

The Sustainable Development Goals in the municipal council

A guide for municipal councillors worldwide with examples from the Netherlands





What are the SDGs, and what can I do with them as a council member?

An overview in ten questions

Introduction

What do 17 internationally agreed goals for sustainable development have to do with the daily practice of municipal councils? As many as 65% of the underlying targets of the SDGs cannot be achieved without action from local governments. As the highest administrative body in municipalities, the municipal council has an important role and a major influence on the localisation of this sustainability agenda, and on achieving the SDGs in 2030. Over 90 Dutch municipalities are members of VNG International's Gemeenten4GlobalGoals ('Municipalities4Globals') campaign. For over several years now, the campaign has designed guides for municipalities to support their journey to incorporate and internalise the 17 SDGs. The initiative for this brochure for council members stemmed from the growing initiative and enthusiasm that can be observed in municipal councils to put the SDGs on the map locally and to get started. Global Goals, local action.

Based on ten questions, this guide outlines the significance of the SDGs in the global pursuit of sustainable development, the relationship between this global agenda and local government, the various ways in which municipalities publicise and implement the SDGs and the specific roles that municipal councils can play in this. In the digital version of the



'We see an increasing interest in the SDGs among the more than 4000 council members who are affiliated with us. It is an important agenda where the difference is made locally.'
Bahreddine Belhaj, President of the Dutch Association for Council Members

booklet, hyperlinks to sources are included in various places. For the perspective of the target group, we spoke with council members from various political parties from Oisterwijk, Hardenberg, Utrecht and Leiden, and with the clerks of Velsen and Nieuwegein. The relevant council members all endorse the goals in their own municipality by exploring and communicating them in their activities and through fortification thereof in their agendas. With this first guide for municipal councils, we certainly do not provide exhaustive answers to all conceivable questions. There will also be good examples of commitment from municipal councils that are not expressed here.

We cordially invite council members to share their inspiring examples via globalgoals@vng.nl.

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What are the SDGs and who are they for?

Sustainable development goals

The 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development is the global framework for sustainable development. On the 25th of September, 2015, the heads of government of all United Nations Member States committed themselves to this agenda in a political declaration. They acknowledged that global prosperity is unevenly distributed and that climate change, environmental degradation, water shortages, conflict and growing inequality threaten current and future prosperity.

The heart of the 2030 Agenda situates the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These are also referred to as Global Goals in the Netherlands. The 17 goals build on other frameworks, such as the UN's 8 Millennium Goals for the period 2000-2015 (poverty reduction), the Rio de Janeiro Biodiversity Convention, climate agreements and human rights agreements. The Netherlands has made a political commitment to achieving the targets in 2030. There are strong links between the goals and social challenges within the country.

Prosperity, People, Planet

The 2030 Agenda is based on a broad understanding of sustainability, consistent with our notion of Broad Prosperity. A central idea is that meeting our present needs must not come at the expense of needs of future gene-

rations. Development is only sustainable if economic prosperity (prosperity) goes hand in hand with well-being (people) and healthy ecosystems (planet). These three pillars are reflected in the SDGs, supplemented by peace and security (Goal 16) and partnerships (Goal 17). The 17 goals are divided into 169 sub-goals (targets). A fully specified list of all the sub-goals can be found on the website of SDG Nederland.

Leave no one behind

Cohesion between the major challenges we face globally and between the 17 goals is an essential starting point for the 2030 Agenda. A second core principle is inclusiveness. The adage 'leave no one behind' is the common thread throughout the agenda. Everyone must be able to participate, including those countries and groups that are currently disadvantaged most. The signatories even promised to work for the latter group as a matter of priority. No such agenda has previously been adopted with such broad support, based on a very extensive consultation process. The SDGs apply to everyone. Everyone's contribution is needed to realise the ambitious agenda.

2

How is the agenda implemented in the Netherlands?

In 2015, the Dutch government chose not to take a strong governing role for the 2030 Agenda. No national strategy or action plan has been formulated. Instead, the emphasis has been placed on collectivity: The SDGs are an agenda for everyone. There is a national SDG coordinator whose task it is to stimulate and connect parties. The coalition agreement only mentions the goals in relation to development cooperation. On the initiative of the Lower House and civil society, however, an 'SDG test' was added to the integrated assessment framework for new legislation and policy. The draft National Environmental Vision (NOVI) also refers to the SDGs. 'Promoting sustainable development of the Netherlands as a whole and of all parts of the physical environment' is the first of the 21 national interests in the NOVI.

The explanation for this task is as follows: *The seventeen sustainable development goals set by the UN (...) are important starting points for government policy for our country, including for the physical environment (...) Sustainable development has not only been agreed internationally by the Dutch government, it is also of essential national and international importance to keep our country and the world viable for future generations.*

In 2015, a group of Dutch companies operating internationally took the initiative to create/setup an SDG charter, a partnership involving civil society organisations and governments.

The result is a movement with around 1000 affiliated organisations. This movement now goes by SDG Nederland and has a website under the same name. There are also SDG alliances for individual goals, various SDG houses and an annual SDG Action Day. Municipalities, companies, universities, schools, museums, civic platforms and civil society organisations organise numerous activities. In January 2020 the headquarters of the VNG, the Willemshof, located on Nassaulaan in The Hague, was declared SDG 11 House.

