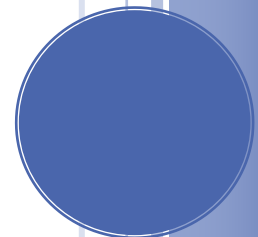


‘Business Associations as Catalysts for Collective Change: An explorative study of the collaboration potential between WWF-NL and Dutch business associations in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals’

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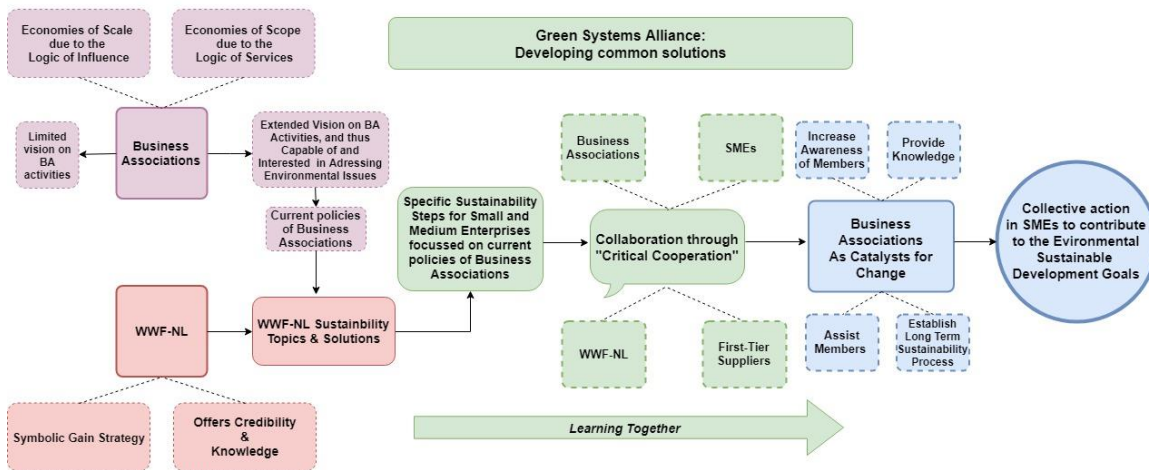
Executive Summary

'Business Associations as Catalysts for Collective Change: An explorative study of the collaboration potential between WWF-NL and Dutch business associations in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals'

In 2012, 192 countries adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which security of people and planet are given priority. The urgency of immediate action increases as current research shows that the SDGs will not be reached by the goal of 2030, nor by 2050. As the private sector is the main productive sector in the global economy, businesses are expected to support the SDGs. However, the SDGs are experienced as being too far from daily business and they lack specific business actions. Consequently, they have been barely integrated into Dutch business strategies. The Dutch Government has therefore primarily recommended to better enable BAs to facilitate small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to contribute to the SDGs. The NGO 'Wereld Natuur Fonds' (WWF-NL), the Dutch branch of the 'World Wide Fund for Nature', is known to use the symbolic gain strategy. This means that they focus on positive and voluntary collaborations. As WWF-NL is looking to collaborate more with small and medium-sized enterprises, the research question was:

'How could a collaboration be organized between business associations and WWF-NL which leads to collective change in small and medium-sized enterprises?'

A Theory of Change was developed to describe why and how social change was expected to occur, of which most aspects were confirmed during this research.



In the figure, on the top left, the BAs can be seen together with the two reasons for businesses to join BAs; the logics of membership. The research started by investigating whether and what BAs are doing on sustainability and the SDGs through Internet research and a survey. This was also done to select the ones that have an extended vision on BA activities, defined by the fact that they are innovative and capable of and interested in addressing environmental issues. During this research, a prominent difference was found between BAs with an extended vision and a more limited vision on BA activities. Furthermore, qualitative interviews were conducted with nine BAs to find their current policies. Looking at the figure, on the bottom

left, WWF-NL can be found, who were expected to offer knowledge and credibility to the BAs. Interviews were conducted to find WWF-NL sustainability topics and solutions that fitted the current activities of the BAs and to create specific sustainability steps for SMEs. The broad nature of WWF-NL offers a lot of potential topics for collaboration.

The next step was to organize two pilot-meetings to see if a collaboration could be started. These meetings were structured according to the principle of critical cooperation, which is a way of structuring interaction. Critical cooperation, together with some added conditions from the literature, helped in creating a sustained constructive cooperation between WWF-NL and the BAs. During the meetings, it was confirmed that, apart from the BAs and WWF-NL, other parties should be present. These include first-tier suppliers of the whole sector and SMEs. The SMEs can be the bigger SMEs, the SMEs that have a lot of influence, or the front-runners in sustainability. Finally, the research has shown that business associations can function as catalysts for change. They do this by increasing the awareness of their members, by providing knowledge, by assisting their members and by establishing a long-term sustainability process. Expected was that this process would result in the end goal: collective action from SMEs to contribute to the environmental SDGs. However, due to time constraints of this research, the effects will have to reveal themselves in the future.

In answer to the research question, a collaboration can be organized between BAs and WWF-NL through a strategic collaboration meeting format. This format includes selective steps in which potential BAs are selected based on their extended vision on BA activities. Moreover, SMEs and first-tier suppliers are invited, practicalities are decided upon and an agenda is provided which ensures room for critical cooperation. This critical cooperation contains some conditions which are found to be highly important to facilitate a successful collaboration. Prior to a meeting, WWF-NL should collect enough knowledge of the market. Furthermore, it is important to manage relations with key stakeholders, to build collaborations on existing practices and to have inclusive collaborations. During meetings, the rights of all parties should be recognized. Also, negotiations during meetings should be interests-based and the focus should lie on shared goals.

This research resulted in four recommendations for WWF-NL. Firstly, collaborate with multiple BAs in different sectors and start using them as intermediaries to reach SMEs. The current collaborations with ANVR and Tuinbranche Nederland should be continued, and more collaborations should be set up. Secondly, challenge the traditional view of BAs. Initially, only collaborate with BAs who have an extended vision on BA activities. When WWF-NL gains more experience in these types of collaborations, it could also be effective to start collaborations with BAs that have a limited vision on BA activities. Thirdly, do not use the SDGs as a framework for collaboration (yet). Currently, the SDGs are not specific enough and lack communication. If in a few years this has improved, they can be used as a framework in BA collaborations. Fourthly, use the strategic collaboration meeting format provided in this research, but be flexible and make sure to have enough capacity for follow-up actions. These collaborations have a good potential to reach a large number of SMEs but they are time-consuming. Therefore, enough resources should be made available.

Abstract

It is expected that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted by 192 countries, will not be reached by 2030, nor by 2050. The Dutch Government has recommended to better enable business associations (BAs) to facilitate small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to contribute to the SDGs. This research tried to establish what role non-governmental organization WWF-NL could have in this, by investigating how to organize a collaboration between WWF-NL and BAs, in order to create collective change in SMEs. Literature on the nature of BAs is discussed. Moreover, multiple conditions are identified which contribute to successful multi-stakeholder collaborations, and a Theory of Change is created which tries to predict how collaborations should be set up in order to create collective change. This research was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, in which eight methodological steps were taken. The quantitative part of the study revealed that many organisations mention sustainability and are somewhat active in sustainability. However, these activities are seldom framed within the SDGs. The qualitative part of this study showed that there are many different topics that the BAs are working on in which a collaboration could be started between the BAs and WWF-NL. A strategic collaboration meeting format was created which incorporates theory from the literature as well as the results from the first part of the study. Then this format was used to set up two pilot-meetings. These pilot-meetings were successful and constituted the start of a collaboration between the BAs and WWF-NL. Overall, the results show that a division exist between BAs with a limited vision on BA activities and BAs with an extended vision on BA activities. The BAs with an extended vision on BA activity have a potential for a collaboration with WWF-NL. Such collaborations could make use of a strategic collaboration format which entails practicalities on how the meeting should be set up and an agenda which ensures room for critical cooperation. Recommendations for further research are made, focussing on the importance of collaborating with BAs and their potential in creating change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As humans increasingly influence the environment, our world has entered into a new state in which ecosystems are altered; the Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2002). To estimate a safe operating space for humanity, Röckström et al. (2009) developed nine planetary boundaries which are necessary to keep the earth in a relatively stable state. As three of these boundaries have already been crossed, action is urgently needed (Rockström et al., 2009). In 2012, during the Rio+20 Summit in Brazil, 192 countries adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in which security of people and planet are given priority (Griggs et al., 2013). The so-called triple bottom line approach, a combination of economic, environmental and social sustainability, is at the core of this sustainable development (Sachs, 2012). The urgency of immediate action increases as current research shows that the SDGs will not be reached by the goal of 2030, nor by 2050 (Randers et al., 2018).

As the private sector is the main productive sector in the global economy, businesses are expected to support the SDGs (Sachs, 2012). While some believe businesses can transform in a sustainable way (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and others are more sceptical (Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016), it is undoubtedly clear that the private sector must change in a number of ways. The SDGs have been extended with tools to help businesses integrate the SDGs in their strategies, such as the SDG Compass (GRI, United Nations Global Compact, & WBCSD, 2015). However, the SDGs and these additions are experienced as too far from daily business and they lack specific business actions (Verboven & Vanherck, 2016). Moreover, recent research in the Netherlands has shown that within Dutch companies the SDGs are mostly used to describe the status quo, instead of using the SDGs to improve performance, leading to the fact that the SDGs are barely integrated in Dutch business strategies (Sustainalize, van Tilburg, & Zeeuw, 2018).

For Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the Netherlands, Business Associations (BAs) perform a crucial role in their abilities to contribute to the SDGs (Rijksoverheid et al., 2018). The Dutch Government, the Rijksoverheid et al. (2018), has therefore recommended primarily to better enable BAs to facilitate SMEs to contribute to the SDGs. Employers' associations VNO-NCW, MKB Nederland and Global Impact Nederland (2017) developed ten recommendations for SMEs on how to contribute to the SDGs. However, these recommendations, again, lack specific steps. Only four tips are mentioned for SMEs, which are mostly focussed on reporting performance and one recommendation consists solely of the advice to join a BA (Boschma, 2017). Therefore, the question arises what these BAs are currently doing with respect to the SDGs.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been known to be active on the subject of sustainability, influencing businesses and politics into acting more responsibly (van Marrewijk, 2003). SMEs are often more embedded in the local society than large businesses, which creates more options to collaborate with NGOs (Harangozó & Zilahy, 2015). Two contrasting NGO strategies are identified by den Hond and de Bakker (2007). The first one is symbolic damage, which is the threat of inflicting material damage. The second strategy is symbolic gain, which includes a positive, voluntary collaboration (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2010). The NGO 'Wereld Natuur Fonds' (WWF-NL), the Dutch branch of the international organisation 'World Wide Fund for Nature' (WWF), is known to use the symbolic gain strategy. While WWF-NL has been working with large enterprises on many different aspects, amongst which receiving gifts, collaborating on projects and trying to influence behaviour, their collaboration with SMEs has been limited, mostly receiving financial donations.

WWF-NL wants to collaborate more with SMEs to create change and to help in reaching the SDGs. However, because WWF-NL wants to create a substantial impact, they want to try and create this change through BAs. As there is no previous research on collaboration between WWF-NL and BAs, the research question of this thesis is:

‘How could a collaboration be organized between business associations and WWF-NL which leads to collective change in small and medium-sized enterprises?’

To answer this, five different sub-questions have been answered:

- 1) *What are business associations currently carrying out on sustainability issues and the Sustainable Development Goals?*
- 2) *What do business associations find important in how a collaboration could be structured, and which topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals are they willing to discuss?*
- 3) *What specific steps can WWF-NL develop that fit both WWF-NL’s approach and the topics that business associations are willing to discuss?*
- 4) *Can we accomplish a meeting in which the business associations, small and medium-sized enterprises, suppliers and WWF-NL get together to collaborate?*
- 5) *Was this format successful in creating collective change in small and medium-sized enterprises?*

The remainder of this thesis contains a theoretical background (Chapter 2), which is used as a starting point for this research. Theory on BAs, corporate sustainability and green NGO-Business alliances are discussed. Furthermore, a Theory of Change (section 2.3) on how this research expects to achieve collective change is presented. The method section (Chapter 3) describes the methodological steps that were taken in this research. Then the results (Chapter 4) will be presented for each step. A discussion and conclusion will answer the research question and elaborate on the implications of this research. Finally, four recommendations are given for WWF-NL.

