The influence of the Sustainable Development Goals on the strategies of Non-Governmental Organisations

A case study on the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Health

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Abstract

A growing body of literature addresses the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within organisations. Yet, the influence of the SDGs on the strategies of NGOs remains less researched. In this study the organisational, partnership and communication strategy of an NGO are examined on the influence of the SDG, and the interaction between these strategies is addressed. An analytical framework has been created, building upon existing literature, in order to assess this issue. The direct and indirect naming of the SDGs operationalize this framework. A multi method approach was used, where the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Health (GAIN) was the case study. Coding of documents and in depth interviews led to interesting conclusions. The communication strategy is the most influenced by the SDGs, and seems to overlap with the partnership strategy. Since GAIN focusses primarily on nutrition, the second SDG came forward most often, both directly and indirectly. The main reason for engagement with the SDGs in the strategies of this NGO, is the influence of financial donors. These donors demand certain qualifications, that align partially with the SDGs, such as gender and climate issues. Due to the single case study conducted, the results might not apply to other NGOs and/or organisations. Therefore, more research is needed in order to draw more generalized and valid outcomes. Yet, the internal validity of this study remains high, and the methodology making use of the framework can be repeated and used in future studies.

Introduction

Climate change, poverty, hunger and biodiversity loss: are all issues that play a significant role in politics, economy and social life on earth. All of these issues are interconnected and their solutions are part of what is called sustainable development. These issues surrounding sustainable development have resulted in the emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals by the UN (SDGs). The SDGs are interconnected *in order to leave no one behind*. The seventeen goals emphasize different aspects of sustainable development, and each consist of multiple specific targets (Sustainabledevelopment.un.org, 2019). The countries that participate with the SDGs of the UN, have all agreed that these goals should be met before 2030 (Sustainabledevelopment.un.org, 2019). Therefore, it is important to examine how these goals have an impact on society, for example on local politics, or major businesses, and in what ways these goals can be achieved most efficiently.

In existing literature, reviews of the implementation and effectiveness of the SDGs are covered to a vast degree. Bowen et al. (2017), discuss several governance challenges that arise when attempting to implement the SDGs. They provide possible solutions for challenges such as trade-offs surrounding justice, equity and fairness. Knowledge on these topics give insights on how the goals can be actively achieved, and how to do this efficiently. Yet, the influence of the SDGs on Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the role NGOs play in the implementing of the SDGs has not been covered substantially. NGOs are an important stakeholder to achieve, and communicate the SDGs (Hege & Demailly, 2018). Hege & Demaily (2018) state that: "Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are key actors in translating the SDGs from international commitments to specific action at the national level.". The role of NGOs on the implementation of the SDGs on a national level is highly relevant and significant, and therefore it is meaningful to research the fashion of how NGOs accomplish this.

Some specific case studies on the implementation of one or more Sustainable Development Goals by NGOs have been done, with Walker (2016) being a good example. In this research as well, a case study will be conducted to look into the influence of SDGs on NGOs, since this topic has not been covered completely in existing literature, and can provide valuable insights on the process of striving for a more sustainable society. In this research, the question '*How do the Sustainable Development Goals influence the communication-, partnership-, and organisational strategies of NGOs, and how do these strategies interact?*' will be analysed. In order to answer this research question, a multi-method approach is taken, making use of a case study. Document analysis will show how the SDGs are reflected in these strategies. In depth interviews will give an insight in the extent of the influence, and the reasoning behind it.

The NGO studied in this research is the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Health (GAIN). GAIN is a rather large organisation, with offices in a multitude of countries, including Switzerland and The Netherlands. GAIN was launched at the UN in 2002. The goal of GAIN is to reduce the amount of people that suffer hunger, bad nutrition and health problems related to these issues (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, a, 2019). The NGO has developed and implemented many programs in developing countries. An example of a main concern and project is Improving Children's diets. GAIN is funded by various governments (e.g. the Canadian and the Dutch government) and other institutions (e.g. UK Aid) (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, b, 2019). Since GAIN is such a large organisation with a rather big impact worldwide, it is a suitable organisation for this case study. GAIN focuses mostly on hunger and good nutrition, aligning with the second SDG: zero hunger (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, a, 2019). Yet in this research, a focus will be put on more SDGs to give a broader insight in the influence of the SDGs on the strategies of GAIN.

This research will contribute to the knowledge on the role of NGOs in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. To study the influence of the SDGs on the different strategies of NGOs will lead to a better understanding of how NGOs can help to achieve these goals, and can be a setup for future research on the effectiveness of these strategies. Knowledge on these issues is crucial for society to reach the SDGs as agreed upon: before 2030.

Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research question, concepts and theories from existing literature are operationalized. The field where the research question lies within, is rather broad, and therefore leads to a multidisciplinary approach, with theories and concepts from a multitude of fields, such as political- and organisational sciences. The research question consists of several aspects, each with its own theoretical backgrounds. Therefore, a new theoretical framework is developed, drawing on theories and concepts from literature on the different strategies. There is a rather vast amount of literature which can be relevant for this research. For reasons of simplification, a selection has been made, based on the relevance and usability of the concepts.

The organisational-, communication-, and partnership strategies are assumed to be interlinked, as shown in Figure 1, leading to an integrated analytical framework. In the following section, the operationalized concepts and theories linked to this framework will be discussed, after which the framework is depicted. During the analysis of the data, it became clear that the framework did not suit the data perfectly, leading to a few changes in the concepts and the background literature used. This iterative process leads to the use of both inductive and deductive research methods, that are further explained in the methodological section below.

Figure 1: Integrative model of the interactions between the three different strategies.

Operalization of Strategy

This research focuses mainly on various different strategies. Therefore, it is necessary to define the concept strategy, before analysing the underlying theories for each of the different ones used. According to Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart (2010) strategy is a *"contingent plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal"*. Johnson et al (2011) state that a strategy equalizes the *"long-term direction of an organisation",* giving a broader meaning to the word strategy. A strategy is thus assumed to be an active plan of action to achieve a certain goal. The three different strategies that are covered in this research, are operationalized guided by this definition. In Table 1, the columns show three steps that are taken in the formulation of a strategy. In the next subsections, each of the concepts are elaborated on, based on existing literature.