The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), publishes an annual report on actual trends for the 17 goals in the Netherlands. In 2019, this report was merged with the Broad Prosperity monitor. Internationally, it has been agreed that the UN Member States will translate the SDGs to their own situation. In a number of areas, such as climate and circular economy, this is happening in the Netherlands.



Yet, this does not apply to all goals. For example, the heads of governments have agreed to halve poverty in their own country in 15 years. The Netherlands has not yet formulated policies or targets to reduce the number of inhabitants below the national poverty line by half before 2030. In the annual report *Nederland ontwikkelt duurzaam* ('Developing the Netherlands sustainably'), the central government does report to the Lower House on the commitment made, together with decentralized governments, the business community, knowledge institutions, civil society and youth organisations. In an international comparison, the Netherlands and other wealthy countries score well on goals that have to do with economic productivity, innovation, poverty rates, services in education and care and the quality of institutions. But the high welfare scores are inversely proportional to the (low) scores for the climate and biodiversity goals.

Within the EU, the Netherlands is one of the worst-scoring countries in these areas. Not only are the quality of nature, air, water and soil under pressure within our own borders, our country also has a large international footprint. This calls into question the tenability of our model. In social terms, the domestic trend shows a mixed picture. There are concerns about inclusiveness, for example in the labour market, and about growing social contradictions. The Netherlands has a persistent pay gap between men and women, and there is a visible gender discrepancy in higher positions, to the vast disadvantage of women. This affects the fairness of our society. To make our country sustainable, therefore, more effort is needed to achieve a good balance. Working with and on the SDGs provides an excellent basis for this.

3

What do the SDGs mean for local government?

A global task force of local and regional authorities actively participated in the consultation process that preceded the 2030 Agenda. This commitment has led to an independent goal for sustainable cities and municipalities: SDG 11. It recognises the essential role of local authorities in promoting sustainable development. But it is not only goal 11 that is related to the daily work of municipalities: for about two-thirds of all 169 SDG sub-goals, the contribution of local authorities is indispensable. Moreover, reducing poverty and inequality, suitable housing for all, an attractive and healthy living environment, a resilient economy with sustainable production and consumption and the energy transition is a mission impossible without local governmental interference. Additionally, democratic, effective and participatory governance and socially responsible procurement and tendering.

The task force has made it clear that local authorities should not only be seen as implementers of the agenda. They are policymakers, catalysts of change, and the governance layer in the best position to link SDGs to what

needs to be done locally (*think globally, act locally*). Conversely, the SDGs offer an interesting framework for connecting with global development based on local policy and practice.

Partnerships for sustainable development are an important starting point for the SDGs. Municipalities operate daily in a dynamic force field of companies, educational institutions, organisations and residents. They can demonstrate in practice what can be achieved with good and innovative forms of cooperation.

The 2030 Agenda underscores the diversity of contexts, opportunities and challenges between countries, including at the decentralised level. Municipalities have plenty of room for their own interpretation of the SDGs, appropriate to their circumstances. The goals are not legally binding. They are shared ambitions for an inclusive, sustainable and just world, which are well reflected in the subtitle of the agenda: *Transforming our world*.



4

What do the goals add to what is already happening?

The purpose of the Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign is to contribute to achieving the 17 goals with as many municipalities as possible. Currently, the number of affiliated municipalities has reached over one hundred, constituting nearly one third of all municipalities in the Netherlands. VNG International facilitates and supports municipalities in this campaign in a variety of ways: organizing exchange meetings, thinking about what the SDGs can mean in your municipality, offering various guides and collecting examples of municipalities and local platforms that are already working on the goals.

The campaign offers unity and space for personal initiative and choices. The campaign does not prescribe what municipalities should do, but offers various options. There are no minimum requirements for becoming a SDGs community. However, VNG International has described as a guide in ten points what you can think about when acting in the spirit of the SDGs. This includes, for example, the willingness to work in an integrated and coherent manner, to make the personal contribution to the goals visible, to anchor the goals in the municipal organisation and tasks, and to seek active cooperation with residents, organisations and companies. A council decision to participate in the campaign is seen as a powerful signal.



5

What do the goals add to what is already happening?

One question that arises in virtually every municipality is what exactly working with the SDGs adds. After all, the goals are closely related to the social challenges as we see them in the Netherlands, and the municipality is working on this on a daily basis based on its tasks and roles. Indeed, it is not about the 17 goals in and of themselves. The chapter on decentralized governments in the annual report *Developing the Netherlands sustainably* therefore devotes a great deal of attention to the ways in which municipalities contribute to the SDGs without explicitly naming it that way. Nevertheless, the goals are not without reason: the heads of governments recognise that the pace of the desired transitions is too slow. Directors, officials and council members who embrace the goals often do this because they see a common new (world) language in them and an inspiring agenda, which invites people, companies and organisations to put extra emphasis on sustainability in the broad sense

In the Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign, the added value is worded as follows:

- The SDGs form an internationally recognised framework with a positive view of the future. It is a clear, useful framework to use as a guide when developing and testing policies

- You contribute to a just, safe and prosperous world, both within and outside the municipal boundaries
- The SDGs generate a lot of energy in municipalities and form a connecting element in the cooperation with citizens, companies and civil society organisations
- You can show leadership in sustainability. Given the global attention, the SDGs are a wonderful theme to raise your community's profile internationally

Working with and from the SDGs provides a different way of looking and thinking than working from problems, procedures and budgets. It is about thinking from goals and values, with a positive, shared vision of the future. The goals can also be used as an integrated assessment framework for decision-making. The frequently heard statement 'we are already doing it' often proves to be incorrect upon further investigation.