2. THEORY

This chapter gives a theoretical background of the concepts used in this research and discusses which of those theories are used as expectations within this research. Due to the focus of the research question on BAs and a collaboration with WWF-NL, the concepts discussed are BAs and NGO-business collaborations.

A long search for specific theory on how NGOs can enable BAs to become catalysts of change proved unsuccessful. Theory on BAs is lacking, and most available theory is relatively old, stemming from 1980-2000. Specific theory on NGOs working together with BAs were not found after an extensive search. Therefore, this theory section will discuss these concepts separately, and will discuss NGO collaborations which focus on businesses. This research aims to create a basis for NGO and BA collaboration theory.

Existing theories on the nature of BAs are discussed, including the motives for membership, collective action in BAs, the practical influence of BAs and how they are connected to sustainability (section 2.1). Subsequently, corporate sustainability, NGO-business collaborations, and specifically Green Alliances are explored (section 2.2). Lastly, a visualisation of the expectations of this research will be presented in a Theory of Change (section 2.3).

2.1. Business associations

In the literature, BAs are found to have multiple names. Examples include 'trade associations' (Kirby, 1988), 'industry associations' (Chappin, Hekkert, Meeus, & Vermeulen, 2007; Lente & Hekkert, 2003), 'organizations of business interests', and 'business interest associations'. Sometimes they are defined as including employers' associations (van Waarden, 1992) and sometimes they are defined as excluding them (Schmitter & Streeck, 1981).

Additionally, different definitions for BAs exist. Four will be mentioned here.

"A subset of formal organizations (associations) which specialize in the aggregation, definition, advancement and defense of the collective goals in the political realm (interests) of a distinct group of producers defined by their dominant position in the economic division of labor under capitalism (business)." (Schmitter & Streeck, 1981, p. 33).

"These are defined as formal organizations of groups of business people which have as their goal the aggregation, definition, representation and defence of the group's business interests ... representing economic and technical interests" (van Waarden, 1992).

"Business associations are collective bodies that are intermediary between individual business action and state action. As such they are one of a number of organizations that may influence the development of individual businesses and the wider competitiveness of a nation." (Bennett, 1998, p. 244).

"...they are independent organizations controlled and funded by their members, supporting the entire industry (non-profit) with various services" (Chappin et al., 2007, p. 1463)

Each definition brings up new elements, but the common elements can be summed up as: BAs can be defined as formal non-profit organizations that represent common business interests of a distinct group of businesses.

2.1.1. Motivation for membership

As membership of a BA is voluntary, theories have speculated about the motivations for businesses to join BAs. Two logics of exchange are identified: the logic of services (also referred to as the logic of membership) and the logic of (collective) influence (Bennett, 1998; Schmitter & Streeck, 1981; van Waarden, 1992). These logics are considered to constitute the reasons for businesses to join the organization, and therefore also act as the tasks of BAs.

The logic of services entails that BAs need to respond to individual and specific demands of businesses, as members of BAs need to be able to recognize their own particular interests in the association to be interested in membership in the association at all. Furthermore, it is important that they feel like they can influence the association and are represented by the association on a personal level (van Waarden, 1992). In contrast, the logic of influence entails that BAs need to act collectively on the common interests of its members. Therefore, BAs need to have credibility and act in a united and coercive way so that they can exert influence on other parties (van Waarden, 1992).

While these two logics seem to be in conflict, it is precisely the combination of these two which the members of the BAs demand (Bennett, 2000). The combination of these two logics allows the BAs to offer their members not only economies of scale through collective activities, but also economies of scope through specific services. If they do not apply the two logics, they will have few members (Bennett, 2000). A study by Perry (2009) identifies a new task for BAs combining elements of the logic of influence and the logic of services: interaction with other members. BAs can provide such interaction for example through common forums, conferences and workshops (Perry, 2009). Similarly, a study focussed specifically on BAs in the paper industry, found that BAs create an environment where businesses can connect and share common interests (Nordqvist, Picard, & Pesämaa, 2010).

2.1.2. Collective action through business associations

Possibly, BAs are suitable candidates for creating collective action and can act as catalysts for change due to the fact that they are able to combine the two logics. Generally, establishing collective action is problematic as businesses are mostly motivated by self-interests (Hardin, 2015). However, as BAs offer the logic of services, this creates a self-interest for businesses to participate in actions set up by BAs (Hardin, 2015). As WWF-NL wants to bring about collective change according to the SDGs in SMEs, the combination of these logics offers a good reason to try and do this through BAs. Furthermore, as sustainability projects could contain financial benefits or market advantage (Carter & Rogers, 2008) collaboration with WWF-NL might offer incentives related to the logic of services. Accordingly, through BAs, businesses could learn how to reap these benefits.

Schulze-Cleven (2017) discusses collective action in workers who were mobilized through forms of worker organizations. He finds three aspects involved in successful collective action in workers. Firstly, active framing of social solidarity is exhibited when ideas are generated. For the present research it could therefore be important (when speaking with BAs on how to contribute to the SDGs) to frame how collective action will eventually benefit everyone. The second aspect is the construction of broad coalitions over shared interests, which already applies to BAs. The final aspect is the leveraging of existing institutional rules and regulations (Schulze-Cleven, 2017). Therefore, it could be helpful in this research to build on the sustainability practices that BAs are already carrying out.

2.1.3. Practical influence of business associations

BAs have been shown to improve collective industry standards (Bennett, 1998). Lane (in Bennett, 1997) has identified five different ways for trade associations to exert influence, of which two are relevant for this research: “. . . disseminating and enforcing a stock of commons rules and norms” and “by articulating collective goals that may influence the sectors development, for example, 'by avoiding destructive competition'.” (Bennett, 1997). By appealing BAs to help SMEs contribute to the SDGs (Rijksoverheid et al., 2018), the government tries to use the BAs to disseminate and enforce the common norms on contributing to the SDGs. Furthermore, sustainable development is seen as inherent to innovation (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2013). With new sustainable companies emerging everywhere, this could cause destructive competition. BAs can help avoid this through the collective goal of reaching the SDGs.

Schwartz and Ber-El (2015) show that BAs can play the role of catalyst for change, in situations where innovation is needed and the government’s response is not sufficient. They identified five channels through which BAs can have a positive influence as a catalyst. These channels are: increasing the awareness of all actors, providing information and knowledge, assisting firms in developing their innovation capabilities, developing the environments innovation capabilities, and establishing long-term sustainability of processes (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015). As the government appears unable to provide concrete steps for SMEs to contribute to the SDGs, the BAs’ role as a catalyst for change could offer a viable alternative. In addition, Nordqvist et al. (2010) found that BAs perceive part of their role as helping the industry in times when innovations and pressures cause a need for change. They support the industry with understanding and adapting to these changes (Nordqvist et al., 2010). Furthermore, Chappin, Hekkert, Meeus, and Vermeulen (2007) characterize BAs as intermediaries between government and firms, which can have different roles for different policy-making processes. Contributing to the SDGs can be seen as a voluntary agreement, which they identify as interactive regulation (Chappin et al., 2007).

2.1.4. Business associations and sustainability

Previous research has found that not joining a BA poses a barrier for SMEs that want to implement an Environmental Management Systems (EMS) (Hillary, 2004). However, established BA theory states that BAs merely lobby for their members’ own self-interests. A recent literature review by Marques (2017) tries to find whether BAs are capable of addressing social and environmental issues. According to Marques (2017) two visions of BA activities exist. One is a more limited vision of BA activities, in which only their members’ self-interests are served and the BA is as innovative as their weakest members. That BAs have this limited vision of BA activities is a classic view on BAs. The other one is an extended vision of BA activities, in which under specific conditions, not only their private members but also the society at large is served. According to Marques (2017), these conditions, while the article clearly states further research is needed, could contain when reputational benefits are included, when sanctions can be avoided or governmental regulations can be deflected, when there are valuable benefits included for member or when complying with a set of rules distinguishes the members from non-members (Marques, 2017).

A recent study by Vivoda and Kemp (2018) on sustainable development in Australian mining industry associations shows the lack of sustainability commitment in BAs. 33% of the studied associations did not have any statement at all about sustainability. Of the 66% that did have a statement, only 68% had an actual formal policy to show their specific commitments to sustainability. The authors suggest that sustainability is sometimes used solely as a public relations spin (Vivoda & Kemp, 2018). The studies above show that under the right circumstances, BAs could offer viable channels to contribute to sustainability and the SDGs, while also showing that there is a lack of guidance on making use of the opportunities for BAs.

2.2 Corporate sustainability and NGO-business collaborations

The classical approach to corporate responsibility was focused solely on a responsibility to shareholders. However, recent approaches focus on corporations having a responsibility to all stakeholders, or even to society as a whole (van Marrewijk, 2003). From these approaches the goal of corporate sustainability emerged as the goal to meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs in the contexts of business (WCED, 1987). While there are many reasons for companies to aim for corporate sustainability, short-term and classic business views could lead to limited adoption of corporate sustainability (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). One way to enhance the adoption of corporate sustainability is through partnerships with environmental organizations that have a symbolic gain strategy, because when this strategy is implemented effectively it will induce re-institutionalization of corporate practices (van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2010).

Glasbergen and Groenenberg (2001) found that even though partnerships between environmental organizations and the private sector can influence the market, there are some constraints. The partnerships they studied were often organized in an ad hoc way and not embedded in a broader strategy. Moreover, knowledge of the market by the environmental organization was limited and their arrangements were too exclusive in who could cooperate in the partnership. Moreover, there was a lack of international coordination (Glasbergen & Groenenberg, 2001). By collaborating with BAs, the present research hopes to include as many businesses as possible, instead of being exclusive.

As this research focusses on collaborations with BAs to reach the SDGs, the collaborations can be called green alliances. Green alliances can be defined as “any formal or informal collaboration between two or more organizations which is aimed at developing common solutions to the collaborators' environmental problems” (Crane, 1998, p. 560). Hartman and Stafford (1997) define green alliances more specifically as collaborations between environmental groups and businesses. They hypothesize six different forms of green alliances, which are subdivided according to the goal of their interaction. In the present research, the focus is on forming a Green Systems Alliance, which is “an alliance to implement economically feasible environmental systems, or programmes for the greening of business practices” (Hartman & Stafford, 1997, p. 189). The goal is to minimize the ecological impact of the industry by utilizing the knowledge and leverage the credibility carried by the environmental group (WWF-NL) (Hartman & Stafford, 1997).

2.2.1. Conditions for successful green alliances

Covey and Brown (2001) discuss in what form civil society-business engagements can lead to a sustained constructive engagement. The essential component for this successful engagement is what they call ‘critical cooperation’, which they define as a pattern of interaction which can be used when converging interests and conflicting interests are both high. Critical cooperation offers a form of engagement that can use the strengths of both parties to produce gains of value to many stakeholders. To ensure critical cooperation, Covey and Brown (2001) state that four different aspects need attention. Firstly, balancing power asymmetries, for which it is important that the different actors recognize each other’s powers. Secondly, recognizing the rights of the parties involved. Thirdly, interests-based negotiations should help with avoiding conflicts due to their converging and conflicting interests. Lastly, relations with key stakeholders need to be managed properly (Covey & Brown, 2001).

Savage et al. (2010) discuss three sets of factors that are expected to contribute to a successful collaboration: appreciative linkages, which focusses on shared goals, structural features of the collaboration, which is on power differences, and processual issues, which is on the trust between the

different groups. While the structural features of the collaboration and the processual issues overlap to some degree with the critical cooperation theory (Covey & Brown, 2001), the appreciative linkages is a new condition for collaboration (Savage et al., 2010).