Organisational strategy

Within the organisational strategy, the three following aspects are analysed: identify the goals, determine the business model and formulate the policies. These are deduced from many research findings and organisational practices, such as Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart (2010), Teece (2010), Bocken et al. (2014). The manner in which an organisation or business is built up, partly results from the organisational strategy they aim to pursue, in order to achieve the goals that have been set (Teece,

2010). The strategy an organisation adopts has a significant influence on the structure, culture and impact of this organisation (Jones, 2018). Therefore it is relevant to examine this strategy. Identifying the goal of the organisation is assumed to be the first step when realizing an organisational strategy (Popova & Sharpanskykh, 2011). The goal of an organisation differs per business, and can be determined by the individuals or the group that create and build up the organisation.

The goal of an organisation leads to the development of a business model. Therefore, in the framework, business models are assumed to be the second step. An organisational strategy, or business strategy, usually precedes the creation of the business model that a company chooses to adopt (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010). Business models exist in a wide variety, that cannot be summarized in just one section, therefore, interested readers are referred to existing literature (Teece, 2010; Zott, Amit & Massa, 2011). A business model captures the value creation process, and is an overall model of how the organisation aims to achieve its goals (Zott, Amit & Massa, 2011). Yet, as Zott, Amit & Massa (2011) explain, there is no consensus about what a business model exactly entails. On the other hand, there is consensus among scientists, that business models are of strategic use, and might determine the competitive advantage of a company or organisation (Michell & Coles, 2003). In this research, the explanation of a business model by Richardson (2008) is adopted. Richardson (2008) states that a business model explains how the strategy is executed by making use of activities of the firm. This is the interlinkage between the formulation of the organisational goals, and the implementation of these goals.

The organisational goals lead to the development of a business model, which in itself leads to the formulation of the policies. This third step entails the practical guidelines in order to fulfil the business model. "Policies are 'the plans of an organisation to meet its goals'. They are persistent entities which are intended to influence actions, either by motivating actions or by authorising them." (Moffett & Sloman, 1991). The policies are written documents, that cover a specific relevant topic, such as a code of conduct, or an environmental policy. They show the actions that are expected, or prohibited, within an organisation, in order to operationalize their business model and achieve the overall goals. Policies exist in a wide variety, and there are no specific guidelines for which policies an organisation needs to have.

Partnership strategy

Identify the aim of the partnership, determine the partners and formulate the stakeholder management, are the three steps that are identified with regard to the partnership strategy. The strategies of organisations regarding their partnerships, can take many different forms. Partnerships are defined by Brinkerhoff (2002) as the following:

*"Partnership is a dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. (*p 21).

No clear definition of a partnership strategy is formulated in literature, therefore the definition stated above, is combined with the description of strategy, which has been formulated in the subsection *operationalizing strategy* above. This combination leads to the definition of partnership strategy as the active plan to achieve valuable partnerships.

The first step in the framework is to determine the aim of the partnership. What does the organisation want to achieve with this partnership? What are the goals of the partnership? This very much resembles the goal setting within the organisational strategy, as explained above. Often, the aims of partnerships are often discussed, and documented by the actors and organisations involved. The second step in the framework is to identify the partners. This entails the selection of the partners an organisation wants to collaborates with. In this research, the influence of the SDGs on the identification

of the partners is operationalized by analysing the following: Are there new partnerships that can be linked to the SDGs? Are old partnerships removed?

The formulation of stakeholder management is the last step in the analytical framework. It is included in this research, because of the strategic nature of stakeholder management (Laplume, Sonpar, Litz, 2013). Stakeholder management entails the management of the relations with stakeholders, such as customers, employees, suppliers, et cetera (Hillman & Keim, 2001). It entails the contacts with these stakeholders, and the communication towards them. The concept is rather broad, and besides this definition, there are no pre-determined aspects to it, and it may vary per organisation. Stakeholder management gained more attention mostly due to Freeman (1984), who emphasized the importance of the management of all stakeholders involved with an organisation, and not only the directly related actors. Interested readers are referred to the literature review on stakeholder management of Laplume, Sonpar and Litz (2013). To measure the extent to which the SDGs have an influence on the stakeholder management, the following question will be addressed: Are existing partnerships' aims restructured with regard to the SDGs? This can for example be analysed by looking at the communication towards these stakeholders.

Communication strategy

In Table 1, it is shown that the communication strategy is assumed to consist of the following three steps: Identify objectives, determine target audience, formulate message. The influence of the SDGs on the communication strategy of NGOs will be analysed based on a simplified derivative of the communication strategy model by Kotler & Andreasen (1996) (see Figure 2). This theory explains the steps to be taken in order to determine strategic communication to other actors, such as the media. By using this model, it is possible to map the communication strategy of NGOs, and see if the SDGs influence one or more steps in this process, and to what extent this influences the overall communication strategy. Duong (2017) shows an example of how the communication strategy of fourth generation NGOs are shaped and realized, using the communication strategy model visualized in Figure 2. They assume that an NGOs communication is in its essence strategic, and of vital importance for the conveyance of the goals and aims of the organisation. Therefore, this model will be employed in this research as well, though deduced slightly, in order to make the concepts fit the new theoretical framework. The steps that have been included in this research are the first three of the model as shown in Figure 2. Yet, the two first steps are switched around, since it is assumed that the goal of the communication usually precedes the identification of the target audience. The final three steps are left out, for reasons of simplification, and the fact that these steps are assumed to be of less strategic origin.

The objectives of the communication, which includes the goal that the organisation aims to achieve with the communication, for example to get a positive look on the organisation. The determination of the target audience implies the actors that the communication is directed at, such as customers, politicians et cetera. The target audience can be strategically chosen, in order to fulfil a goal the organisation aims to achieve. The formulation of the communication message entails the actual wording of the message. In this case study, press releases will be screened for the extent that the SDGs are reflected.
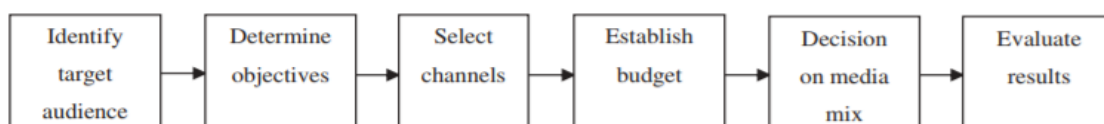

Figure 2: Communication strategy model by Kotler & Andreasen (1996).

In Table 1, the final framework is shown, using the three step approach for each of the three strategies. The concepts are explained in the section above, and the table summarizes and visualizes the three strategies and the components they exist off. The concepts for each of the strategies move from conceptual to practical when going from the left side of the table to the right side. This makes it possible to compare the strategies to a certain extent.