Municipalities that effectively align their policies with the SDGs and their sub-goals (see Section 6), both internally and with external partners, typically find gaps in some areas. There is also often much to be gained through increased cooperation, a better link between different tasks, and avoiding solutions to one problem coming at the expense of another (shifting).

Oss

Oss has already won several awards as the most inspiring SDGs municipality. This success is due to a combination of factors. One of them is the Platform SDGs Oss, in which many civil society organisations and all the parties on the council are represented. The platform has a number of active groups such as the Food, Youth, Juniors and Goal 5 working groups and the Fairtrade Municipality core team. The platform has a large network and support within society in Oss and supports the municipality in raising awareness of the SDGs.



In addition, Mayor Wobine Buijs-Glaudemans (VVD) is an enthusiastic ambassador of the goals. In the aftermath of a crisis in which thousands of jobs were lost, she and society searched for a new direction that was consistent with the DNA of the city. She saw a crucial role for family businesses, who have a heart for corporate social responsibility. The new model for the city had to be tenable, because the Netherlands has an excessively large footprint. We need to reduce our con-

sumption of raw materials and invest in things that are good for the rest of the world. For Wobine Buijs-Glaudemans, the SDGs give a balanced and concrete interpretation of the concept of sustainability. They are well in line with the principles of fair trade that Oss had already embraced. They help to look beyond the usual processes at major challenges and - together with alliances in society - to formulate ambitions, agendas and activities. Together with companies and educational institutions, the municipality created an agenda focusing on SDGs 2 and 12. A lot of attention is also paid to health. Many companies are attracted by the agri-food profile. A talent campus has been built where education, business and sport come together, linked to the TOP Oss Stadium, an inspiring place to visit, work and learn. Students from various HBO programmes come to Oss to investigate issues and design



PLATFORM GLOBAL GOALS OSS



visions and revenue models together with the business community, the Talent Campus, the municipality and the Platform Global Goals Oss. The innovative Sustainability Square in Oss ties in well with goal 12 and offers work for people with a distance to the labour market. The SDGs also play a role in international trade missions.

The SDGs have been given their own place in the municipality's programme budget. Wobine Buijs notes that the goals encourage a different perspective, rather than just looking at things functionally. When she visits a troubled neighbourhood, she not only looks at the situation of benefits, WMO and

security, she also wonders: what training do people have? What about nutrition? She came to the shocking discovery in a neighbourhood that four children per class went to school without breakfast and could only enjoy a hot meal once a week.

'If you talk not only to professional care partners but also to parents, schools and neighbourhood councils, you get a much broader picture. You can map together: What can someone do themselves, and what can the direct network do? And what else is needed? The SDGs are a great source of inspiration for that.'



6

How do SDGs municipalities fulfil their role?

Municipalities implement the SDGs and the campaign in a variety of ways. On the VNG International website, you will find exciting examples of this.

6.1 Raising awareness on the SDGs in local society

In many municipalities, attention to the SDGs begins with the initiative of citizens or public activities of the municipality that use the SDGs logo and the icons. In municipalities such as Utrecht, Oss, Langedijk and Tilburg, social or civic platforms have been actively engaged for years in raising awareness and inspiring activities around the goals. Schools are also often involved. In Rheden, the annual school day for sustainability pays a lot of attention to the 17 goals, which have also been translated into 7 Children's SDGs in this municipality. In Deventer, the core group Deventer4GlobalGoals was set up in 2018, with representatives from education, business, NGOs, culture and the municipality. In the coming years, the core group wants to identify what is already being done and by whom, to inspire (highlight good examples) and to activate: encourage organisations and companies to contribute.

The VNG provides information and materials via the Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign. Since 2016, the SDGs Time Capsule has been touring the country. This represents the period from now until 2030. In a small ceremony, the mayor or an alderman, and sometimes a council member, entrusts his or her wishes and dreams to the capsule in response to questions such as: What do you want our world to look like in 15 years' time? And what can you contribute to that? This is a good reason for an interview with civil society organisations, schools and residents about their wishes and dreams. Another way to initiate such a conversation is with the help of the SDG ToerMee ('TravelAlong') VIP bus. The SDGs Accelerator organisation can assist in setting up Circles of 17, in which people from different backgrounds each represent a goal.



6.2 Inventory: Municipal policy along the SDGs benchmark

For municipalities that want to link their own commitment to the goals, the first question is: what are we already doing? It seems obvious to start with what is already there and to connect with local needs and energy. For example, in 2016, at the request of the council, the municipality of Haarlem first drew up an inventory of the SDGs to which attention was already paid in policy and implementation, and then mapped out where an additional commitment was possible or desirable. An inventory with the substantive experts from various departments identified additional measures for 19 sub-objectives.

Inventorising the connection between the goals and existing municipal policy visions and programmes is important as a process to connect the 'new language' of the SDGs with the existing conceptual framework. For example, a municipality may opt for a focus on a number of specific goals, without losing sight of the coherence with the other goals.

The SDGs Guide in Municipal Policy helps to take a closer look. This guide links each of the 17 goals to the Dutch context, the most important municipal tasks and roles with different application examples.