SMEs are not the only stakeholders that need to be managed. SMEs are largely dependent on their first-tier suppliers (which supply directly to the manufacturer), as they have extended influence on sub-suppliers (all indirect suppliers) and play a decisive role in ensuring sustainability throughout the whole supply chain (Mentzer, Stank, & Esper, 2008). Therefore, identifying these first-tier suppliers is of considerable importance when trying to influence other suppliers to comply with sustainability practices. Suppliers are motivated mostly through external pressures, which can be done through public attention. Furthermore, including these first-tier suppliers in the collaboration can help in getting them to comply to changes (Grimm, Hofstetter, & Sarkis, 2016). Other research has found that stakeholder pressure, including NGO pressure, is the main driver for suppliers to comply to changes. These suppliers will commit the most to changes if they can implement sustainability initiatives in their product offerings and sustainability certificates that are recognizable by customers (Foerstl, Azadegan, Leppelt, & Hartmann, 2015). Therefore, in addition to the BAs and SMEs, large first-tier suppliers will be asked to participate in this research and co-operate in achieving the SDGs.

2.2.2. Overview of conditions for successful green alliances with BAs

Multiple conditions for a successful collaboration between NGOs and BAs on environmental aspects have come from the literature. In Table 1 an overview is given of the conditions and their references, divided in three types of condition categories. Firstly, conditions for the BAs, secondly, conditions for the practical aspects of collaboration and thirdly, conditions for the interaction during the collaboration.

Table 1. Conditions for successful green alliances with BAs.

Type of Conditions	Reference	Conditions
Conditions for BAs	(Marques, 2017)	Reputational benefits
		Distinguishable benefits from non-members
		Sanctions can be avoided
Conditions for collaboration	(Grimm et al., 2016) (Glasbergen & Groenenberg, 2001)	Take suppliers into account
		Collaboration should not be ad hoc
		Enough knowledge of the market
		Collaboration should not be exclusive
		International coordination should be present
Conditions for interaction	(Schulze-Cleven, 2017)	Build on existing practices
	(Covey & Brown, 2001)	Balance power asymmetries
		Recognize the rights of all parties
		Interests-based negotiation
	(Savage et al., 2010)	Manage relations with key-stakeholders
		Focus on shared goals
(Schulze-Cleven, 2017)	Active framing of social solidarity	

2.3. Theory of Change

One of the methods used for promoting social change is the Theory of Change method (Brest, 2010). A Theory of Change is the empirical basis underlying a social intervention, and thus consists of a description of why and how social change is expected to occur. A Theory of Change does this by defining long-term goals and then going backwards to identify the necessary preconditions (Brest, 2010). Figure 1 is a visual representation of why and how collective change is expected to be achieved by a collaboration between WWF-NL and BAs. This figure is created by aiming for the long-term goal to achieve collective action in SMEs to contribute to the SDGs, and the necessary preconditions as found in the theories described in sections 2.1 and 2.2.

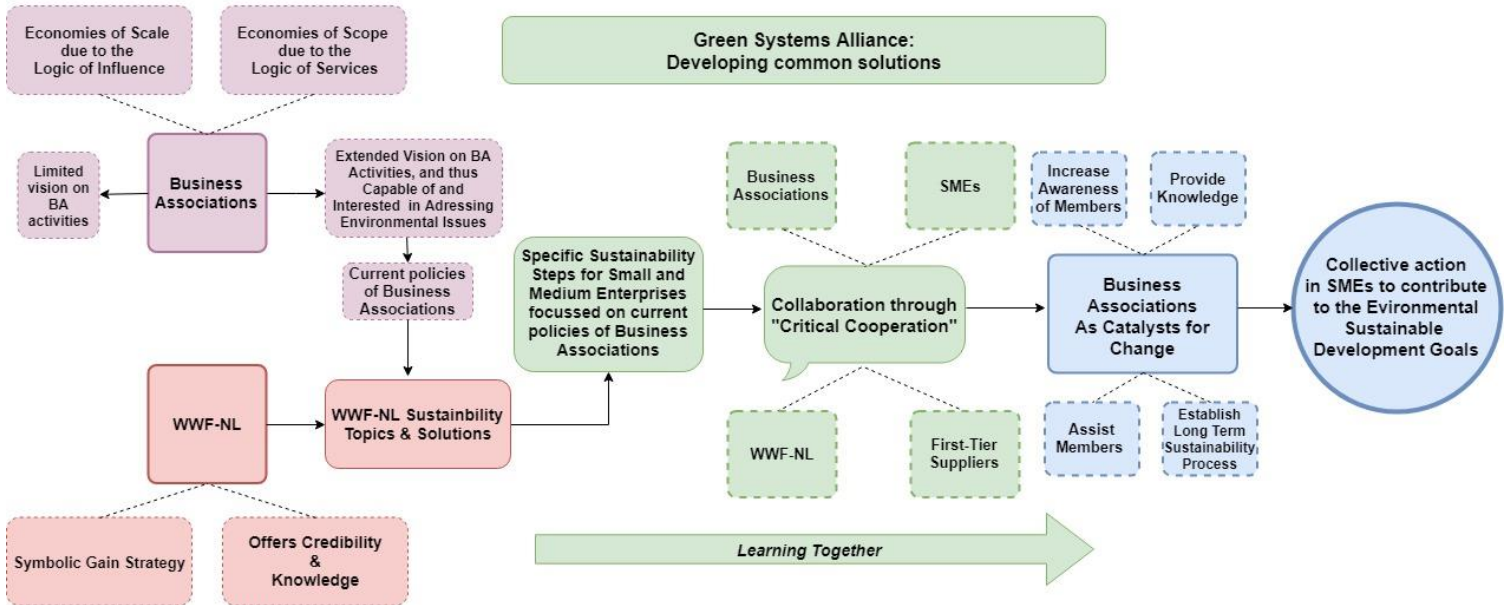


Figure 1. Theory of Change.

The first actor displayed on the bottom left is WWF-NL. WWF-NL is an NGO that uses a symbolic gain strategy (van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2010) in which they collaborate in order to create change. Within their partnerships they can offer credibility and knowledge (Hartmann & Stafford, 1997), since they are a well-known and science-based NGO. The actor that WWF-NL wants to collaborate with are the BAs. The choice to collaborate with BAs specifically is due to the combination of their two logics of exchange (Bennet, 2000; Perry 2009). However, some BAs will have a limited vision of BA activities, while others will have an extended vision of BA activities and in the right circumstances can be capable of and interested in addressing environmental issues (Marques, 2017). The two logics offer a good platform for collective change (Hardin, 2015), provided that the focus is on current policies of the BAs (Schulze-Cleven, 2017). Therefore, WWF-NL will come up with specific actions that fit their topics and solutions and the current policies of BAs. This will lead to specific sustainability steps for SMEs.

In the Theory of Change a Green System Alliance is formed, in which WWF-NL and the BAs learn together while developing common solutions (Stafford, 1997). Here, a collaboration should start through 'critical cooperation', which will help in creating a sustained constructive engagement between WWF-NL and the BAs (Covey & Brown, 2001). As multiple stakeholders are important during this process (Covey & Brown, 2001) SMEs and first-tier suppliers (Grimm et al., 2016) will be asked to participate. Then, the BAs

will be used as catalysts for change, as they will inspire an increasing number of SMEs to commit to the specific sustainability steps. This is done through increasing awareness of the members, providing knowledge, assisting members through the changes and establishing a long-term sustainability process (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015). Eventually collective action in SMEs is achieved which will contribute to the environmental aspects of the SDGs.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research design

Because there has been no previous research on the collaboration between WFF-NL and BAs, this research has an explorative nature. The intention of this research was to propose an action which solves a problem, therefore, this research has a designing function. Designing functions are more practically oriented than theory-driven (Oost, 2006). As the present research has a designing function and is focussed on solving problems and creating social change, it can be defined as action research (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003).

This research has used a mixed methods strategy, which entails a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, for which Bryman (2012) has identified different forms. This research uses a form where the qualitative part gives the quantitative part a 'process', as the quantitative research provides an account of structures in life and qualitative research provides a sense of process. Adding to that, this research uses a quantitative 'sampling method for the qualitative sample, as the quantitative method is also used to facilitate sampling of respondents for the qualitative research (Bryman, 2012).

3.1.1. Action research and validity

Sustainability research often focuses on transition-based and solution-based activities. Action research emphasises action and the outcome of the research by orientating towards solutions, while still being based on scientific research instead of pure activism (Wittmayer & Schöpke, 2014). Therefore, action research is recommended for sustainability research (Kemmis, 2010; Wittmayer & Schöpke, 2014). Similarly, in this study the goal is to create change in SMEs in order to reach the SDGs.

In sustainability action research the role of the researcher can be different than usual, as the researcher often facilitates and participates in dialogues trying to create change. Wittmayer & Schöpke (2014) have identified four different roles for action researchers in sustainability to create tools for researchers to deal with their changing role in action research. The two roles that are applicable in this research are: 'process facilitator' and 'change agent'. As the process facilitator, the researcher initiates the process, is responsible for selecting the participants and oversees specific short-term actions. As the change agent, the researcher hopes to motivate and empower participants and therefore participates in the process of addressing the problem.

In most social research and in action research it is difficult to create validity through replicability, as the research is influenced by the specific real-world situation it is researching. Therefore, Checkland & Howell (1998) find that for action researchers it is important to achieve recoverability of their research process. Accordingly, every step of this research and why certain choices were made during the process, are explicitly described.

3.2. Sub-questions data collection and analysis

To answer each sub-question, eight steps were taken in this research. Figure 2 shows where each step of the research takes place in the theory of change. Subsequently, Table 2 shows an overview of the sub-questions and methodological steps.

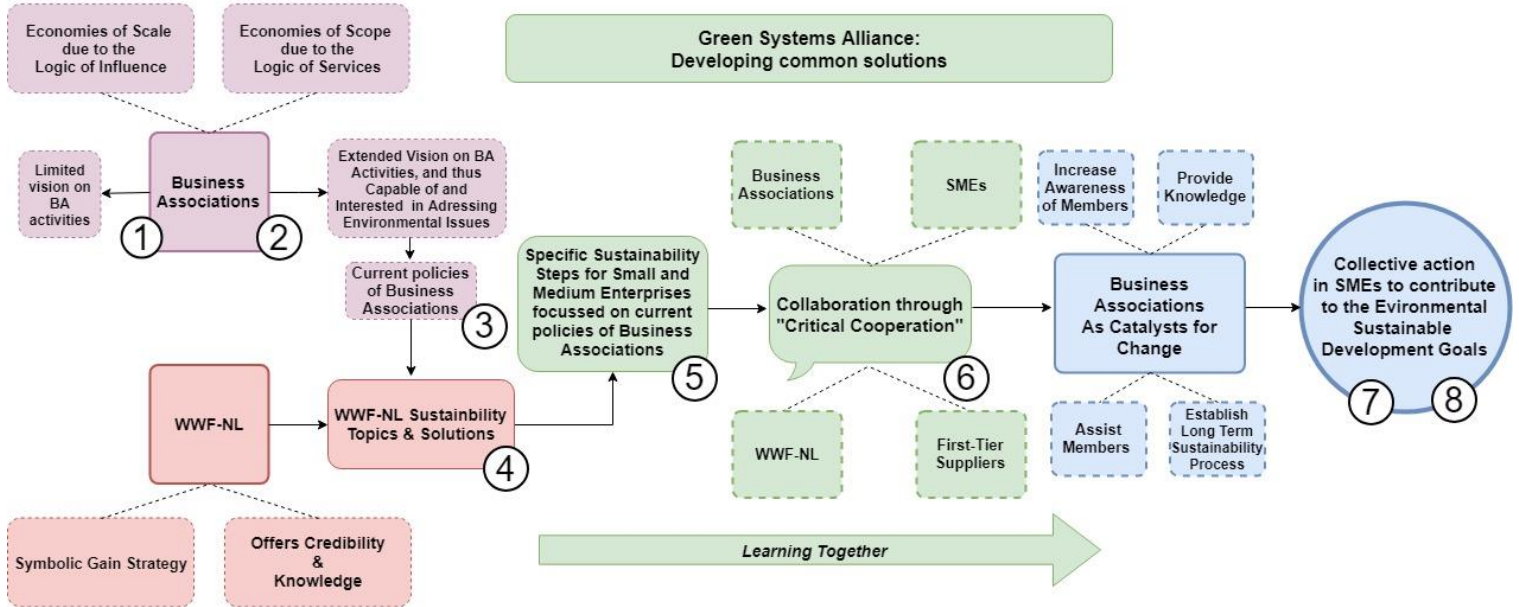


Figure 2. Visualisation of methodological steps.