	Identify:	Determine:	Formulate:
Organisational Strategy	**Goals.** The overarching organisational goals: *We aim to.. Our goal is to..*	**Business model.** The written down plan of how to achieve the organisational goals.	**Policies.** Specific and written down topic related rules of practice in order to operationalize the business model.
Partnership Strategy	**Aim of partnership.** The goals that the organisation wants to achieve with help of a partnership.	**Partners.** Specific actors determined for the achievement of a goal.	**Stakeholder management.** The management of the partnerships, including agreements among the parties.
Communication Strategy	**Objectives.** The reasons for the communication to be carried out.	**Target audience.** The audience that will be targeted with the communication.	**Message.** The specific wording of the message.

Table 1: The integrated framework for analysing stages in different strategies.

Interaction between strategies

The organisational, partnership and communication strategies are assumed to be interrelated, as stated above. The interaction between the strategies is measured as coevolution of the strategies and the steps defined in Table 1. This can be seen in Figure 1 as well as in Table 1. In Table 1, the rows are organized in order of significance of the strategies. The organisational strategy lies at the core of an organisation, and possibly influences the other strategies. Furthermore, the column represent the three steps in creating a strategy. The level of the SDG influence on these three steps is going to be analysed as described above. The interaction between the strategies can also be determined and analysed based on this three step approach as explained in the previous section. It is assumed that the more the SDGs have an influence on the strategies, the more steps will be influenced.

In Figure 1, these interactions are shown in a simple figure, with the arrows pointing out the relationships between the different boxes. For example, the partnership strategy of an organisation entails the strategic planning surrounding stakeholders of an organisation. The communication with these stakeholders is partly determined by the communication strategy. Thus, the communication and the partnership strategy are linked. This linkage is assumed to come forward within the in depth interviews of this research. The interaction between the three strategies is assumed to be iterative, meaning that not only the organisational strategy has an influence on the other two, but also the other way around.

Methodology

In this research, a multi-method approach has been used. A literature study was performed to define the theoretical framework, and set the discourse for the research. This theoretical framework is the basis for a case study on one of the larger international NGOs worldwide, namely GAIN. Using a case study to answer the research question is a suitable method for this research, since it gives an in-depth understanding of the processes surrounding the various strategic environments of NGOs. Strategy documents, and other relevant information provided by the organisation were analysed. At last, in depth interviews with relevant stakeholders of GAIN were conducted in order to gain more insights in what the influence of the SDGs on their organisational-, communication-, and partnership strategy is, and how these strategies interact.

Data collection

The data that has been analysed in this research is mostly qualitative, originating from the in-depth interviews and the (strategy) document analysis. The sources of the literature used are scientific (e.g. search engines such as Scopus and Google Scholar), with articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals (e.g. Elsevier). The relevant strategy documents were obtained through the website of GAIN (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, c., 2019). Press releases by GAIN were also included in the analysis, in order to analyse the communication strategy of GAIN. These publications are available on the main website of the organisation. Random sampling of five publications per year has been conducted in order to make a selection of the press releases included in this research (years with less publications have been excluded), leading up to 40 items in total. This can provide insights in the development of the influence of the SDGs on this particular strategy. Besides the strategic plan of GAIN for 2017 - 2022, all the policy documents available on their website were included, since these documents contain the vision of GAIN on several issues, and might cover parts of their strategies as well. The total amount of policy documents adds up to 13. Furthermore, annual reports of GAIN from the year 2008 until 2017 have been included in order to analyse the development of the influence of the SDGs over time (9 documents). In Appendix 2, an overview of all the analysed documents is provided. The total amount of documents used in this study is 63, excluding the two transcriptions of the interviews.

In order to measure the influence of the SDGs in the various strategies and the three steps, the direct and indirect naming of the SDGs was counted in the documents. Directly encompasses the active naming of specific SDGs, by using the terms: SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals, goals by the UN, etc. Indirectly incorporates statements that overlap the targets and goals of the SDGs, but do not mention the exact name. Following this, extra information on specific areas was collected through interviews, where the framework has been used to guide the questioning.

Qualitative data derived by the in depth interviews was gathered through current employees of GAIN. Two main employees of GAIN The Netherlands were interviewed. These employees are considered to be experts on the topics that make part of this research, and therefore are valuable interviewees in this research. The interviews were semi-structured, with a pre-defined (interview-) script. Data was analysed using open coding with the NVIVO software (for the transcribed interviews), and general analysis of the literature found, using the theoretical framework as explained in the section above.

Data processing

As explained before, the data (press releases, interview(s), strategy and policy documents, annual reports) was coded in Nvivo, using the analytical framework as a guidance for the nodes. Resulting from this, several graphs and tables have been constructed, showing the most important outcomes of the data analysis. These are presented in the results section. The SDGs that have been included in the research are SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG

12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). This choice has been made based on the relevance for the organisation GAIN, and the first reading of the policy and strategy documents.

Ethics and data processing

Since this research makes use of a case study, where both individual persons as well as departments of an organisation are analysed and interviewed, it is necessary to have a clear vision on the ethical issues within the research, and the management of the data collected. The in-depth interviews were anonymously processed, leaving out the names of the interviewed persona's, and possibly named people within the interviews, unless consent is given by the participants. Names are also left out in the document analysis, unless consent is given by the individuals in question. Replacing the names of the participants with 'current employee' ensures their privacy. A consent form was given to all the participants of the in-depth interviews, following the main guidelines of personal data protection and participation of the interview. The interviews have been recorded and transcribed. The transcribed interviews are not added as appendices in this research, since consent was not given by the interviewees. All the files with regard to the interviews have been stored on an external drive. At last, GAIN has given consent to use the name of the organisation, and to publish this report in university databases.

Expected results

The hypothesis following up the research question in this study, consists of several aspects. It is expected that the SDGs are mostly indirectly named in the communication and partnership strategies of GAIN. The organisation strategy on the other hand, has no direct and indirect linkages to the Sustainable Development Goals. Partnerships with strategic stakeholders concerning the SDGs are developed, though this amount is not significantly high. Furthermore, the interaction between the different types of strategy is most apparent between the communication and partnership strategy.