6.3 Connecting SDGs with policy visions or the programme budget

One step further is to explicitly link the SDGs to existing or new policies or to the programme budget. To this end, ten administrative programmes were reviewed in Oss with the policy departments. Teams looked at which goals were in line with these programmes and, conversely, which programmes were already working on the individual goals. Such a process creates awareness and makes sense, because employees see the broader goals to which they are contributing. The next step was to formulate an additional ambition where many programmes were found to contribute to the same goal. The programme budget indicates for each programme the SDGs to which it contributes.

The coalition in Delft wrote in its Coalition Agreement: *'In our course, let us be inspired by the SDGs: seventeen goals that the United Nations has formulated for a fairer and more sustainable world. With these goals, we bring coherence to various efforts for social, economic and environmental sustainability. The SDGs offer a strong and integrated framework for our daily work, with a positive view of the future. In our agreement, we have indicated per chapter the goals to which our policy contributes. In the coming period, we will use these goals as a guide*

when developing and testing our policies. We will connect each spearhead of the college programme to one or more SDGs.'

In the 2018-2022 administrative programme of the Delft college, a link has been made with the SDGs at the goal-setting level. The VVSG, the Flemish sister organisation of the VNG, offers a detailed guide for integrating the SDGs into the policy and management cycle.



6.4 Strengthening integrated decision-making and cooperation

The coherent nature of the 17 goals appeals to many and makes the goals a good tool to support a more integrated way of working and cooperation between departments. The municipality of Rheden has implemented this principle extensively. Rheden wanted to move away from separate domains with limited communication and evolve into a network organisation, in which a task-oriented attitude is used to think and work together. Former director Frank Landman saw the SDGs as a good basis for this. The SDGs were grouped under the themes of economy, sustainability, well-being and territorial development, around which four policy clusters were set up. In addition, there is a 'strategy' team for overarching themes. The implementation also works around these clusters. In Rheden, 17 officials act as SDGs ambassadors. Frank Landman is clear about it: this is a long-haul transformation process.

Municipalities that do not want to go as far as Rheden can also achieve more internal cooperation by connecting themes with each other with the help of the SDGs.

In the municipality of Smallerland, trainee Sterre Koops, with the support of the civil service, wrote a comprehensive report with recommendations on the SDGs as an instrument to develop integrated policy.

6.5 SDGs as a basis for environmental vision

Sustainable development is one of the social objectives of the Environment Act. Municipalities must combine tasks in the physical environment in a coherent environmental vision at a strategic level. In addition to local themes such as living, soil or cultural heritage, global themes such as climate change require attention. The current tasks require a different commitment than what municipalities have been used to in recent decades. Attempting to meet the goals means requiring close cooperation as well as making clear choices; not everything is possible. This requires a transparent assessment, with an emphasis on long-term sustainability.

Along with four municipalities, the VNG held a practical trial in 2019 with an integrated assessment framework based on the SDGs. In the trial, an instrument was designed that can help to assess the quality of the living environment and compare alternative development options. This *SDG Kompas voor de Leefomgeving* ('Compass for the Living Environment') is divided into twelve main themes. The assessment framework consists of a selection of 47 sub-objectives, which together represent a wide range of tasks in the living environment. It became clear from the trial that involving the SDGs in choices in the physical environment leads to new and inspiring perspectives.

Súdwest-Fryslân was one of the participants in the practical trial and tailored the SDG compass for its own use. The compass was applied in a session on the way to the Environment Vision 1.0. More than 45 policy officials spoke to the councillors about the transition tasks and the ambitions and priorities for the future. In addition to input from the Mienskip (community), the 17 SDGs are an important pillar in the Environmental Vision.

The SDG compass is also used in the licensing, supervision and enforcement policy and in a practical trial 'participation with initiative' on Antenna Policy/G5, in the context of the environment plan. In addition, Súdwest-Fryslân wants to practice with the compass at the environment table to be set up. The SDG compass is thus an important tool for discussion when considering initiatives for a safe and healthy living environment.

6.6 The SDGs as a guide in international cooperation

The inextricably linked global dimension of the agenda means that the SDGs can be used well to shape and implement international cooperation between municipalities. The goals are therefore used by various municipalities as a basis for (bilateral) international partnerships, in cross-border collaborations with municipalities in Belgium and Germany, international initiatives from the community and within international networks. For example, the municipality of Rheden, located close to the German border, has entered into cooperation with various municipalities in North Rhine-Westphalia. One of the projects focuses on developing regional sustainability strategies with the goals as a basis, and exchanging opportunities to monitor the progress of the implementation. The Municipality of Baarle-Nassau, with 22 Belgian enclaves within the municipality, is also implementing its sustainability policy on the basis of the goals (7, 12, 13, 15 and 17) and in cooperation with Belgian border municipalities. In addition, the municipalities of Waalwijk and Oss, among others, use some of the goals to give thematic direction to their partnerships with the Unna (Germany) and Taizhou (China), respectively.

The Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign has developed a guide aimed in particular at the use of the goals in international

cooperation. The complete guide with many more applications and practical examples can be found online.



7

What is our role as a municipal council?

The discussions with council members conducted for preparing this booklet revealed as a common thread that linking local goals to the SDGs gives extra significance to local commitment. By conducting discussions within or outside the council in relation to the 17 goals, social values come to the fore more strongly and create an incentive for other considerations. As with directors and officials, it also applies for council members that determining and filling their own role requires (joint) exploration. With the following sections, we want to support that process.