Table 2. An overview of sub-questions and methodological steps.

<i>'How could a collaboration be organized between BAs and WWF-NL which leads to collective change in SMEs?'</i>	
Sub-questions	Methodological steps
1. What are business associations currently carrying out on sustainability issues and the Sustainable Development Goals?	1. Explorative web-based analysis.
2. What do business associations find important in how a collaboration could be structured and which topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals are they willing to discuss?	2. Quantitative survey directed to the BAs. 3. Semi-structured interviews with BAs.
3. What specific steps can WWF-NL develop that fit both WWF-NL's approach and the topics that business associations are willing to discuss?	4. Open interviews with WWF-NL employees.
4. Can we accomplish a meeting in which the business associations, small and medium-sized enterprises, suppliers and WWF-NL get together to collaborate?	5. Designing and invite participants for meeting.
5. Was this format successful in creating collective change in small and medium-sized enterprises?	6. Testing phase through collaboration meeting. 7. Evaluation survey to all participants. 8. Reflection from observant.

3.2.1. Sub-question 1

The intention of sub-question 1 was to give an overview of the topic. Therefore, it has a descriptive function (Oost, 2006). This question consists of step 1 and step 2 of the methodological steps. The sample was gathered through selective sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling (Bryman, 2012). The sample in step 1 consisted of VNO-NCW members. VNO-NCW is an employers' association which represents 90% of private employment in the Netherlands, making them the biggest employers' association. Furthermore, the NVO-NCW holds seven members in the 'Sociaal Economische Raad' (Social Economic Council) and often consults with the Dutch government. The VNO-NCW has 135 members of which some are excluded, as WWF-NL has international guidelines on so called 'black' and 'grey' industries. These are industries WWF-NL cannot engage with because of their unsustainable nature. The final sample consists of 114 BAs.

Step 1 consisted of an explorative web-based analysis to gain some basic knowledge on what BAs are currently doing on the topic of sustainability and SDGs. All 114 BAs were looked into during the web-analysis and were subdivided into industrial categories, which can be found in Table 3. This was done by firstly checking the website on mentions of sustainability and the SDGs. Then a web search was performed on the BA to see whether there were any other mentions on the BA and sustainability. In an Excel sheet for each website three things were notated. Firstly, whether they mention sustainability on their website, secondly, whether they were mentioned in combination with sustainability anywhere else on the Internet, and third, whether they mention or use the SDGs in any way. Some BAs are connected to SDGs through separate organizations or documents, but these were not counted as they did not arise from the BAs themselves. Moreover, for almost all BAs a short description of what they do on sustainability was written down to be able to summarize the approaches of BAs on sustainability.

Table 3. BA categories for industries.

	Categories	Number of BAs in category
1.	Agriculture and Fishing	8
2.	Industry	27
3.	Construction industry	7
4.	Trade	17
5.	Catering industry	3
6.	Transport and Communication	2
7.	Financial Institutions	7
8.	Business services	10
9.	Health and Wellbeing	9
10	Remaining	24
	<i>Total: 10</i>	<i>Total: 114</i>

Step 2 consisted of a quantitative, descriptive survey directed at the BAs. The survey gathered information about the BAs, whether they were open to contributing more to the SDGs, and explored whether the associations were willing to participate in further research together with WWF-NL. The survey can be found in Appendix A. The survey collection was done using the online programme Survey Monkey. The questions were multiple-choice, to ensure a straightforward analysis. A response-rate of 35% was expected, as research has shown this is the average response rate of organizations for online surveys (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). This expectation was not realized, as only a response rate of 25% occurred with 29 participants.

3.2.2. Sub-question 2

The intention of sub-question 2, methodological step 3, was to win more specific information about BAs, therefore the function is descriptive (Oost, 2006). The sample of the BAs was gathered through a mix of convenience and selective sampling, both non-probability sampling (Bryman, 2012), as the sample was extracted from the participants in the survey. This was to ensure that the participants were willing to contribute to the research, to the SDGs, and were open to collaborating with WWF-NL. While thirteen respondents replied to be interested, eventually the researcher was able to get into contact with nine of them.

Sub-question 2 was answered by conducting semi-structured interviews with BAs. This approach allows for flexibility and offers room for follow-up questions, which ensures reliability in the data, while still creating some structure for the data analysis through an interview guide (Bryman, 2012). The interview guide can be found in Appendix B. Audio from the interviews was recorded and the interviews were transcribed. Then, an analysis was performed and written down by using quotes to describe how the BAs from the sample perceive the SDGs, what they find most important to structure the dialogue and which topics they are willing to discuss. An overview of the interviews conducted to answer this sub-question is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Overview interviews BAs.

	Business Association	Sector	Interviewee
1.	Tuinbranche Nederland	Garden Industry	Brenda Horstra
2.	GGZ Nederland	Mental Health Care	Freddy Ong
3.	Federatie NRK	Rubber and Plastics Industry	Erik de Ruijter
4.	MVO	Edible oils and Fats Industry	Eddy Esselink
5.	KNB	Building Ceramics Industry	Ewald van Hal
6.	HollandBio	Biotechnology Industry	Irma Vijn & Timen van Haaster
7.	ANVR	Travel Industry	Gerben Hardeman
8.	Bewust met Hout	Sustainable Wood Industry	Berdiën van Overeem
9.	BRBS	Waste and Recycling Industry	Peter Fraanje

One of the interviews was not with a BA, but with covenant organization Bewust met Hout who has BAs as members. Their goal is that all wood used and produced in the Netherlands is 100% sustainable, therefore making their goal inherently focussed on sustainability. Therefore, while not all questions were applicable, they offered extensive knowledge on how their BA members are able to collaborate.

3.2.3. Sub-question 3

The aim of sub-question 3, methodological step 4, was to unite the topics of the BAs with the topics of WWF-NL and create practical steps for SMEs, therefore it has a designing function (Oost, 2006). It consisted of open interviews, which is an approach in which only the topic is predetermined (Bryman, 2012). These interviews were held with WWF-NL employees specialized in specific environmental problems of the topics that arose in sub-question 2, who can be found in Table 5. These interviews were transcribed and analysed, by filtering to the practical steps that were found to be most crucial.

Table 5. WWF-NL interviews and topics.

	Business Association	Topic	WWF-NL interviewee
1.	Tuinbranche Nederland	Biodiversity	Jacomijn Pluimers & Annemiek Heuvelmans-Driessen
2.	GGZ	Be one with nature	Anita van der Aa
3.	Nederlandse Bouwkeramiek	Clay removal and rivers	Bas Roels & Michiel van den Bergh
4.	ANVR	Plastic	Sabine Bos

3.2.4. Sub-question 4

Sub-question 4, methodological steps 5 and 6, tries to answer the question how a collaboration with BAs can be set up and therefore has a designing function (Oost, 2006). Step 5 consisted of using the theoretical information and the interviews from step 3 to design a collaboration between WWF-NL and the participants. During step 5, the researcher acted as the process facilitator (Wittmayer & Schöpke, 2014), as discussed in 3.1.1. Step 6 consisted of two pilot meetings focussing on two different BAs. Table 6 below shows the attendees of the meetings. During this part of the study, the meetings were led by an WWF-NL employee from Business Engagement, and the researcher had an observing role.

Table 6. Attendees during the two pilot meetings.

	Business association	Members of BA	Other related parties	Attendees of WWF-NL
Meeting 1	ANVR – Gerben Hardeman	Better Places – Saskia Griep	MVO Nederland – Tessa Groenen	Rikkert van Erp, Sabine Bos & Joost Hoogenboom
Meeting 2	Tuinbranche Nederland – Brenda Horstra	Pokon Naturado – Ben Scheer	Griffioen Wassenaar BV. – Stefan Verbunt	Rikkert van Erp, Annemiek Heuvelmans-Driessen

3.2.5. Sub-question 5

The intention of sub-question 5, methodological step 7 and 8, were to evaluate whether the format created in methodological step 5 can be used successfully, and therefore has an evaluating function (Oost, 2006). It consists of an evaluation by the researcher, who had an observing role during the meetings. The evaluation questions for the researcher can be found in Appendix D. Furthermore, a short evaluation survey that was sent to all participants of the pilot meetings. This survey can be found in Appendix E. The information gathered during methodological steps 7 and 8 will lead to the result of this research and a recommendation for WWF-NL.

4. RESULTS

To answer the research question eight methodological steps were established. Each of these steps led to results which will be presented in this section. The results are structured according to the sub-questions.

During data collection, it became apparent that when searching for sustainability in BAs, the number of active BAs quickly diminishes. In Figure 3, the blue circles represent the remaining BAs for each step and the red circles represent the number of BAs that opted out at each of the different steps. This study started with 114 BAs. When researching how many of the BAs mention sustainability on their website, the number decreased to 78. Then, when asked to reply to a survey with sustainability as a topic, the number decreased to 29. After asking the BAs if they have an active sustainability policy, the number decreased to 20. Finally, when asked who would participate in a sustainability collaboration, the number decreased to 13. This meant around 11% of the researched subjects was interested in a sustainability collaboration. This process is visualised in Figure 3.

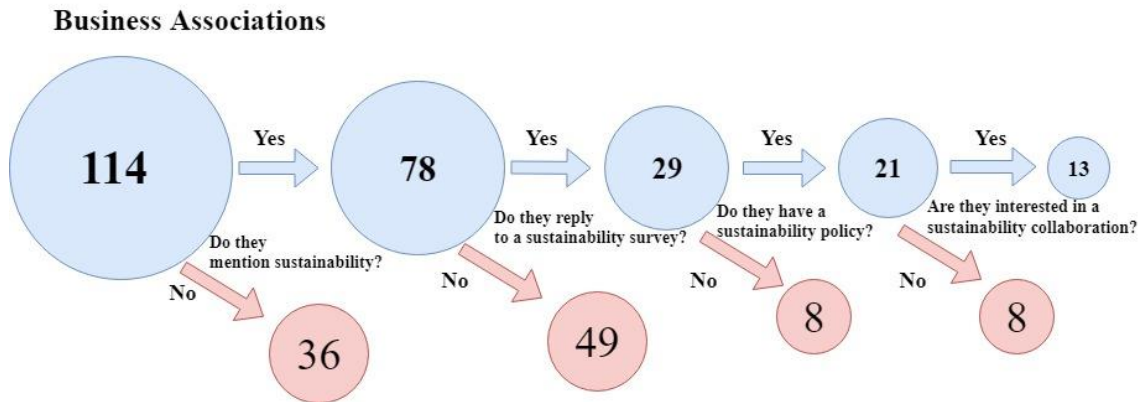


Figure 3. The number of business associations decrease at each of the different sustainability steps throughout the study.

4.1. Current activities on sustainability by business associations

“What are business associations currently carrying out on sustainability issues and the Sustainable Development Goals?”

4.1.1. Results Internet search

To answer the first sub-question (methodological step 1), an Internet search on 114 BAs was performed in which it was investigated which BAs mentioned sustainability and the SDGs. The results are discussed together with the statistics of the web content and with a more detailed description of what this sustainability web content entailed. An Excel sheet with the statistics of the web analysis can be found in Appendix C1 and an overview of the different ways in which BAs pay attention to sustainability per BA can be found in Appendix C2.