Results

In graphs 1, 2 and 3, the frequencies of the directly and indirectly named SDGs in the three steps of the different strategies, are shown. The documents used for these graphs are the same for the three graphs, and entail the press releases, annual reports, policy documents, interview transcriptions and strategy documents. One result that stands out immediately, is the great importance of the second SDG relative to the other goals. This is a rather logical outcome, and can be explained by the stated organisational goal of GAIN, as stated in their strategy of 2017 - 2022: "*GAIN's purpose is to advance nutrition outcomes by improving the consumption of nutritious and safe food for all people, especially those most vulnerable to malnutrition.*" Which aligns well, and is often connected in the analysed documents, with SDG 2. When looking at Graph 4, it stands out that the organisational strategy has the most naming of the SDGs. This is mostly due to the indirect naming of SDG 2 within the goals of GAIN. Furthermore, SDG 3 and 12, are barely mentioned in any of the documents. The reason for this, is that these goals are not prioritized by GAIN, and do not directly overlap with the organisational goal.
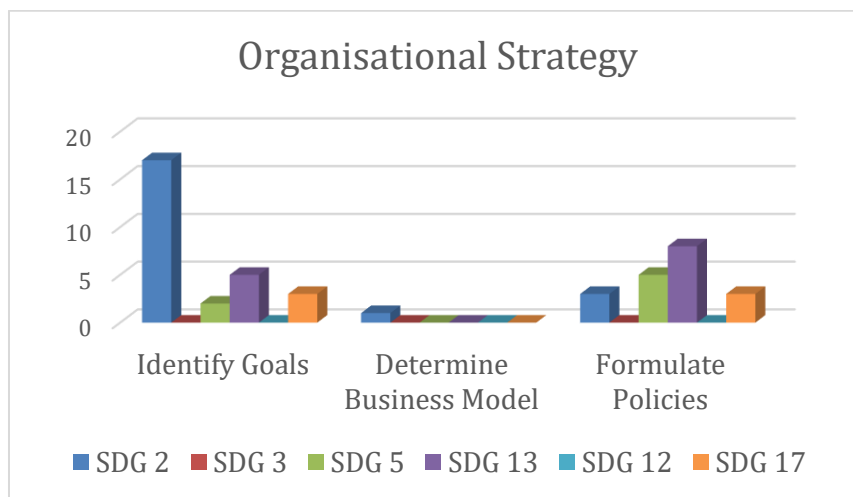
Graph 1: The frequencies of the SDGs named (directly and indirectly) in the three steps of the organisational strategy within all the documents coded.
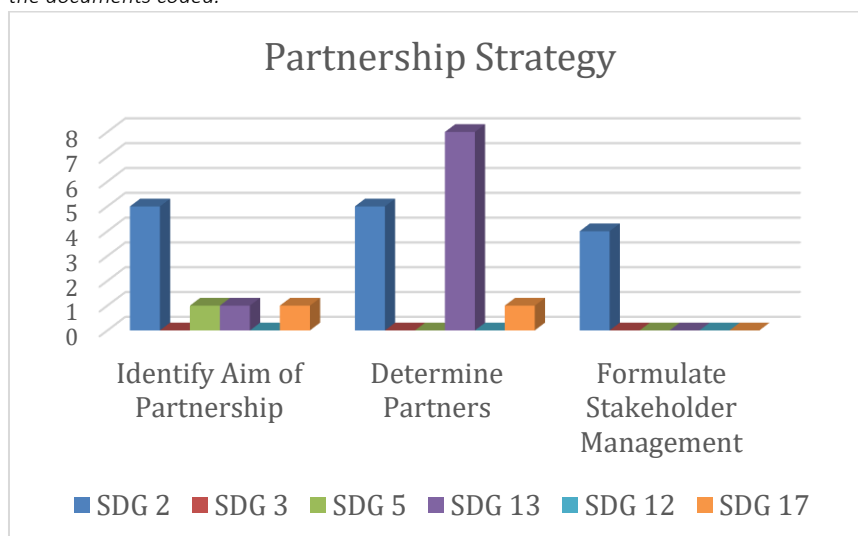
Graph 2: The frequency of the SDGs named (directly and indirectly) in the three steps of the partnership strategy within all the documents coded.

Communication Strategy
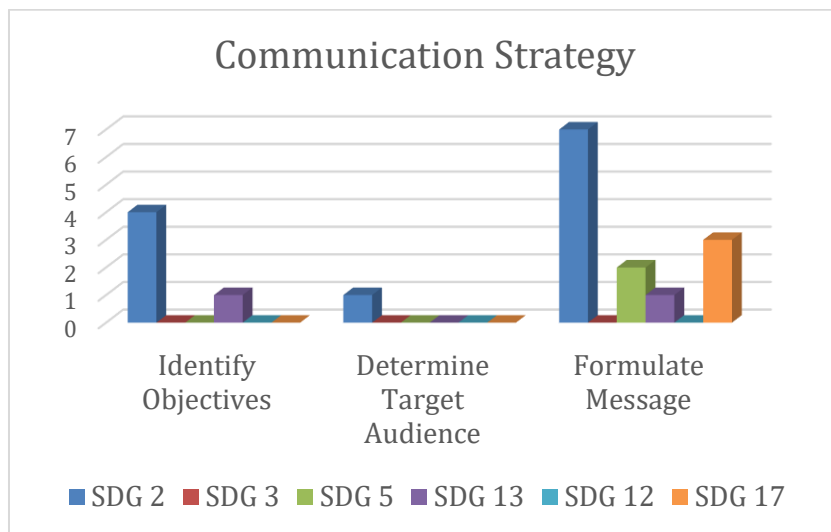
Graph 3: The frequency of the SDGs named (directly and indirectly) in the three steps of the communication strategy within all the documents coded.

In the organisational strategy the SDGs are named most often in *identify goals* and *select policies*. SDG 2 is named often in the identify goals step, yet not much in the policy step. This might be due to the fact that the organisational goal is embedded in the more practical outcomes of the goals and business model, and is more reflected within the projects GAIN does. These projects were not analysed in this study, yet might give an interesting insight in the operationalization of SDG 2.

Within the policies, several of the SDGs are named. This is due to the rather large variety of policy documents of GAIN. For example, the environmental policy, aligns strikingly well with SDG 13. The Principles of Engagement policy, which explains how GAIN forms partnerships, has overlap with SDG 17. At last the Gender policy aligns well with SDG 5. Gender and climate are named as two important popular topics, that GAIN a) wants to contribute to, because of internal motivation of employees, and b) has to contribute to, because of the demand by donors. Both policies are being revised, and presented to the external board of advisors in the end of June 2019.