7.1 Agenda-setting

A call or decision by the council to get started with the SDGs gives the college and officials a firm mandate. In various municipalities, such as Oisterwijk, Leiden, Tiel and Roosendaal, it was the municipal council – on the initiative of one or more council groups – who asked the college to get started with the SDGs or join the Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign. In Utrecht, the council designated the city a SDGs City in 2016. In Haarlem in the same year, the council asked the college to compare the policy with the SDGs (see Section 6).

In March 2018, under the motto 'Choose a sustainable world in the coming Council and College Period', 31 municipal administrators called on municipal councils and the new colleges to strive to put sustainability in its social, economic and ecological dimensions first in their programmes, with the SDGs as reference framework. The city council in Velsen, among others, responded to this call. In the council agreement of July 2018, the social challenges were connected with the SDGs at the initiative of the D'66 party. The Coalition Agreements of Delft, Leeuwarden, Opsterland, Oss and Rheden actively link the SDGs with the various policy themes. We also find the goals in the coalition agreement in Tilburg, Helmond, Maastricht, Schouwen-Duivenland, Zwolle and other municipalities.



Oisterwijk and Hart van Brabant

Council member Stefanie Vulders put the SDGs on the agenda in her municipality of Oisterwijk and the Hart van Brabant region. When she got to know the goals, she thought: what a beautiful programme! This is what we all want, isn't it? In the past, Oisterwijk applied a sustainability test to council proposals. Stefanie saw the goals as a nice new framework to give substance to the sustainability balance. Her motion to become a SDGs municipality was adopted. She then also mobilised council groups in the region to turn Hart van Brabant into the first SDGs region. This means that all municipalities in the region are part of the campaign and have a common agenda, for example by regionally linking societal initiatives. During the United Assembly of the Region in May 2019, Stefanie's motion was adopted.

This first for the region was celebrated on HartvanBrabant Day. Stefanie regrets that the call in the motion for a regional vision document and implementation programme for the SDGs is not being implemented. For her, this is the crux.

She also sees too little life in the goals in her own municipality. Gradually, she came to the conclusion that the current system of governance, laws and regulations does not support the SDGs agenda. In practice, for example, she sees many initiatives by residents for a city park, food forest or tiny house run aground on rules and procedures. In her view, achieving the goals requires a far-reaching system change.



7.2 Framework role

In addition to a call for the College to link the SDGs to municipal policy, the council can also contribute to the desired implementation. For example, it may have a preference for the extent to which the 17 goals structure the work of the municipality, or the way in which monitoring takes place. The practical examples from municipalities in Section 6 and on the VNG website can serve as inspiration. Good examples can also be found abroad, such as in Flanders.

In Leiden, leftist parties such as Partij voor de Dieren ('Party for the Animals') and Groenlinks ('Greenleft'), submitted a successful motion in 2019 to join the SDGs campaign. It was left to the College to implement this. Initiator Martine van Schaik (PvdD) would like the entire planning and monitoring cycle to be organised around the SDGs, but she realises that this is a major shift. However, she would like to ask the college to concretise the goals in the programme budget in the next framework memorandum. Experience in Oss shows that a debate on the budget involving the SDGs leads to a different kind of discussion on the 'why question'. It can also help to focus and sharpen ambitions, for example in relation to shortages in the social domain.

Using the SDGs as a framework can also help in balancing social goals from a broader perspective with regard to specific plans. In day-to-day practice, the costs and benefits of

choices in the longer term are often not sufficiently taken into account in decision-making. For example, unpaved soil, the preservation of greenery and a beautiful landscape are considered important, but they often disappear in the planning process or in concrete considerations. The sum of such situations is at odds with the attractive, healthy and climate-resistant living environment to which the parties want to commit themselves. Thinking through the SDGs can help to focus more actively on solutions that connect multiple tasks, such as a design that preserves trees and greenery from the start.



From their representative role, council members ensure that the commitment of the municipality is in line with what is going on in society. Where citizens, companies or organisations such as foundations are already committed to the SDGs in a municipality, you can join them as a council member and help parties find their way to the government. That may be the municipality, but sometimes it may be useful to raise issues at a different administrative level.

Also, when you speak to or on behalf of parties in society who are not familiar with the goals, you can link their input to the goals yourself in the council, for example by including topics that are still underexposed in policies, such as gender equality or biodiversity. Or by asking for physical, financial or regulatory space for positive social initiatives that run into obstacles. The previously mentioned SDGs Guide in Municipal Policy (Section 6) can support this. This shows per SDG what relevant sub-goals are and gives many examples of concrete commitment.

Based on your role as a council member, you may also choose to actively bring the goals to the attention of your network. For example, many companies in the Netherlands already work with the SDGs. You can encourage companies in your municipality to use the goals to visualise their impact more broadly than just a business approach. This also applies for social and citizens' initiatives. On the website of the MAEX initiative,

nearly 2000 examples of small-scale local initiatives that contribute to the goals can be found. SDG Nederland is running various initiatives that help to drive local conversations around the SDGs in a creative way.