4.1.1.1. Statistics web content

36 of the 114 BAs have no mention of sustainability on their website at all. Six of these BAs were mentioned somewhere on the web in combination with sustainability. However, this still leaves 31 BAs that give no attention to sustainability. Of the 78 BAs that do mention sustainability on their website, 55 BAs are also found in combination with sustainability on the rest of the Internet. Only seven BAs embrace the SDGs on their website by using them in their vision or policy.

The BAs have been divided into categories according industry sectors. The subdivision per category has some notable results. The category industry pays the most attention to sustainability and the SDGs. All catering industry BAs pay attention to sustainability online and on their website. five of the seven financial institution BAs have nothing on sustainability on their website. Within agriculture and fishing, construction industry, catering industry, transport and communication, business services and health and wellbeing sectors, there is no mention of SDGs at all.

4.1.1.2. Detailed web content

Many of the BAs that mention sustainability on their website have sustainability or sustainability-related topics as one of their themes on their website. Sometimes this theme is 'sustainability', but also themes such as 'energy', 'circular economy', 'environment', 'climate' or 'CSR' are often mentioned. A smaller number of BAs give attention to multiple of these themes separately.

The issues within sustainability which are discussed most often are energy, packaging and recycling. Energy is usually approached as a way to save money as a company while helping the environment, by being more energy efficient. Packaging and recycling are often seen as easy ways to contribute to sustainability problems without having to change the products themselves. Multiple organizations have signed 'Green Deals' which exist in multiple sectors and are initiated by the government. These deals contain goals and agreements which all participating actors should adhere to.

Most of the BAs talk about their 'vision' on sustainability. This usually contains the opinion and aspirations of the BA and their members. However, while the BAs often say they represent their members' opinions, almost none of the BAs can say that all their members are active on sustainability. A few exceptions exist, such as ANVR and VEBON-NOVB, where the BAs have requirements on sustainability topics that need to be fulfilled in order to become a member.

Many of the BAs discuss new regulations made around the topic of sustainability, to inform their members on how to adjust to them. While most of these BAs support their members in following these regulations, some see it as their job to mediate against these regulations. They believe that the regulations are too strict or difficult and should be undone.

Many BAs speak about their CSR policy, but only three BAs have CSR policies that are mandatory for their members. Furthermore, only two BAs in the wood sector, the pallet association and the paper-and carton association, have a real requirement for all their members to have a sustainability certification. A few other BAs say most of their members have a certification like FSC or PEFC, but this is voluntary for each business.

Within these BAs, a few frontrunners on the topic of sustainability exist. Three BAs have helped creating tools to calculate the sustainability (sometimes solely on CO2) of the products of their members or their members' organizations. Specifically, KVGGO (the BA of the printing sector) created a tool based on ISO norms. Moreover, of the seven BAs that mentions the SDGs, four BAs really use the SDGs as a guideline in their (year) plans. For example, Greenport Holland, the BA of the Horticulture Cluster uses the SDGs as a guideline for making their programme for the next five years.

Overall, while some BAs can be found to be quite actively involved in sustainability (these are often the BAs that are in industries closely related to sustainability issues), most BAs do not have specific sustainability actions. Often, the only thing they mention is that sustainability is 'hoog in het vaandel' for the organization, which can be translated as highly valued, highly committed or considers it of great importance. However, then what is done actively on sustainability within their organization lacks, therefore it is unsure if specific activities on these subjects exist.

4.1.2. Results survey

The next step to answer the first sub-question was methodological step 2, a survey to the same 114 BAs, of which 29 replied. In this survey multiple questions about their sustainability performance were asked. The Dutch version of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

To the first question almost all respondents answer that they were engaged in sustainability activities. Two respondents say they are not really engaged in sustainability (Table 7). Only 73% of respondents says they have an active sustainability policy. This means that 27% has no sustainability policy for their members (Table 8).

Table 7. Question 1: Statement: *"Our organisation is engaged in sustainability activities"* (N = 29)

	Totally agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally disagree
Percentage	69%	24%	3%	3%	0%
Respondents	20	7	1	1	0

Table 8. Question 2: Statement: *"Our organisation has, besides its engagement for sustainability, an active sustainability policy"* (N = 29)

	Totally agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally disagree
Percentage	52%	21%	14%	14%	0%
Respondents	15	6	4	4	0

Figure 4 gives an overview of which sustainability areas the respondents say their organizations are active in. The most popular areas to be active in are climate and energy. Secondly, the respondents indicate they are active in the area of raw materials. The area that gets the least focus is water. Under the option 'other', ten respondents named areas, among others, health, circular economy, animal wellbeing and the SDGs.

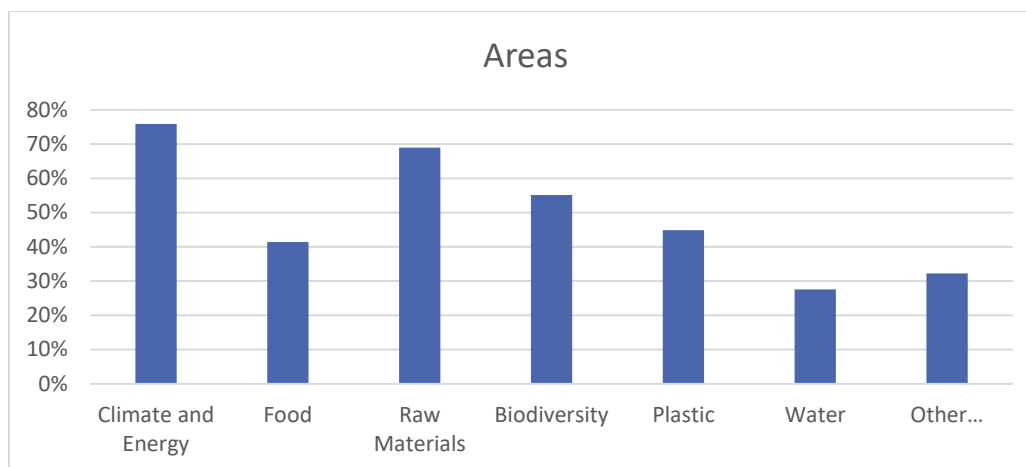


Figure 4. Question 3: To which areas does your organizations pay attention? (N = 29)

Table 9 shows whether the respondents' BAs have policy statements on sustainability. 24% have no sustainability policy statement at all. Under 'Differently, namely', some pointed out they are connected to other organizations or have signed external policies such as the Green Deal. Or they pointed out they have what they mostly call an ethical code under which is stated that they should contribute to the SDGs as much as possible (but no specific interpretation or goals). One person points out they do currently have intentions, and the obligations are under negotiations. Overall, it seems that of the respondent's BAs only 20% has a policy with obligations. The most common sustainability policy statements only contain a vision or an intention.

Table 9. Question 4: Does your organization have a sustainability policy statement for your sector? (N = 29)

	Percentage	Respondents
No, it does not exist	24%	7
We are currently working on it	0%	0
We only have a sustainability vision	14%	4
Yes, there is a sustainability policy with mainly intentions	21%	6
Yes, there is a sustainability policy with obligations for members	21%	6
Different, namely...	21%	6

Surprisingly, one of the organizations answered in Question 2 not to have an active sustainability policy, but answered in Question 4 that they had a sustainability policy statement. Apparently, they do have a statement for the outside world, but they do not actively engage in it.

Under 'different, namely' respondents mostly took the chance to elaborate on their sustainability policy statement. Often, this statement was not strictly from the organizations, but a shared statement such as the Green Deals. One organization mentioned that their policy statement currently consists of intentions, however, they are discussing whether to change them into obligations.

Table 10. Question 5: Statement: "Our organization is familiar with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" (N = 29)

	Totally agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally disagree
Percentage	45%	38 %	7%	7%	3%
Respondents	13	11	2	2	1

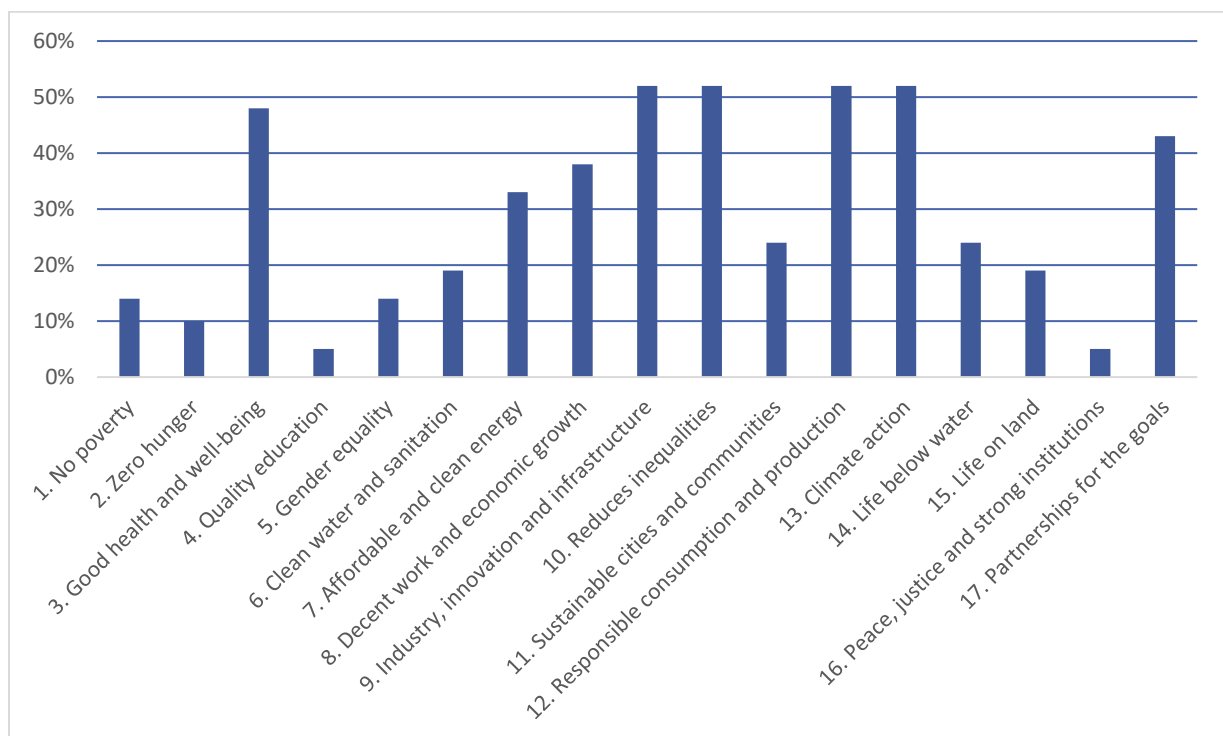


Figure 5. Question 6: Have you organized specific activities to contribute to the SDGs? If yes, to which SDGs? (N = 21)

While 24 respondents indicated to be familiar with the SDGs, this did not mean that all 24 have activities that contribute to the SDGs. Only 21 respondents answered Question 6 about activities organized to contribute to the SDGs. Therefore, the percentages portrayed are based on 21 respondents.

All SDGs were mentioned as goals to which end activities had been organized at least once. Again, subjects that are closely related to industrial aspects and CO2 score high, such as SDGs 9, 12 and 13. Notably, some less related SDGs also score quite high, for example SDGs 3, 10 and 17. Contrary to the results in Figure 4, here only 33% mention SDG 7 on energy. To the related question of since when these activities had been organized, answers differed between BAs. One respondent answered that activities had been

organized since 1980, one answered since 1990, two answered since 2000, but most answered since a few (approximately 3-6) years.