In the partnership strategy, there is a consistent naming of SDG 2 in all three of the steps. This is because GAIN has always included other organisations that work with nutrition in their partnerships, also now that the SDGs have come into existence. The other SDGs are named significantly less. What stands out is the large share of SDG 13 in the Partnership strategy: *Identify Partners.* The reason for this came forward in the in depth interviews. SDG 13 is considered the most relevant, and popular in a sense, also for the organisation GAIN. Therefore, GAIN considers it to be of importance to strategically choose new partnerships, that are actively engaging with SDG 13 (climate action). Though, SDGs 13, is not reflected much in the identification of the aim of the partnership and in the stakeholder management. The reason for this is uneasy to determine, and can be partially appointed to methodological biases and difficulties.

GAIN has a wide variety of partnerships, both in different sectors as in different countries (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, b. 2019). In the in depth interviews, it came forward that GAIN is involved in several partnership that actively engage with the SDGs. An example is The Netherlands Working Group on Nutrition (NWGN), where partners from different sectors engage with promoting nutrition as an important issue. A second example is the SDG charter, of which GAIN is a member. This collaboration looks at how the organisations involved can work around the SDGs. This shows that new partnerships and alliances are formed and/or influenced by the SDGs. As stated in the interview, GAIN wants to develop and extent their old partnerships, and helping these partners grow for themselves as

well. GAIN is working on improving existing partnerships, in order to contribute to for example SDG 13. An example on the project based level are the single use plastic sachets for micronutrient powders. GAIN is exploring the options on how they can switch to bio based plastics or other more sustainable options, without compromising their existing partnership. Yet, it can be discussed to what degree these type of actions reflect SDG 13, climate action, and to what extent the influence of the this SDGs runs within the organisation.

Within the communication strategy most references are situated in the *select formulation* step of the framework. As came forward in the interviews, the reason for this is mainly grounded in the demand of financial donors. Donors ask for certain aspects to be fulfilled by an organisation, such as environmental concern. In finance applications, GAIN strategically names the SDGs, and implements them in their projects in order to get the funding they need. This financial driver will be further elaborated on in the discussion section below.
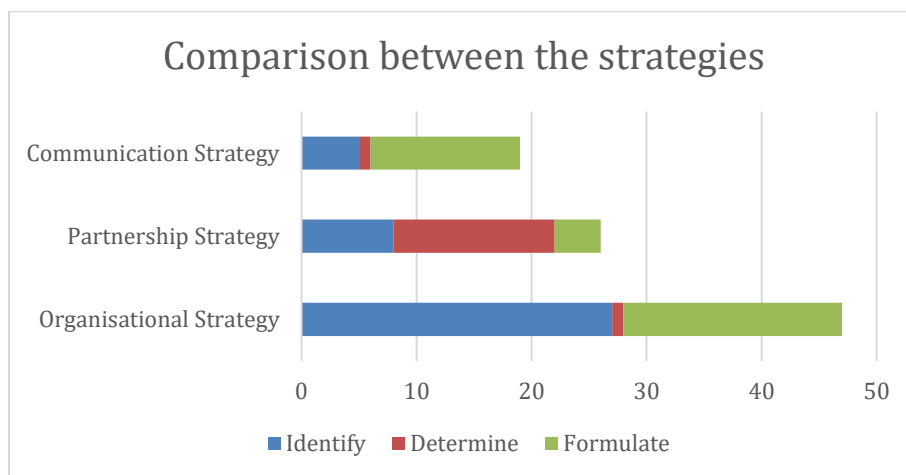
Graph 4: The comparison between the organisational, partnership and communication strategy, including all the documents coded, with both the direct and indirect mentions of the SDGs.
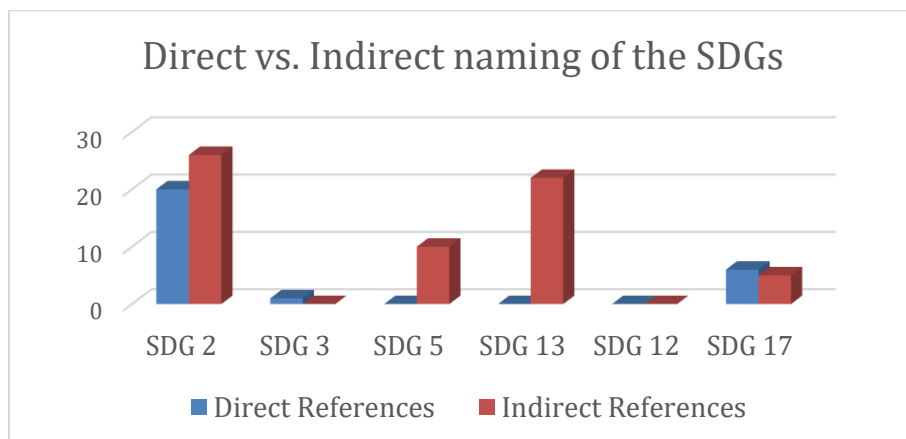
Graph 5: Direct vs. Indirect naming of the SDGs in all the coded documents.

Graph 4 shows the three strategies in comparison with each other. The three steps are, as explained before, build up from conceptual to practical, which makes is possible to compare them to a certain degree. It is visible that the organisational strategy has the most references of SDGs. Though, as explained before, these mostly consist of indirect references that fall into the category of organisational

goals. The SDGs are named less in the communication strategy than the other strategies, which is a result that is was not expected in advance.

In graph 5, the amount of indirect and direct references to the SDGs are visualized. What stands out immediately is that the SDGs are more often indirectly mentioned in the analysed documents. SDG 2 and 17 have the most direct references. This can be explained by the organisational goal of GAIN. GAIN emphasizes the importance of multi stakeholder partnerships, and multi- level partnerships, from different sectors in society. This is embedded in their organisational strategy, that nutrition issues cannot be solved just by an NGO and the government, but that the private sector is absolutely needed in order to achieve this goal. As stated in the annual report of 2015-2016: "While Sustainable Development Goal 2 specifically refers to the elimination of malnutrition by 2030, SDG 17 – "revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development" – is perhaps one of the most unsung yet important SDGs. Specifically it calls for all of us to "encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships". (p – 2).

The issue of better nutrition aligns rather well with SDG 2, and is therefore also more often named than any other SDG included in this research. Also, GAIN not only emphasizes the importance of partnerships in order to achieve their goal, but also to achieve the SDGs as a whole.