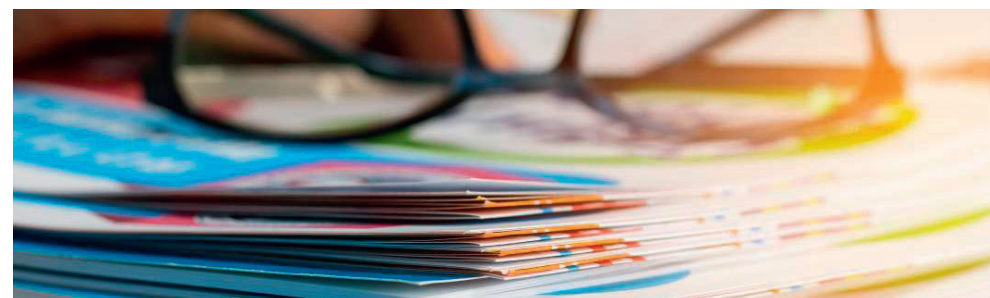
Hardenberg

Hardenberg was previously a millennium municipality and won the title ‘Most accessible municipality for people with disabilities’ in 2018. In Hardenberg, the aim of becoming a SDGs municipality is included in the coalition agreement at the initiative of the ChristenUnie. But first it is up to the council. In 2019, a council working group was set up to explore how the municipality can work with the goals. The working group went to Rheden to look for inspiration. Questions in the working group include: Do we opt for a focus on a few goals, or do we look at coherence?

Do we start at the municipality, or do we see if we can engage schools? A proposal for a council initiative will be drawn up and discussed first in the working group and then in the council. Much remains to be done to raise awareness. The municipality is already doing many things that interface with the SDGs, but how do you anchor a broader awareness of this? At the beginning of May, an informal meeting took place in the sustainable knowledge centre Hibertad, to look at how – even further in the future – the link with the SDGs can be established on the basis of recent proposals on poverty and the economy. CU council member Hans Odink, chairman of the working group, believes that the goals help to think more positively about possibilities, for example when it comes to people with disabilities.



This is in line with the Hardenberg commitment to inclusiveness. Max Bakhuis, CDA council member and member of the working group, is positive about the goals but still has many questions about how it will be taken in the council and college. One of the ideas in the working group is to add a SDGs paragraph to future council proposals. In this way, you can show how the proposals contribute to the goals and link them in a meaningful way to what society needs. Such a SDGs paragraph can also stimulate collaboration between departments at an early stage in the process. Max is cautious: if you connect with the SDGs, not everyone in the political arena will immediately be on board. For example, think about nature management and climate: How far do you go with it? ‘You do need to operate reasonably and take everyone’s interests into account.’



7.4 Monitoring role

Not all municipalities that are members of the Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign are visibly implementing them. Even if, for example, the college programme or policy refers to the SDGs, a results framework is not always linked to them. The council may ask the college about the concrete commitment and ways to operationalise the goals, for example with action plans, objectives or budgets.

The monitoring function may therefore be a call for a more active commitment to one or more goals, but the council may also raise alerts about contradictions. The city of Utrecht has opted for Healthy Urban Life for All as its central theme. Consequently, political parties in the council pay a great deal of attention to this issue. The Partij voor de Dieren asked the college questions about the arrival of a new fast-food branch and how that relates to the SDGs and the pursuit of health. CDA council member Jantine Zwinkels, herself an ambassador for SDG 3, asked questions about a planned new building location along the railway and the possible effects of vibration on the healthy living environment. This led to an extra investment in additional physical measures.

The monitoring task becomes more concrete when the college links its commitment to the SDGs to specific action plans or results frameworks. This step is often not taken.

In Utrecht, the college draws up SDGs working plans for periods of three years. One goal from the 2017-2019 plan was to design a monitor that links the SDGs to the strategy for Healthy Urban Life for All. The aim of the municipality is to integrate this link into the regular Utrecht Monitor starting in 2021. In this way, the commitment to broad prosperity and the SDGs can be made more visible in the Utrecht planning cycle.

As a council member, you can ask the College to make concrete proposals for indicators to visualise the contribution to one or more goals. For example, air pollution in districts with a less politically active population, suitable homes or jobs, the number of roofs on which solar panels are installed or the size of the trees.

Leiden

Martine van Schaik (Partij voor de Dieren) called on her municipality of Leiden to join VNG's SDGs campaign. An important added value for her is that the goals can contribute to a more balanced commitment in the living environment. In Leiden, for example, has invested a lot in the economy: a lot of money goes to commercial parks and attracting new companies. For a good balance, attention must also be paid to nature, greenery and liveability. Leiden is one of the most urbanised and densely populated municipalities in the Netherlands: every square metre is claimed in triplicate, says Martine. If the municipality is looking for space for a car park, new homes or a hockey field, the remaining pieces of green are soon rezoned. But an open grass area is not a worthless space. It often acts as a garden for a block of houses, a place to sit

down, or a dog park. In addition, space in the city is very important for nature and wildlife. The awareness of this is increasing, but growth thinking (more roads, more companies, more houses) is deeply rooted.

For Martine, working towards a balance also means: looking where the balance has already been seriously disrupted and restoring it. She refers to the book *De kwetsbare welvaart* (2018) (The fragile prosperity), which shows how prosperity and well-being have diverged in the Netherlands. Martine would like to see the monitoring and evaluation system of the municipality tightened on the basis of the SDGs. In her work, she is also involved in monitoring and evaluation, and she sees that measuring is knowing.



8

What data is available to track progress towards the goals?

