consulting	DETIC, Réseau IDée
Technical assistance	DETIC, ISF
Information	Ecoconso, DETIC, Papier.be, Réseau IDée, Solsoc
Training	Ecoconso, Fristouille, Nature Attitude, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Quinoa, Solsoc
Participatory processes	Espace Environnement, Nature Attitude
Development of Fair trade	Fairtrade Belgium, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde
Development of social and circular economy	Herw!n
Political plaidoyer	IEW, Miel Maya Honing, Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Réseau IDée, Solsoc
Lifelong learning	IEW
Printing, mailing, data, encoding, handling, e-picking	Manufast
Exchange meetings, debates	Réseau IDée
Creation of jobs	Herw!n

N. List of the chosen programmes for each NGO

NGO's name	Programme 1 – sustainable public procurement	Programme 2 – sustainable tourism	Programme 3 – sustainable information for SCP	Programme 4 – sustainable building and construction	Programme 5 – sustainable food system	Programme 6 – sustainable lifestyle and education
Brufotec			X		X	X
Close the Gap			X			
Detic	X		X	X		X
Ecoconso	X	X	X	X	X	X
Espace environnement	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fairtrade Belgium	X		X		X	X
Fristouille			X		X	X
Goods to Give					X	X
HERW!N	X		X		X	
IEW (Fédération InterEnvironnement Wallonie)						X
Ingénieurs sans frontières (ISF)				X		X
Manufast			X		X	
Miel Maya Honing			X		X	X
Nature attitude			X			X
Oxfam, Magasins du monde			X		X	X
Paper Chain Forum			X		X	X
Quinoa			X			X
Réseau idée					X	X
Share food					X	
Solsoc					X	

O. List of the actions NGOs put in place to include marginalized actors and small suppliers in sustainable food systems

NGOs	Actions for marginalized actors	Actions for small suppliers
Brufotec	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
Ecoconso	Animations in PCSWs, visits in supermarkets, "Green for life" campaign	Via the Network of Walloon actors for sustainable food
Espace Environnement	Collaboration with social actors, trainings of bridging actors	Involvement in the Charleroi Food Belt project
Fairtrade Belgium	Southern producers own 50% of the Fairtrade system	This is the main objective of Fairtrade
Fristouille	<i>None</i>	Culinary workshops with only ingredients from small producers
Goods to give	Any association against poverty can be a partner	Quotas for associations according to their size so that everyone gets their share of products
Herw!n	Collection, distribution and transformation of surplus food for social organisations	<i>None</i>
Manufast	Employing people with disabilities	Selling their harvest through our channel
Miel Maya Honing	Facilitating the formation of cooperatives for small producers	Cooperatives in Africa, Latin America and Belgium
Oxfam-Magasins du monde	This is the main principle of fair trade	This is the main principle of fair trade
Réseau IDée	Involvement in projects that target these audiences.	<i>None</i>
Share food	Setting up a suggestion box open to the public	<i>None</i>
Solsoc	Emancipatory and participatory methods of intervention ensuring voice for all, support for trade unions	Support to farmers' unions and producers' federations, financing of sales premises, price information system

P. Measurement methods and common frameworks of NGOs regarding sustainable lifestyles.

NGOs	Measurement methods	Common frameworks
Brufotec	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
Detic	Before/after market research, monitoring and reporting, measurement of key indicators, external audit and monitoring	Development of charters, guidelines and normative schemes, participation in university teaching
Ecoconso	Measure of the distribution of content	Use of the "framework agreement on eco-consumption and waste prevention"
Espace Environnement	Project-by-project approach	Project-by-project approach
Fairtrade Belgium	Tracking of consumer habits, tracking of consumption of Fairtrade products	Faire trade notion
Fristouille	<i>None</i>	Use of the "7 criteria of sustainable food"
Goods to give	<i>None</i>	
IEW	<i>None</i>	Awareness raising in municipalities, continuing education
ISF	Monitoring of the evolution of the facilities over several years	"Education for Global Citizenship and Solidarity" programme
Miel Maya Honing	"Fairomètre" for municipalities, evaluations for schools, logical framework (over 5 years), programme evaluations	Webinar with 140 beekeepers
Nature attitude	Annual reporting of activity, evolution of the groups of citizens	Internal sharing of experiences
Oxfam-Magasins du monde	Sales figures and financial monitoring	Via educational work, awareness and action
Papier.be	Regular surveys	Collaboration with Good Planet
Quinoa	Through the local alternatives project	<i>None</i>
Réseau IDée	Surveys and participant evaluations to measure change	The nature of Réseau IDée is to be a common framework

Abstract : This thesis aims to study the current situation of NGOs in Belgium in order to understand what role they play in the implementation of SDG12 and, conversely, how the SDGs (and in particular SDG12) can impact the activities of Belgian NGOs. To do so, this thesis is composed of a theoretical part that aims to contextualise the subject of NGOs and SDGs by highlighting what has already been published by the scientific world, both at the global and Belgian levels, and a practical part aiming to confront theory with reality and to understand in greater depth the ins and outs of NGO activities in relation to sustainable consumption and production. To do this, this practical part is based on the testimonies of some twenty Belgian NGOs, all of which are focused on responsible consumption and production in one way or another, but of very different sizes and sectors.

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