Press Releases	#SDGs	General or Specific
2007	0	_
2008	0	_
2014	1	General, yet linked to nutrition
2015	1	General
2016	0	_
2017	0	_
2018	3	General
2019	2	General, yet linked to nutrition

Table 2: SDGs directly named in press releases, including the general or specific naming of the SDGs.

Annual Reports	# SDGs	General or Specific
2008-2009	0	_
2009-2010	0	_
2010-2011	0	_
2011-2012	0	_
2012-2013	1	General
2013-2014	1	General, yet linked to nutrition
2014-2015	2	General, yet linked to nutrition
2015-2016	2	General, yet linked to nutrition
2016 - 2017	1	General

Table 3: SDGs directly named in annual reports, including the general or specific naming of the SDGs.

The random sampled press releases of GAIN, show clearly the transition towards the SDGs that were established in 2015, as can be seen in Table 2. In the documents before 2015, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are named to some extent. The MDGs are considered to be the frontrunner of the SDGs, and are named in interview 1 as GAINs basis for existence. Therefore, GAIN has always mentioned the global development goals set by the UN in its communication. The reason for this is merely strategic, and overlaps with what is explained above regarding the financial donors of GAIN.

Furthermore, as came forward in the interview, the development goals are used as a common language among GAIN and its partners. The SDGs are described as a framework for communication, in order to make collaborations clearer, and avoid miscommunication (interview 2). The SDGs are named directly, yet in general, and specific SDGs are not mentioned in the press releases analysed. In some of the documents, the nutrition is named as an important factor within the SDGs, and therefore they link with SDG2.

The MDGs, and later the SDGs are named in most of the introductions of the Annual reports, in order to emphasize the importance of these goals, and where GAIN aims to contribute to. In the interviews, it came forward that one of the reasons for GAIN to use the SDGs, is to highlight the global urgency of the issues they are addressing. In that sense, the SDGs are used as a validator of the work that GAIN does. Aligning with the results of the press releases, within the annual reports, the SDGs are mostly named in general, and no specific SDG is stated. Also here, nutrition is often linked with the SDGs, but SDG 2 is not directly named. For both the press releases and the annual reports it can be discussed whether this use of the SDGs is a sign of shallow or deep uptake.

Discussion

The results as discussed above, bring up several questions of interest, that will be discussed in this section. Furthermore, the contribution of this research to the wider literature will be addressed, after which the limitations of the analytical framework and the research itself will be stated. At last, recommendations for further research will be made.

Drivers of SDG implementation in strategy

The level of indirect influence of the SDGs on the strategies of GAIN seems rather large when looking at the coded documents, yet, as became clear within the interviews, it is hard to point at the cause of the behaviour, and therefore, even if the strategy of GAIN aligns with an SDG, it cannot be said with certainty that this is always caused by the SDGs in itself. Sometimes, multiple causes for a certain decision or action came forward, making it hard to assign how much the SDGs as one of the causes contributed to the total intention. Some specific links, on the other hand, have been made with the SDGs, which have been covered partially in the results section above. These links all came forward out of the in depth interviews. In existing literature, some of these motivations have been covered, enhancing the validity of the results obtained. Hege & Demailly (2017) for example, list six main reasons why NGOs mobilize around the SDGs. These are 1) A universal and integrated agenda that was long overdue, 2) An advocacy tool, 3) An opportunity to create new coalitions, 4) A window of opportunity to influence a national political strategy, 5) An opportunity for new funding sources, and 6) An opportunity to protect the political space for NGOs.

The fifth reason named above, is the main motivation for GAIN that resulted from the analyses of this research. By engaging in more sustainable activities, for example aligning with SDG 13, there is a wider variety of donors that the organisation can address for finance. New opportunities come forward, and thinking outside of the box was named in one of the interviews, as how they approach this new type of potential donors. Besides this, existing donors also ask for more reporting on the SDGs. Hege & Demailly (2018) state the following: "NGOs report that donors have just begun to adapt tender requirements, mostly in terms of changes to the wording of project requirements.". Their study in Germany and France showed that financial donors of NGOs are changing the requirements with regard to the SDGs that the NGOs need to fulfil in order to get finance. Within GAIN, this also plays a rather big role in the overall use of the SDGs.

The other reasons for GAIN to use the SDGs in their strategies, as came forward in the interviews, are the internal motivation of the employees, the SDGs as a common language, and the validation of the work GAIN does on a national and international level. Hege & Demailly (2017) also explain this common language that the SDGs provide for NGOs and other organisations. The SDGs are seen as a framework, that justifies the NGOs to get more involved in the political arena. The SDGs helps NGOs to justify their work, which was also emphasized by GAIN in this research. The SDGs are described as a useful tool to accomplish specific organisational goals with help of partnerships. From the six reasons described by Hege & Demaily (2017), three come forward most significantly in this research, namely the advocacy tool, the opportunity for new funding sources and the opportunity to create new coalitions. The first reason was named briefly, yet can not be appointed with certainty as one of major importance for GAIN based on the data analysed. The fourth and last reason have not become apparent in the data.

Relative importance of the various SDGs

Some of the SDGs were more apparent in the study than others. There are several reasons that explain this. Firstly, the organisation of interest in the case study, GAIN, has a specific aim for nutrition.