The CBS annually measures trends in the Netherlands with regard to the SDGs, linked to the National Monitor for Broad Prosperity. For trend measurement, the CBS uses only part of the 244 indicators agreed internationally. Not all indicators are equally relevant to the Dutch situation. This applies all the more at the local level. Nor does the Netherlands have the relevant data for all the indicators. One challenge is to divide the available data into municipalities and different population groups. For the pursuit of inclusiveness, it is important to look beyond averages: the average figures can conceal large differences between, for example, men and women, young and old, urban and rural, native and newcomer. For good customisation, it is important to know what different groups think. The CBS's Broad Prosperity monitor shows, for example, that people with a lower level of education and people with a migration background experience significantly lower personal well-being than average for the Netherlands. They score less favourably on many of the indicators of broad prosperity, such as health and living environment. VNG International is working with several municipalities on a standard set of indicators for measuring the progress toward the SDGs at the local level. The Telos research institute and the CBS are also active in this area. Based on a pilot with the municipality of Oss, a first version of an SDG dashboard has been developed. However, this instrument does not yet

provide much data. Of course, numerous independently provided indicators and data are available, such as <https://www.waarstaatjegemeente.nl/> and various national, provincial and local monitors.



9

Are the goals political? Do they fit my party?

Many political parties, from left to right in the political arena, endorse the social tasks contained in the 17 main goals. Some are mainly inspired by the perspective that local action contributes to a better world, and that people elsewhere are committed to the same goals. Others see the agenda primarily as a basis for giving a greater role to the citizen. Others are thinking about mission-driven innovation policies with new revenue models for companies. The political nature of the agenda lies mainly in the level of ambition and in the question of what is the best way to achieve the goals. Most parties are thus in favour of sustainable mobility. But one party also wants to steer more towards expanding public transportation, while another is more interested in stimulating the use of electric vehicles.

Not all political parties are enthusiastic about linking municipal ambitions to the SDGs. The distance to the goals can be perceived as great, especially by local parties. Other parties are also sometimes concerned that embracing the goals limits the local consideration space. In order to avoid politicisation of the SDGs agenda, a council-wide approach can be chosen, as in Hardenberg (see box). In Velsen, the SDGs were linked to local tasks in the council agreement and thus stripped of a specific political colour. During a meeting at the VNG on the SDGs in January 2020, former VNG director Jantine Kriens made a strong

appeal to make the goals political but not polarising. The SDGs can help in a political conversation about the world we want. Make them into flesh and blood targets, she said.

The Utrecht SDGs ambassadors on the council represent goals that are in line with their own portfolio and that can help them to get closer to their own goals. They do this, for example, by involving the SDGs in written or oral questions in the political debate, in motions or on social media. Each party can use the goals to reinforce its own arguments, and to question other political groups or the college about their involvement. But at the start of the initiative, it was also agreed to work together to achieve the goals and thus jointly provide social added value. The ambassadors exchange their experiences from time to time and attend events in the context of the sustainability week, for example. Incidentally, it is not yet easy to actually work together on concrete goals from different corners of the political playing field.

10

What support is possible from my organisation?

Council members who want to commit themselves to the SDGs do not have to do everything alone: they can request support from the clerks and the civil services. The clerks can help with ideas on how to put the SDGs on the agenda in the council, for the college or for the civil services. When civil servants are already active in the municipal organisation with the goals, a commitment from the council offers support. Conversely, the council may ask the college to ensure that adequate civil service support and information are provided with regard to the SDGs and the connection to the council agenda. Officials see projects passing by and can inform council members when there is an opportunity to engage. Through the municipal council channels, clerks can also make a contribution to the visibility of the commitment of council members, for example via social media. The extent to which support is possible of course depends on the size and capacity of the clerks' office and the civil service. Utrecht's example shows what is possible in a large city with a lot of capacity. Former council member for international affairs, Jan Karens, now clerk in Nieuwegein, drove the action to deploy council members as SDGs ambassadors. He also offered substantive and organisational support in the implementation, together with communication consultant Emma Pisters. Together, they monitored the process and ensured that everyone was informed in a

timely manner. They organised interim meetings to discuss progress. They also informed council members about initiatives in the city and brought them into contact with organisations that are active around the goals, such as Utrecht University. Desirée van de Ven and Marcel Herms advise the council members from the civil service and connect initiatives in the organisation, the city and internationally to the SDGs.

The Utrecht4GlobalGoals platform also contributes to the work of the ambassadors. As an external party, it can increase visibility by sharing, among other things, Tweets, Facebook messages and Instagram posts from ambassadors. Attention to the SDGs will only persist if a concrete connection is established with the efforts of the College. In Velsen, the link with the SDGs in the council agreement was not translated into the College programme. It is important that people within the municipal organisation commit themselves. When the council eventually gives priority to other matters, for example because it lacks the tools to steer on the SDGs, progress slows to a standstill. Three initiators have now left Utrecht. This challenges others to keep the initiative and support alive.

Utrecht council members as SDGs ambassadors

Former Utrecht council member for international affairs Jan Karens was inspired by a nationwide action of the Building Change initiative in 2018, in which Lower House members were called upon to adopt one or more SDGs in line with their portfolio. Similar action at local level seemed to him to be a good way to involve the council in international themes. GroenLinks council member Janneke van der Heijden presented herself as a driver in the council. Together with Jan, she organised exploratory meetings with the other political parties and prepared an Action Plan. The goal was twofold: on the one hand, raising awareness of the SDGs within the college, the civil service organisation and the council and connecting the goals with the results of municipal policy, and on the other hand, promoting the goals in society. Except for three parties, all Utrecht council political parties provide one or more ambassadors.