Table 11. Question 7: Statement: *“Are you planning on continually organizing activities to contribute to the SDGs?”* (N = 27)

	Percentage	Respondents
No, we are only continuing with current activities.	7%	2
Maybe, we do not know yet	33%	9
Yes, we are starting (another) activity on one subject.	19%	5
Yes, we are starting multiple activities on one subject.	8%	2
Yes, we are starting multiple activities on multiple subjects.	22%	6
Different, namely...	11%	3

Most of the respondents indicate to continue organizing activities. Also, two of the respondents who answered ‘Different, namely...’ took the chance to elaborate on their activities. However, one respondent mentioned not to do any activities at all, as their duties solely lie with serving the interests of the members and sustainability activities are only organized by their members themselves.

Table 12. Question 8) Statement: *“WWF-NL can have added value for our organization to reach our sustainability goals”* (N = 28)

	Totally agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally disagree
Percentage	21%	36%	32%	4%	0%
Respondents	6	10	11	1	0

As can be seen in Table 12, 16 respondents think that WWF-NL can have added value for their organization, 11 respondents are neutral, and one respondent does not think WWF-NL can have added value.

Lastly, participants were given the option to leave any comments. Eight participants used this to mention specific sustainability projects and to mention collaborations and agreements with other parties. Thirteen respondents were interested in participating in further research and collaborating with WWF-NL.

4.1.3. Conclusion on current activities on sustainability and the SDGs by BAs

Based on the above data some conclusions can be drawn. Most BAs state that they are engaged with sustainability issues in one way or another. These activities are mostly focussed on win-win situations where cost-saving is also a factor, for example energy saving activities or reducing raw-materials.

Regarding the SDGs, the results of the web search and the survey are contradictory. During the web search only seven of the 114 BAs were found in relation to the SDGs, while in the survey 21 respondents stated to organize activities related to the SDGs.

It is not very common for BAs to have obligations on sustainability issues for their members, however, some BAs are working on establishing this. The fact that an organization is busy with sustainability does not mean they have a sustainability policy. Furthermore, when an organization has a sustainability policy, it does not automatically mean they are active in sustainability.

While most BAs have activities on sustainability issues, there are BAs that solely focus on serving the interests of their members. Some view sustainability improvement as an interest of their members, but this view is not universal. Furthermore, many BAs did not reply to this survey from WWF-NL and not all BAs see the value of working together with WWF-NL.

4.2. Topics and collaboration structure for the BAs

“What do business associations find important in how a collaboration could be structured, which small and medium-sized enterprises and suppliers should be present, and which topics related to the Sustainable Development Goals are they willing to discuss?”

To answer this question, methodological step three, nine different BAs were interviewed on their sustainability activities. An overview of the key figures of each BA are shown in Table 13. Additionally, an overview of the sustainability activities which were found online are given in Table 14. The results will be discussed by using quotes of the interviewees and will be structured according to topic. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

Table 13. Practical information on the BAs.

	Industry	Number of employees	Type of member firms	Number of members
Tuinbranche Nederland	Garden Industry	7	Retail, suppliers and service providers in the garden industry.	620
GGZ Nederland	Mental Health Care	60	Mental health care providers	>100
Federatie NRK	Rubber and Plastics Industry	14	Everything in the rubber and plastics industry.	429
MVO	Edible oils and Fats Industry	14	The entire industry chain of edible oils and fats.	66
KNB	Building Ceramics Industry	6	Producers of brick, ceramic roof tiles and baked tiles.	16/41
HollandBio	Biotechnology Industry	8	Companies in the biotech sector that are active in health, agri-food and bio-based economy.	179
ANVR	Travel Industry	12	Tour operators, travel agencies and business travel agencies.	222
Bewust met Hout	Sustainable Wood Industry	1	Government, other BAs, civil society, and labour unions.	23
BRBS	Waste and Recycling Industry	10	Companies that produce from waste.	71

Table 14. Activities on sustainability organized by the BAs.

	Sustainability on website	Last publications on sustainability	Activities on sustainability	Partnerships for sustainability
Tuinbranche Nederland	CSR, crop protection and biodiversity in the garden.	Biodiversity friendly and water friendly garden.	Ambition 3.0 – agreements in crop protection.	Wood covenant – Bewust met Hout
GGZ Nederland	-	-	-	Green Deal
Federatie NRK	Environment & energy as a theme.	Plastics the Facts 2017.	External website “Rethink”.	Green Deal Green Certificates.
MVO	Sustainable development as a theme.	Sector rapport 2014	Awareness activities on sustainable palmoil and the value of oils for the biobased economy.	Palm oil collaborations: DASPO, ESPO, EPOA. Soy collaborations: VERNOF
KNB	Sustainability as a theme, includes many topics.	Routemap building ceramics 2030.	-	WWF-NL
HollandBio	Theme: ‘Technology for a better future’.	Future Vision: ‘LifeSciences 2030’.	-	-
ANVR	Travel Tomorrow.	Travel Experience Tomorrow	Travel tomorrow meetups – sustainability training etc.	TravelLife certification scheme
Wood covenant - Bewust met Hout	Filled with information on why and how wood can be sustainable.	Research into the direct and indirect costs of supply chain certification.	Supervising four workgroups focussed on promoting sustainable forest management.	Sustainable wood certification organizations FSC and PEFC.
BRBS	Sustainability as a topic.	“Taking advantage of opportunities” on processing non-hazardous waste	Researching and stimulating sustainable processing and recycling of materials.	Governmental bodies, other BAs and certification institutions.

4.2.1. Sustainable Development Goals

The opinions around the SDGs are diverse. However, it becomes apparent that the actual communication between the government and the BAs around the topic of SDGs is limited. As one BA stated in their interview: *“No, we do not use them... I actually have not heard of them. I am always occupied with sustainability, but I have no idea what this is about the government asking BAs to be active in them.”* BA GGZ Nederland mentions: *“No, within the Green Deal we do not use the SDGs. I do not think the government is really cooperating in this area, different things live with different government parties.”* Similarly: *“The signal of the government is way too weak. One press release and that’s it.”* But even though communication from the government is viewed as lacking, another BA HollandBio tries to improve this: *“As an organization*

we are not working on reaching the SDGs, that would be too indirect. ... We would like to turn it around, to reach the SDGs, what should policy around biotech be? We would like to achieve this with the government."

The BAs also critique the SDGs for not being an applicable framework for SMEs because of their broad and unspecific nature. As BA Federatie NRK explains: *"The SDGs are too far away for SMEs. . . . It is useless for an SME to tell them: this is my part in the SDG. That is too small to work."* This has caused them to create an SDG translation specifically for their members. However, not all BAs want to go this into depth, as BA ANVR explains: *"When the government came with SDGs . . . They are quite abstract goals without real specific expectations for businesses. . . . As a BA we cannot report on how much the Dutch sector has contributed to those SDGs. We can only say our actions have something to do with those SDGs."*

Some BAs are more positive towards the SDGs. However, this is still limited to placing their original activities within the SDG framework, and not to starting something new. BA KNB explains: *"They are broadly acknowledged, and may cause a better connection, and it won't give us a different story, but a story that comes across in a different way."* Similarly, another BA explains: *"We don't do it yet, but lately you see the SDGs being used as a communication framework, so we will start doing that too. If that works better than our current way of communicating, that is good."*

Only one of the nine BAs, MVO, is actively using the SDGs by creating an 'Impact-Tracker' which gives companies the ability to link their activities to the SDGs. *"We find this crucial, not only to create a pretty picture but to take the next steps"*. Furthermore, HollandBio, while criticizing the applicability of the SDGs, they use the framework of SDGs to show how their organization is contributing to them.

4.2.2. Member participation

When asked if all members actively participate in becoming more sustainable, many of the BAs speak about the classic division between the front-runners, moderate performers and laggards. As GGZ Nederland explains: *"About 30% of our members are enthusiasts when it comes to sustainability. . . . The small members are the ones that lag behind most."* While Hollandbio says many members are very active in sustainability, the laggards are described as: *"There are definitely some members that are still in their own world and pay no attention to what is happening in society with sustainability."*

Besides size, the place of the company in the supply chain also influences the degree of participation: *"Participation isn't that high yet. The closer the companies are to the forest, the more they feel the relevance."* Other than this, the nature of the company also influences their participation in sustainability. As Federatie NRK explains: *"The extent to which companies are concerned with sustainability varies, and especially the extent to which they do that consciously and intentionally"*. Furthermore: *"Not all members are active in sustainability, that has something to do with the character of the company."*, as explained by BRBS.

However, for some BA members, the participation is seen as necessary and more and more companies engage: *"I really have to pull garden centres, but they are slowly starting to get it."*, according to Tuinbranche Nederland. Adding to that BA MVO says: *"Yes our members support this, it is necessary for them."*

4.2.3. Obligations for members

Some of the BAs had a limited vision on their BA activities. Nevertheless, sustainability is more and more considered as something which is good for their members. Sometimes the reason given is that it is necessary

for businesses, *“otherwise they would have continuity problems”*, sometimes because of a more personal reason, *“Directors say: my children this, my children that. So, the awareness is growing more and more”*.

However, the activities on sustainability are mostly limited to goals and stimulation, therefore creating obligations for their members is not seen as an option for all BAs. For example, GGZ Nederland says: *“I wish I could, but I cannot obligate them anything besides the requirements in the Green Deal. I can inform them about everything, but what to do to fulfil the requirements is up to themselves”*. Similarly: *“We have goals, not obligations, because everything is voluntary. There are no laws around buying sustainable products.”*

Three BAs are more open to these kinds of regulations. Firstly, Tuinbranche Nederland: *“We never really thought about it, we just stimulate everything and I kind of assume everybody does it. But I guess we could do that...”*. Secondly, BA Federatie NRK, is already thinking about obligations: *“We already have informal obligations, but we are actually thinking about implementing requirements at the NRK level”*. Lastly, BA ANVR already has obligations for their members: *“We have 30, 35 criteria that are a minimum requirement for our members, for which the businesses must do an exam, have a plan and report. We control and monitor that. . . . Due to this we have lost some members. . . . If they do not do this, with all due respect, we also do not have a place for them.”*

4.2.4. Important in collaboration

Two BAs mention that they find it very important to have specific ideas in the next meeting, precisely what WWF-NL is looking for: (GGZ) *“Well, I would like to make it very specific. So, what can we offer each other. . . . what are we going to do. Where is the common ground in our initiatives, to create change in these groups?”* Similarly: *“So yes, I would find it interesting to get together with WNF and talk about what we can mean for each other in a very specific way”*.

When asked whether the BAs would invite members to a meeting with WWF-NL, most BAs said they would. For example: *“I would definitely invite a few members, because that way you can get more perspective on the specific applications of what they are working on and the way of working that they have”*. Some BAs mention that their biggest members are not representative of all of their members, and this should be taken into account in order to get all the members actively involved. *“I do not want exclusive rights for one member. I would hate it if we pave the road, one organization sees that it goes well and then individually takes action upon it.”* In addition, some would invite other organizations or government institutes to join the meeting.

BA ANVR explains: *“Well, if you, for example, only want to collaborate if we put 50.000 euros on the table, then we need to have honest expectations about this, about what is possible and what is not possible.”* Another BA, Tuinbranche Nederland, focusses more on the fact that it is important to get the members to want to collaborate: *“You need to make sure it is fun, because people only change their behaviour, research shows, if it is easy and they can get an advantage”*.

4.2.5. Common ideas on collaboration

One aspect that came forward in multiple interviews was that the BAs would really like public support or approval from WWF-NL. HollandBio says: *“We do not have the intention to make you completely pro genetic modification, but just a nuanced attitude would already help. Also, because here in Europe we are getting more and more isolated when these subjects are discussed.”* Another BA mentioned: *“So the awareness of the fact that with clay removal you are adding a societally relevant application to building materials, that is*

something we must carry out permanently. Us, together with WWF-NL and other parties.” ANVR mentioned: “I think it would be powerful . . . if WWF-NL can play a role in the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. They are already recognized by the United Nations, but a renowned organisation like WWF-NL, that would . . .” Lastly, BRBS says: “It is very useful when an NGO sees our work, or supports it, we could work together. So, it is also a lobby interest”.