Therefore, SDG 2 was named rather much compared to the other goals. What became apparent in the interviews, was that the issue of nutrition is assumed to be an important factor for achieve all the other SDGs. The Global Nutrition Report of 2017 states that "Improving nutrition will be a catalyst for achieving goals throughout the SDGs." (Hawkes & Fanzo, 2017). The importance of nutrition and thereby SDG 2 is emphasized, and visualized in Figure 3. Nutrition is assumed to have an influence on all the other goals, and therefore being an important issue to focus on. GAIN collaborated with many partners on publishing the Global Nutrition Report, and uses the information presented as a validation for their work, to emphasize the global urgency of nutrition. Figure 3 represents an item used in the communication strategy of GAIN and other nutrition organisations, to emphasize the urgency of their cause, and validate the work they are doing.
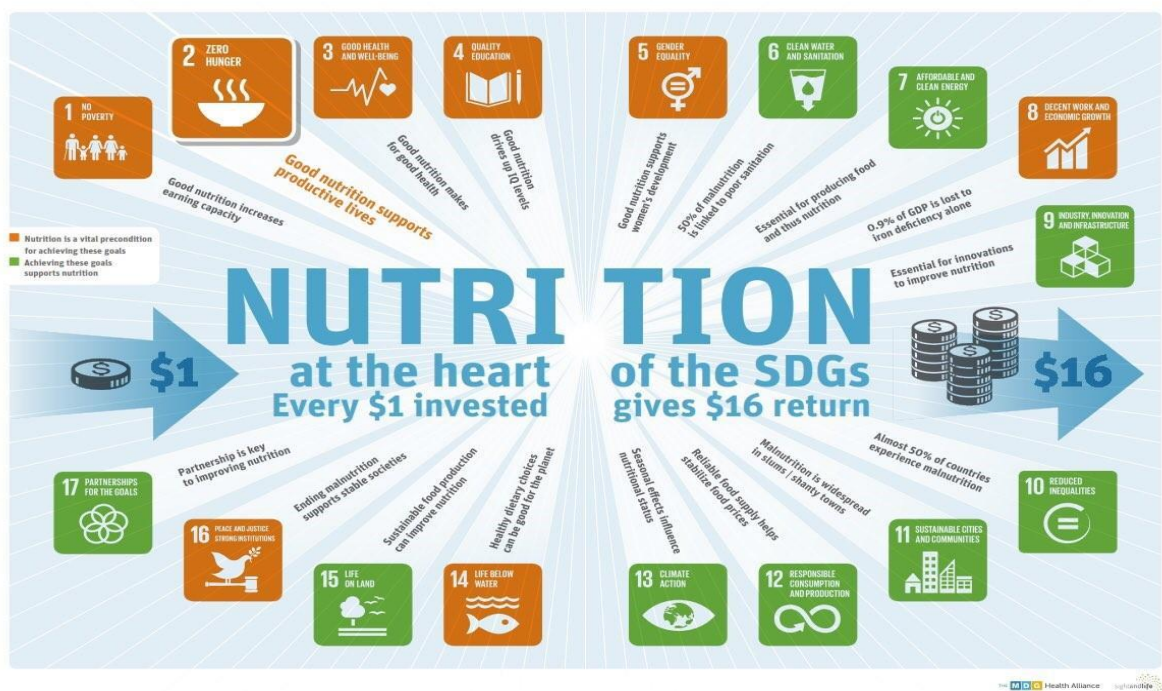

Figure 3: Obtained through interviewee 2.

What has also been stated above, is the fact that SDG 5 and SDG 13 are described as GAIN to be the most relevant and popular of the SDGs as viewed by society, leading to GAIN prioritizing these goals as well, beside their main goal that aligns with SDG 2. This is visible in the revision of both the gender policy and the climate change policy of GAIN. This trend seems to be visible in more sectors, yet not much research has been done on this issue. Mhlanga, Gneiting & Agarwal (2018) discuss the SDG prioritization in companies, and also find a trend in the prominence of SDG 13 and SDG 5.

Influence of the SDGs on strategies

By combining the results obtained through the coding process, and the reasons for SDG implementation as described above, it is possible to examine the influence of the SDGs on the strategies of the NGO investigated. The SDGs are named directly and indirectly in all three of the strategies researched in this study. The organisational strategy has the most counts of SDGs in the various steps. Though, the influence of the SDGs on this strategy is not the most significant, since the SDGs were mostly indirectly named, and the goal of GAIN aligned well with SDG 2. The influence of the SDGs on the partnership strategy is more apparent, and is starting to play a larger role overall, as came forward from the in depth interviews. The naming of the SDGs in this strategy is explained both by the expectancy of external

donors, and the internal motivation of the organisation. At last, within the communication strategy, the SDGs came forward constantly, which shows the influence that the goals have on this particular strategy. As with the partnership strategy, the influences by financial donors on the use of the SDGs is one of the main reasons deducted from this research.

Overall the influence of the SDGs on the organisational, partnership and communication strategy of GAIN is present, yet the SDGs have not directly established themselves as much within the organisational strategy and the business model of GAIN. The largest influence of the SDGs is on the communication strategy, driven by the financial donors of GAIN. In the in depth interviews, it became clear the GAIN views the SDGs to be of value, yet they are more concerned with achieve their organisational goal of reducing malnutrition and hunger in the world. This goal remains of largest importance, and is prioritized over all other goals that might come forward out of the SDGs. As shown in Figure 4, GAIN actively acknowledges the importance of SDG 2, which overlaps quite much with their core organisational goal, for the achievement of the other SDGs. This they therefore use to validate their work, and their focus on SDG 2.

It can be discussed whether the use of the SDGs by GAIN is a sign of deep or shallow uptake. Since the SDGs are mostly reflected in the communication and partnership strategy, and are not directly reflected in the organisational goals as much. Yet, the indirect overlap of the SDGs within the policies of GAIN, show that the organisation does have practical rules on these topics and issues. On the other hand, since GAIN contributes to SDG 2, it can be discussed whether they need to actively include the other SDGs as well, which was also brought forward in both of the interviews.

Interaction between strategies

As stated above, the analytical framework together with the information gathered through the in depth interviews, have led to a conclusion on the influence of the SDGs on these strategies of the organisation studied. As explained before, it is assumed that the three strategies interact. In Figure 1, this interaction is visualized. The results obtained with the coding, did not show a trend in interaction. The reason for this, is that this aspect cannot be deducted from the analytical framework. Also, in the interviews, a clear relationship has not come forward. Though, it was brought up that the communication and the partnership strategy have several overlaps. In the coding process, this became apparent by the fact that it was sometimes rather difficult to decide on which strategy to choose for a certain statement of an/the SDG(s). The interaction between strategies is a topic that can, and should, be researched more, in order to better determine the influence of the SDGs on NGOs (and other organisations). A conclusion on the interaction between the strategies is therefore rather difficult to draw from the results obtained in this study.

Contribution to literature on SDG implementation

The results found in this study, contribute to the knowledge on the SDG implementation. By gaining knowledge on the influence of the SDGs on the various strategies of NGOs, the impact that the SDGs have on NGOs, and therefore society, becomes clearer. Understanding these processes can help to improve the SDG implementation, and contribute to the accomplishment of these goals.

On the level of GAIN, this study may contribute to the understanding of the strategies of their organisation, and how the SDGs influence these. This information might be used as input for further developments in this field. Furthermore, it is interesting to look at how these insights contribute to the project level of GAIN. How do the strategies of GAIN influence the projects on the ground, and how do the SDGs come forward in these actions? A few examples have been provided in this research, resulting from the in depth interviews with employees of GAIN, they can be found in the previous sections.