Former mayor Jan van Zanen (VVD) regularly speaks as VNG chairman at international meetings on behalf of municipalities about the SDGs. He shared with the aspiring ambassadors his view of the 17 goals as a binding conceptual framework between different groups and parties in society. He advised a council-wide approach, in connection with the city. On February 7, 2019, the initiative was launched with a joint manifesto. The clerks' office and the civil service will support the ambassadorship (see Section 10).

Martijn van Dalen is Ambassador for Goals 9 and 11 on behalf of the VVD. This is in line with its themes of circular economy, emission-free transportation and district-oriented work. Martijn believes in the importance of sustainability and sees a gradually increasing focus on this theme within his party, especially in large cities, partly thanks to the Liberal Green movement. The SDGs are supportive, as far as he is concerned. He does not like symbolic actions. He is more interested in technological applications such as a bubble barrier in the canal to stop plastic. Martijn actively promotes electric driving in the city through the construction of charging infrastructure, also for electric trucks. His motion for high-speed charging stations at supermarkets has been adopted by the council. He also works to promote the installation of a hydrogen filling station. However, differences along political lines do remain. Ultimately, everyone wants to move towards emission-free transportation, but then you choose to steer on behaviour, for example through a car ban, or for the transition to electric driving. The government can give incentives in a certain direction. Utrecht, for example, has been doing reverse collection for a long time, while post-separation is easier for residents. If something goes wrong, he will talk to the councillor about it. For written questions, Martijn adds icons of the SDGs to which the questions relate. This raises awareness of the contribution that local action, for example



against litter, makes to the SDG of a cleaner environment. From the CDA, Jantine Zwinkels is the SDGs ambassador for Goals 3, 9 and 12. In her work, she also works on sustainability in a broad sense and frequently brings up the theme in the council. For her, it was a logical step to become an ambassador, especially because you can choose your own goal and give it your own interpretation. However, it was important for her that the council-wide initiative should not remain a symbolic gesture, and that it would really lead to an additional commitment. The mayor agreed with her. She would like to see which projects receive extra focus.

In practice, she has noticed that civil servants quickly turn to her when questions come from the city around her goals. In relation to SDG 12, she has asked that attention be paid to fair shopping. This is in line with the efforts of the CDA in the council for vital shopping areas. She has also posted a video on social media and got positive reactions to it. As ambassador for Goal 3, Jantine pays extra attention to health. For example, she asked questions about possible vibration nuisance for new construction (see Section 7). In her conversations in the city, sustainability is a big issue, but she doesn't bring up the SDGs on her own. Jantine and Martijn entered into a conversation with students from an Utrecht international Master's degree in sustainability. They presented research they had done in

relation to the SDGs. It was valuable to be able to show that the council is also working on the goals.

Ilse Raaijmakers is Ambassador for SDG 4 on behalf of the PvdA party. The fact that this goal is in line with her education portfolio is a good way to connect, and it does not involve much extra work. She, too, does not bring up the SDGs on her own in conversations with educational partners. Schools are often involved in sustainability campaigns, such as the plastic whale in the Utrecht canal, which drew attention to the plastic soup. The SDGs lend themselves well to strengthening the faction's spearheads. For example, when it comes to equal opportunities in education, which is under pressure in the Netherlands due to the early selection.

The city of Utrecht is struggling with a teacher shortage, class sizes that are too large and teachers drop out in some neighbourhoods. What is important is what you can do locally to increase equal opportunities. There is an action plan to combat the teacher shortage, but the question is whether it will be sufficient. The PvdA party would like to focus more on affordable homes and, for example, free parking for teachers. Broad school communities are also better at equal opportunities than categorical schools, but many residents want the latter. It illustrates that the way to reach the SDGs is a political issue.

Ruurt Wiegant is the SP SDG ambassador for



Goals 1 and 10. His party is positive about the active role of municipal councils in the SDGs. However, one problem in the eyes of the SP is that many parties that are in favour of the SDGs are at the same time - and even more so - in favour of a capitalist economic model that impedes the achievement of these goals, especially in developing countries. Action means more to Ruurt than words.

For example, if you choose to reduce inequality, that ought to include effective policies. The Partij voor de Dieren considers it only logical that Utrecht contributes to the SDGs, and both council members from the party have embraced a goal. Anne Sasbrink adopted goal 12, responsible consumption, and Maarten van Heuven goal 12, climate action. They are goals that fit well with the Partij voor de Dieren. Since then, they have often used the SDGs in their political work. They refer to them in debates and in questions to the college or other parties, and in motions and amendments.

GroenLinks has eight SDG ambassadors on the council. Fred Dekkers is ambassador for Goals 8, 16 and 17. He does not always find it easy to connect the goals to his activities. After all, the city has already formulated local development goals in every area. If district councils have their own framework, such as Samen voor Overvecht ('Together for Overvecht'), you want to take that as the basis. As far as SDGs 16 and 17 are

concerned, it is especially important that you act in the spirit of these goals: that you put participation and partnerships at the centre. You thus tackle SDG 7 together with energy cooperatives, and you must ensure that the energy transition is feasible and affordable for everyone. In the healthy food agenda for the city that is currently being worked on, there is an explicit reference to the SDGs. Goal 16 also comes to the fore in relation to migration and refugee issues, and the link with security here and elsewhere. For Fred, the goals mainly help to show that what you do in the city is part of a larger, global commitment. Recently, he received council-wide support for a motion to frame, in the founding deed for the new Regional Development Society, the objective of economic development within the conditions of the broad prosperity principle.

The SDGs also help to see economic development not only in terms of financial value but also as a contribution to social values.

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