Another noticeable aspect is that despite the fact that WWF-NL wants to reach more people by using the BAs, the BAs often saw this the other way around. “Yes, you have an enormous reach, and an enormous number of members.” Similarly: “WNF can be so powerful, they have huge support, an enormous reach, you can reach many people. For us it is almost too difficult to reach people.”

4.2.6. Conclusion topics and collaboration structure for the BAs

Many topics exist that BAs would like to collaborate on with WWF-NL, as they find that they are active on topics similar to WWF-NL’s vision. On these topics they seem to have an expectation on what WWF-NL can contribute to the collaboration, as there are certain things they could use which they feel WWF-NL can offer. Whether WWF-NL is willing to offer them these things, is considered important by the organizations.

Even within more evolved BAs that have an extended vision of BA activities, it is still important for most BAs that collaboration for their members remains voluntary, as they are first and foremost there for their members. The members that the BA would invite are mostly the biggest ones, which are usually also active on the board of the BA, as they have the most influence. However, some argue that the most progressed member in sustainability topics should be present at the meeting with WWF-NL.

Many topics arose on which the BAs could collaborate with WWF-NL. In Table 15 a summary is given of the topics for each BA.

Table 15. Possible topics for collaboration.

Business Association		Topics	
1.	Tuinbranche Nederland	1.	Biodiversity in gardens
		2.	Travelling butterflies
		3.	Plastic pot recycling
2.	GGZ Nederland	1.	Be one with nature/Healthy living and living environment
		2.	Corporate social responsibility
3.	Federatie NRK	1.	Consumer side awareness recycling
		2.	Reduction of single use plastics
4.	MVO	1.	Awareness around sustainable palm oil specifically to companies
5.	KNB	1.	Communication on sustainability of clay products
		2.	Animal housing in building designs
6.	HollandBio	1.	Creating sustainable agriculture with the help of biotechnology
7.	ANVR	1.	Care for destinations
		2.	Plastic reduction
		3.	Animal welfare
		4.	Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria
8.	Bewust met Hout	1.	Communication on certified wood
9.	BRBS	1.	Promote wood recycling
		2.	Promote wooden housing
		3.	Create a bigger market for recycled plastics

4.3. Topics that WWF-NL can collaborate on with the BAs

“What specific steps can WWF-NL develop that fit both WWF-NL’s approach and the topics that business associations are willing to discuss?”

To answer sub-question 3 (methodological step 4), open interviews with WWF-NL employees involved in topics for collaboration of the BAs were conducted. For this step, a number of BAs were selected based on whether they had an extended vision on BA activities and on whether WWF-NL feels that they are currently suitable for collaboration. The selected BAs were Tuinbranche Nederland, GGZ Nederland, ANVR, FEDERATIE NRK, BRBS and KNB. The following sections will discuss the results of these interviews.

4.3.1. Interview Unit Food

Tuinbranche Nederland is active in biodiversity. However, no specific people are working on this as a common topic within WWF-NL. Therefore, an interview was held with WWF-NL’s Unit Food, who work with farmers and biodiversity on farms.

In the interview it became clear that Unit Food found it important that they were not going to be mentioned in any way of approving of something. However, the idea of supporting biodiversity in gardens was considered interesting. As biodiversity decreases, civilians can help with what WWF-NL calls ‘bending the curve; from decay to recovery’. Therefore, supporting this message was seen as something positive and would not get in the way of any other WWF-NL goals.

It was made clear that if the focus stayed on biodiversity, there would be no risk, nonetheless, within the garden industry there are some risks in collaboration. Attention should be paid to the fact that they sell a lot of plastic articles, may sell uncertified wood and often their plants are grown with pesticides. Therefore, it should be made clear that the collaboration is purely focused on endorsing biodiversity in gardens.

4.3.2. Interview WWF-NL Magazine

For a possible collaboration with GGZ Nederland on the topic of healthy living environment, an employee from the WWF-NL magazine ‘Be one with nature’ was interviewed. The idea was that the magazine could be distributed to members of GGZ Nederland as a way of pursuing the same goal.

In the interview it became clear that the magazine could be shared with the member institutions, or maybe even all their employees. Sending copies of the magazine to specific people would also help in promoting WWF-NL and would therefore be more useful than sending it to institutions. The idea arose to have GGZ Nederland write a letter about why they believe WWF-NL and nature are important, and implement this in the edition that would go to all GGZ Nederland members.

Regarding this, it arose that it is important to be clear about what the collaboration would exactly be about. What are we trying to do with sharing the magazine and what do we expect in return? The interviewee was very clear about the fact that if the goal for WWF-NL was to receive monetary funding this should be made very apparent to GGZ Nederland.

4.3.3. Interview Plastic Team

As plastic was a topic that came up in multiple interviews with BAs, an interview with an employee from WWF-NL’s Plastic Team was conducted. The focus was on multiple BAs: ANVR, the Federatie NRK and BRBS.

Most evident in the interview was that plastic is a universal problem and therefore a possible collaboration was seen in each of the BAs. WWF-NL does not want to boycott plastic completely (therefore even a collaboration with NRK was possible), however, plastics should not harm the environment, which is done mostly by disposable plastics. The goals of WWF-NL are first to eliminate disposable plastic, second to create alternatives where possible and finally to recycle more.

Multiple ideas arose for collaborations. For BRBS a main problem was the lack of a market for recyclable plastics, for which the idea arose to use WWF-NL's business contacts from the business engagement department and ask these businesses to use more recyclable products. Organizations such as Unilever could create a bigger market for recycled plastic by using it for e.g. shampoo bottles. For the BA Federatie NRK, it would be interesting if they could play a role in using alternative materials, maybe even using recycled plastic. If that would be possible, the two BAs BRBS and Federatie NRK could be brought into contact with each other.

The best connection to the activities of WWF-NL on plastics was found with the ANVR, as WWF-NL is launching a plastic campaign in which they also focus on holidays and travelling as an activity where consumers can have a positive impact on reducing the use of plastics. For example, the ANVR could contribute to the Plastic Free Holiday Pledge that WWF-NL is starting.

It is important to do a due diligence check on the ANVR and to check the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) that ANVR asked for, and their certification scheme. If these criteria are accepted by WWF-NL a collaboration can be started, and if the GSTC criteria are considered sufficient by WWF-NL International, the GSTC could be endorsed by WWF-NL. This could be done casually in a tweet, or more officially on a page on the WWF-NL website.

4.3.4. Interview Fresh Water Team

An interview was conducted with the Fresh Water Team, as they are considerably involved in clay removal and associated clay industries. It soon became clear that there is already a collaboration from a different angle with the BA KNB, but this still leaves room for more collaboration. During the interview the topic of GGZ Nederland arose, and some new collaboration ideas came about.

The KNB organization asked if WWF-NL could help support the message that removing clay from rivers is sustainable and positively affects biodiversity. In the WWF-NL project 'The living River' this subject already receives attention, but this could be extended and improved. It was also suggested that it could be interesting to receive contact information of the members of KNB, as this is usually treated confidentially. However, as a collaboration already exists within the BA, this was seen as less interesting than other collaboration ideas.

Another aspect of the project 'The living river' is that WWF-NL is creating a design for strategically placed nature, including housing areas within this nature. One of the motives for this design is the aspect that being surrounded by nature has proven psychological health benefits. At the moment when this idea is presented to the government, it could be very helpful to receive support from institutions such as GGZ Nederland. As WWF-NL has no connections in the mental health care industry yet, it could be beneficial to start a collaboration with GGZ Nederland.

4.3.5. Conclusion of the topics that WWF-NL can collaborate on with the BAs

For each of the BAs and topics discussed, ideas arose that were compatible with WWF-NL's approach. The diversity of the organization allows for connections in various fields. However, it also appeared that sometimes WWF-NL sometimes is overly careful, which could hinder effective and impactful collaborations.

4.4. Setting up a meeting to collaborate

“Can we accomplish a meeting in which the business associations, small and medium-sized enterprises and suppliers get together to collaborate?”

To answer this question and to conduct methodological step 5, the data from Question 2 and 3 were analysed more specifically per case and conversations were held with WWF-NL's business engagement squad about specifics. Collaboration is decided on two of the BAs, as they are considered most suitable under current circumstances. The two BAs are Tuinbranche Nederland and the ANVR. Below, first the process of deciding, then the process of creating the format and then the format itself is described.

4.4.1. Process of deciding on the final organizations for the pilot meetings

The pros and cons of collaborating with each of the BAs were discussed with the Business Engagement Team of WWF-NL.

Each of the nine organizations were interested in a further collaboration with WWF-NL, which shows that they are to some degree interested in addressing environmental issues. However, not all of them have an extended vision on BA activities. Most of the BAs have an expectation on what WWF-NL should contribute to the collaboration, as there are certain things they could use that they feel WWF-NL can offer.

For WWF-NL collaboration can be sought in different topics. Connections were found between most of the topics the BAs are active in and the topics WWF-NL is active in. However, a complete match between the activities of the BAs and WWF-NL was difficult to find. Often, the BAs and their members also pursue activities that are sensitive topics within WWF-NL because of their unsustainable nature which could create tension between the two parties.

For this trial research WWF-NL chose first to work with BAs with whom there was little tension. For this reason, HollandBio and Federatie NRK were dismissed. Secondly, it was considered undesirable if the topic of the collaboration would interfere too much with current views within WWF-NL. Therefore, BAs Bewust met Hout and MVO were also dismissed, as WWF-NL is already active in discussions around wood and sustainable palm oil. Thirdly, in order to prevent the topics from being too complex, BRBS was disregarded for collaboration within this research. Lastly, KNB was not chosen due to the fact that there is already a collaboration with this BA.

The goal of this collaboration was to start a collaboration with BAs which are already active in sustainability, have actions that connect to WWF-NL's goals and have an extended vision on BA activities. Therefore, the two BAs that WWF-NL will continue with for this project are Tuinbranche Nederland and ANVR.

4.4.2 Designing the format for the meeting

As preparation for the meetings, a format was designed in which the logistics and the agenda of the meeting were discussed. Since the goal of the meeting was to start a collaboration in which specific steps would be taken, part of the content of the meeting was discussed beforehand, and because participants were strategically chosen, the format was named a strategic collaboration meeting format. The format is customizable for each strategic collaboration meeting with a specific BA. Decisions on what should be included in the agenda were based partly on the conditions for collaboration (see section 2.3), partly on the Theory of Change (see section 2.4) and partly on the interviews with the BAs (see section 4.2).

It was considered important to start the collaborations with the BAs who have an extended vision of BA activities (Marques, 2017). WWF-NL needed to be clear on the common ground between them and the BA, to make the strategic collaboration meetings as effective as possible. As many BAs had an expectation of what WWF-NL could do for them, it was important for WWF-NL to have researched the BAs' activities to see if endorsement was possible. These interview results fit the Theory of Change, specifically the aspect that NGOs can offer credibility (Hartmann & Stafford, 1997).

Another condition for collaboration was that first-tier suppliers should be present, as recognized by Grimm et al. (2016), and this was therefore incorporated into the format. Furthermore, to incorporate the conditions for collaboration as outlined by Glasbergen & Groenberg (2001), the format prescribes preparing the meeting with knowledge of the market and making sure that the collaboration is not exclusive to the organizations present. The conditions for interaction that should be taken into account are the conditions identified in Covey and Brown (2001) and Savage et al. (2010). To conduct critical cooperation key stakeholders should be present (Covey & Brown, 2001). Based on the interviews with the BAs, the bigger SMEs and the SMEs which already were sustainability front-runners were identified as the key stakeholders and should therefore be present at the meeting. Moreover, for critical cooperation (Covey & Brown, 2001) it is important to make sure the external participants and WWF-NL are in balance, meaning that there should not be more WWF-NL people present than external participants.