Validity and limitations

The internal validity of this research satisfactory, since the methods are applied in a structured and logical way. The external validity, and the ability to apply the insights of this study on other areas, has to be considered carefully. Since this study is an in depth case study, the results might not apply to other NGOs or organisation. Yet, since the information obtained through is study is so specific, interesting new facts can come forwards, that can be used as a basis within other case studies. The mixed-method approach use in this research also increases the validity of the results, since the results obtained are originated from different sources and therefore have an increased reliability.

During the analysis of the data, it came forward that the analytical framework needed to be adapted slightly, in order to be more functional. Also, the placement of relevant information out of the documents within the framework turned out to be a slightly subjective process. Therefore, the results should be looked at carefully. Two parts in the framework stood out specifically. First, the *determine business model* step in the organisational strategy, had almost no results. The reason for this is that the NGO studied, did not have a written down business plan. In one of the interviews it was stated that the strategic plan covered most of the business plan of GAIN, yet the interviewee was not certain whether it could be called a business model. Written down business models, by for example using the business model canvas, are more often used by small to medium sized enterprises (Frick & Ali, 2013). The business model step was still included in the research, because of this valuable framework, which can be used to study other organisations.

Secondly, within the communication strategy, it was difficult to code the second step in the framework: *determine target audience.* The reason for this was the big overlap with the first step (*identify objectives).* Often it was rather complicated to draw the line between those two steps, because the objectives of the communication often implicated what audience there was for the communication.

At last, the framework identifies the amount of direct and indirect references to the SDGs. The results that can be drawn from this are in itself not explanatory. It is visible to detect a trend, yet it is important to study the reasoning behind these results. This was the reason for the interviews to be conducted. These interviews turned out to be rather valuable, and therefore it is recommended for further research to use this tool more extensively.

Recommendations for further research

More research is needed to cover the interaction between the organisational, partnership and communication strategies of organisations. In existing literature, there is a wide gap on this topic, and it turned out to be rather difficult to analyse this interaction in the case study of this research. Therefore, it is of relevance to build a theoretical understanding of this interaction, in order to analyse the impact that SDGs have on the strategies of organisations more extensively.

More case studies, and quantitative studies on this topic, should be conducted in order to detect a more general trend among NGOs. This will lead to more valid conclusions, and will give a more certain result than the one case study conducted in this research. This knowledge will be of value in the literature on SDG implementation. Future research can also be done on the impact side of the strategies of organisations, to analyse to what extent the SDGs actually influence action on the ground and for example in projects. In this case study, some examples came forward, and it would be interesting to research more in to depth how the organisation uses the SDGs in practice.

Conclusion

In this research, the question '*How do the Sustainable Development Goals influence the communication -, partnership-, and organisational strategies of NGOs, and how do these strategies interact?*' stood central. As explained in the discussion, the influence of the SDGs on the strategies differed in several ways. First, the communication strategy was mostly influenced, driven by the demands of financial donors of the organisation. The communication strategy seems to overlap with the partnership strategy, in which the SDGs play a role. At last, the influence of the SDGs on the organisational strategy showed to be growing. New policies are written and old ones are rewritten, that align with the SDGs, such as the gender and climate policies.

Several reasons for the influence of the SDGs on these strategies were brought forward, of which the demand by financial donors was the most significant one. Furthermore, the justification of the work the organisation does plays a role. This also aligns with the SDGs being viewed as a framework for organisations to work together, where the SDGs function as a common language. The main goal of the organisation was on the other hand emphasized to remain the most important goal, whereby the goals of the SDGs were not prioritized over this core organisational goal.

The interaction between the three strategies was not very clear, and conclusion cannot be made with certainty about this issue. The research showed that the communication and the partnership strategy had overlap, insinuating an interaction between these two strategies. Yet, more research has to be done in order to validate these insights.

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Appendix 1: Codes Nvivo

Nodes

✦	Name	/
⊟ ◯	**Communication Strategy**	
⊞ ◯	Determine Objectives	
⊞ ◯	Identify Target Audience	
⊞ ◯	Select Formulation	
⊟ ◯	**Organisational Strategy**	
⊞ ◯	Determine Business Model	
⊞ ◯	Identify Goals	
⊞ ◯	Select Policies	
⊟ ◯	**Partnership Strategy**	
⊞ ◯	Determine Goal of Partnership	
⊞ ◯	Identify Partners	
⊞ ◯	Select Stakeholder Management	

The three steps for each strategy are split up in the SDGs included in this research.

Appendix 2: Overview of coded documents

Press releases 2007

GAIN (2007). Flour fortification to drastically reduce anemia and birth defects in Egypt. [online] Available at: https://www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/flour-fortification-drastically-reduce-anemia-birth-defects-egypt/ [Accessed 13 Jun. 2019].

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Press releases 2014

GAIN (2014). National Workshop on Sustainable Universal Salt Iodization (USI) Program in Bangladesh. [online] Available at: https://www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/national-workshop-sustainable-universal-salt-iodization-usi-program-bangladesh/ [Accessed 13 Jun. 2019].

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GAIN (2014). GAIN helps Ebola-affected Liberia by supporting food fortification program. [online] Available at: https://www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/gains-helps-improve-nutrition-ebola-affected-liberia/ [Accessed 13 Jun. 2019].

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Press releases 2015

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Press releases 2018

HarvestPlus & GAIN (2018). New partnership between the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) and HarvestPlus seeks to expand access to biofortified crops to one billion people. [online] Available at: https://www.gainhealth.org/knowledge-centre/new-partnership-between-the-global-alliance-for-improved-nutrition-gain-and-harvestplus-seeks-to-expand-access-to-biofortified-crops-to-one-billion-people/ [Accessed 13 Jun. 2019].

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Code of Conduct
Conflict Of Interest Policy For Board Members
Environment and Climate Change Policy
Fraud And Corruption Prevention Policy And Whistleblower Mechanism
GENDER in projects
Intellectual Property and Global Access Policy
Policy for Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons
Position Paper on Value for Money
Principles of Engagement
Procedure for the application of GAIN's principles of engagement
Strategy 2017-2022
Transparancy at GAIN - IATI
Workplace, gender, equality and diversity policy

Annual Report 2008 - 2009
Annual Report 2009 - 2010
Annual Report 2010 - 2011
Annual Report 2011 - 2012
Annual Report 2012 - 2013
Annual Report 2013- 2014
Annual Report 2014 - 2015
Annual Report 2015 - 2016
Annual Report 2016 - 2017