It is important that an introduction round leaves room for every party to show their power (Covey & Brown, 2001). It is also important that it is stated what one wants and what one can offer, to make sure everyone's rights and conflicting interests are put on the table. However, when taking into account Savage et al. (2010), the focus should lie on shared goals. Another aspect is that the bottlenecks of WWF-NL's strategy should be clear, as WWF-NL needs to be careful with collaborations with other parties and needs to be clear about their own view and strategy on sensitive topics. Finally, it is an important part of critical cooperation to discuss conflicting interests (Covey & Brown, 2001).

The BAs are expected to function as catalysts for change (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015). Therefore, the format should pay attention to what the BA is able and willing to offer. Can the BA, as described in the Theory of Change, increase awareness, provide knowledge and assist the members to establish a long-term sustainability process (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015). Additionally, the format needs to include aspects which show how the BA can function as a catalyst for change. The meeting, despite being focussed on short-term collaboration, also needs to discuss long-term collaboration to establish a long-term sustainability process.

One of the most evident aspects that arose in the interviews is that BAs, while active in sustainability, do not actively engage in the SDGs. Therefore, the agenda in the format should not be structured (too much) around the SDGs, as this might not be a framework the other parties are familiar with and have worked with.

4.4.3. Strategic Collaboration Meeting Format

Resulting from the aspects described in section 4.4.2., the following format was designed. To guide the meeting, a WWF-NL PowerPoint presentation was created following the strategic collaboration meeting format. Then methodological step six, the two pilot meetings, were held.

Invitations go to:

- Two people from the business squad.
 - o It is advised to have at least two people present from the business squad, as this way more insights can be shared.
- One person of the squads/teams connected to the topics that will be discussed.
 - o They can be present for more in-depth content on what is possible within the topics.
- The business association representative.
 - o Often this person is responsible for sustainability within the business association.
- 2-3 members of the business association.
 - o These associations will consist of the frontrunners in sustainability in their sector.
 - o Often these will be sizable members, as they have more influence.
 - o However, due to the topic or nature of the organizations, sometimes smaller organizations are preferred to be present at the meeting.
- A first-tier supplier of the members of the BA, if applicable.
 - o Some industries have one or multiple suppliers that have a large influence on the possibilities of actions. Therefore, it can be interesting to invite them, provided that they are interested in a sustainability collaboration.

Preparations:

- The business association that is invited should be capable of and interested in addressing environmental issues. This means that they should have an extended vision of BA activities and should already be active in sustainability issues.
- The business association should be researched. It should be clear how WWF-NL's strategy feels about the practices of the association. Can WWF-NL acknowledge or endorse their sustainability actions?
- Before the meeting WWF-NL should have made clear which topic(s) they would like to start the collaboration with.
- Bring to the meeting: a PowerPoint presentation with the agenda, post-its in at least two colours, pens and a whiteboard or paperboard.

Location:

Zeist WWF-NL office. The Zeist Office is the preferred location because other WWF-NL employees can sit in and share their views, the home base will create a good atmosphere for WWF-NL to negotiate, and lastly people are often enthusiastic to visit the WWF-NL building. Furthermore, the environmentally friendly building and nature-focussed surroundings can inspire people.

Time:

The meeting will take 2 hours in total.

Agenda

1. Welcome & Goal of this session – 5 minutes

A welcome to everyone. The goal of the meeting is to act as a brainstorm session on the topic of collaboration. Preferably, at the end, agreements can be made about the next steps for the collaboration.

We are here today because WWF-NL wants more collaboration with SMEs and the government has asked business associations to help businesses to work on the SDGs.

Goal:

- *Looking for common topics to collaborate on*
- *Creating a bigger impact on sustainability together*
- *Expanding networks and creating a bigger reach*

Important is firstly that while this meeting is intended to start a collaboration on one topic (of which the BA is already active in), the future can always bring more collaboration. Secondly, the collaboration is not only for the participants that are at the meeting, but should focus on an industry-wide collaboration.

2. Introduction round: Every participant and their sustainability vision – maximum of 5 minutes per person +-30 minutes in total

This introduction round should be an introduction of every individual and the organization they represent. Here, each person is able to discuss their vision on sustainability and their organization's actions regarding sustainability. The participants should not yet go into possible collaborations, as this is discussed later.

3. Common ground explanations – 10 minutes

Discuss the common ground between WWF-NL and the BA. This is partly thought of by WWF-NL beforehand and complemented by the information of step 2 and will be used as a basis for step 4.

- What is the common ground between the two organizations?
 - o Where do they overlap?
 - o What do they agree on?
 - o What topics do they both work on?
- What is the relevance for the sustainability topics?

4. Brainstorm on what we would like to do – 25 minutes

The next step is taken to create room for everyone to share their own interests and discuss these, while brainstorming for topics. Turns are taken in which everyone can put forward:

- Firstly, what they would like to accomplish on the common ground topic.
- Secondly, what they can offer in a collaboration on the common ground topic.

This round should divide topics between short-term and long-term plans. Inspire people to think practically for the short-term and inspire people to think big for the long-term.

- Tell everyone to write down what they want to accomplish and what they can offer on the topic.
- Give everyone the chance to individually explain their thoughts. While this is done, the discussion leader writes on a whiteboard or post-its very shortly (preferably one word) what each participant would like to accomplish and what they can offer.
- WWF-NL goes last on the brainstorm round. This way others are not influenced by WWF-NL's opinions.

5. Summarize the outcomes and find corresponding aspects. – 15 minutes

The whiteboard now shows an overview of possible collaboration topics and how the organizations' expertise can be used in this. Discuss this together and decide which options are most viable on the short term.

6. If necessary, discuss risks and requirements – 10 minutes

If the subjects did not arise before agenda item 6, it could be useful to discuss the risks and requirements. Important again is to first ask the participants if they have any, before WWF-NL discusses theirs.

7. Member participation – 10 minutes

Discuss the member participation.

- Who will participate?
 - o How can the largest number of organizations be reached?
- How will they be reached?
 - o Can they be reached in a way that WWF-NL gains their contact information?
- Will there be a difference in actions/steps between certain members?
- Will these actions/steps be obligated for all/for certain members?

8. Agreements & dates – 5 minutes

It is time to decide on practical agreements and the next steps. Important is that dates are discussed, so that the steps can follow quickly.

9. Closing

First ask if everyone feels their wishes for this meeting have been met. Close with a thank you to everyone and say goodbye.

4.5. Reflection strategic collaboration meeting

“Was this format successful in creating collective change in SMEs?”

4.5.1. Reflection strategic collaboration meeting from observant

For methodological step 7 the researcher has taken the role of observer during the meeting and reflected on the meeting based on 12 questions. Table 16 gives a short overview of the results for both meetings.

Table 16. Reflection strategic collaboration meeting ANVR from observant.

Questions		Meeting 1: ANVR	Meeting 2: Tuinbranche Nederland
1.	Did everyone who was invited attend the meeting?	No. One member of the BA was not able to join, and the BA forgot the date of the meeting, however he joined on skype.	Yes.
2.	Did everyone participate (actively)?	All external participants participated actively. From the WWF-NL participants some were participating less actively.	Everyone but one supplier participated very actively.
3.	Were all participants valuable during the meeting?	Yes. However, the BA that could not attend could have been quite useful.	Yes. However, a retailer could have been added.
4.	Were all participants happy to be at the meeting?	Yes.	Yes.
5.	How was the timeframe of the meeting?	A bit short due to unplanned practicalities.	The two hours were sufficient for this meeting.
6.	Did the structure of the meeting run smoothly?	Yes.	No, the meeting was a bit unstructured.
7.	Did specific ideas arise during the meeting?	Yes, multiple specific ideas arose on one specific topic.	Yes, some specific ideas arose, however they were not decided upon or worked out at all.
8.	Was everyone willing to collaborate? (and therefore, also willing to give in on certain things)	Yes, but some areas remained sensitive.	Yes.
9.	Were agreements made during the meeting?	Agreements were made that a collaboration will start and some more specific plans were agreed upon.	Agreements were made that a collaboration will start.
10.	Was there enough follow-up action after the meeting?	Yes.	Yes.
11.	Was the goal of critical cooperation (Covey and Brown, 2001) reached?	Yes.	Yes.
12.	Were the four channels of BAs (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015) to have influence as a catalyst confirmed?	Yes.	Yes.

While most participants participated actively and were very enthusiastic, one of the suppliers in the second meeting was less active than the other one. It was clear that their organization's sustainability practices were still a bit behind, and they therefore had less collaboration ideas. In the meeting with ANVR more people from WWF-NL were present, which resulted in some WWF-NL employees being less active in order to avoid repetition. The people present in the meetings complemented each other well. In the first meeting, ANVR also invited MVO Nederland, a knowledge institute, which was a very good fit for the collaboration.

However, the member that could not be present was a more sizeable member which could have given insights into the possible collaborative actions. In the meeting with Tuinbranche Nederland the two members present were suppliers, but it would have been useful to have a retail member at the table. But these missing people during both meetings were due to practicalities in both meetings and not due to missing in the strategic collaboration meeting format.

During both meetings everyone was very happy to be present and expressed this actively. However, one BA member in the first meeting sometimes seemed a bit frustrated, wanting more actions and less brainstorming. The two hours for the meeting would have been sufficient for both meetings, however, due to some practicalities the first meeting had to start later which limited the time to come up with more specific actions. During the meeting with ANVR the content and order of the meeting ran smoothly. Almost all topics were discussed as the format prescribed, except agenda item 6 on risks and requirements. On the other hand, the meeting with Tuinbranche Nederland was a bit unstructured. The agenda was not followed, as the participants were very excited and took matters into their own hands. However, the brainstorming part was incorporated, with the post-it tool included, and important points for attention that were part of the agenda were all appointed and proved important and useful.

During both meetings, specific ideas arose. However, the meeting with ANVR was more successful in creating feasible short-term options. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to decide on them and work them out. During the meeting with Tuinbranche Nederland, specific ideas emerged, but these were mostly long-term ideas. The willingness for collaboration of the participants was high in both meetings. However, when a topic was discussed for which ANVR and their reach was needed, ANVR were a bit hesitant. At this point the traditional role of the BA surfaced somewhat, with the BA having a limited view of BA activities. But after some argumentation the ANVR were more willing to give in. During the second meeting, the participants mentioned multiple times that they just wanted to do some good and that they were very willing to collaborate.

For both meetings there was agreement on the fact that a collaboration could and would be started. However, specific agreements were not yet made. In the first meeting many possible topics arose, and some plans were approved by everyone. However, realizing actual agreements seemed to take more time. One of these reasons was that real actions need to be discussed within each organization internally. For the meeting with Tuinbranche Nederland the ideas mostly needed more elaboration and a second meeting was planned, thus making sure there would be follow-up action. The meeting with ANVR had enough follow-up actions, as after the meeting many emails on more ideas were sent out and a second meeting was planned where most attendants would come together to make more specific decisions on collaboration.

When looking at the critical cooperation theory of Covey and Brown (2001), the questions to ask are whether the strengths of all parties were used and whether gains of value were created for many stakeholders. During the first meeting, each party revealed their strengths, and as expected had something to offer for a collaboration. Interestingly, sometimes strengths of parties were identified by the other parties. Furthermore, the goals for the chosen topic overlapped for all parties, and the output of the collaboration would create gains of values for all attendants and multiple stakeholders. Therefore, the goal of critical cooperation was reached. During the second meeting the goal of critical cooperation was also reached, as each attendant had discussed their needs and what they are good at.

The four channels of BAs (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015), namely, increasing awareness of members, providing knowledge, assisting members and establishing long term sustainability process, were acknowledged by the BAs in both meetings. During the meeting with ANVR, ANVR confirmed their strength to function as an intermediary between WWF-NL, other parties and their members. During the meeting with Tuinbranche Nederland it became clear that this BA already provided their members with these channels and would like to continue and expand this in the collaboration with WWF-NL.

4.5.3. Reflection survey

For methodological step 8, a reflection survey went out to all participants of the strategic collaboration meeting, including WWF-NL employees and external participants. All questions were based on a Likert-scale with five answers. Nine participants replied. As no big difference was found between the evaluation of the two pilot meetings, Figure 6 shows the combined results of the two meetings.

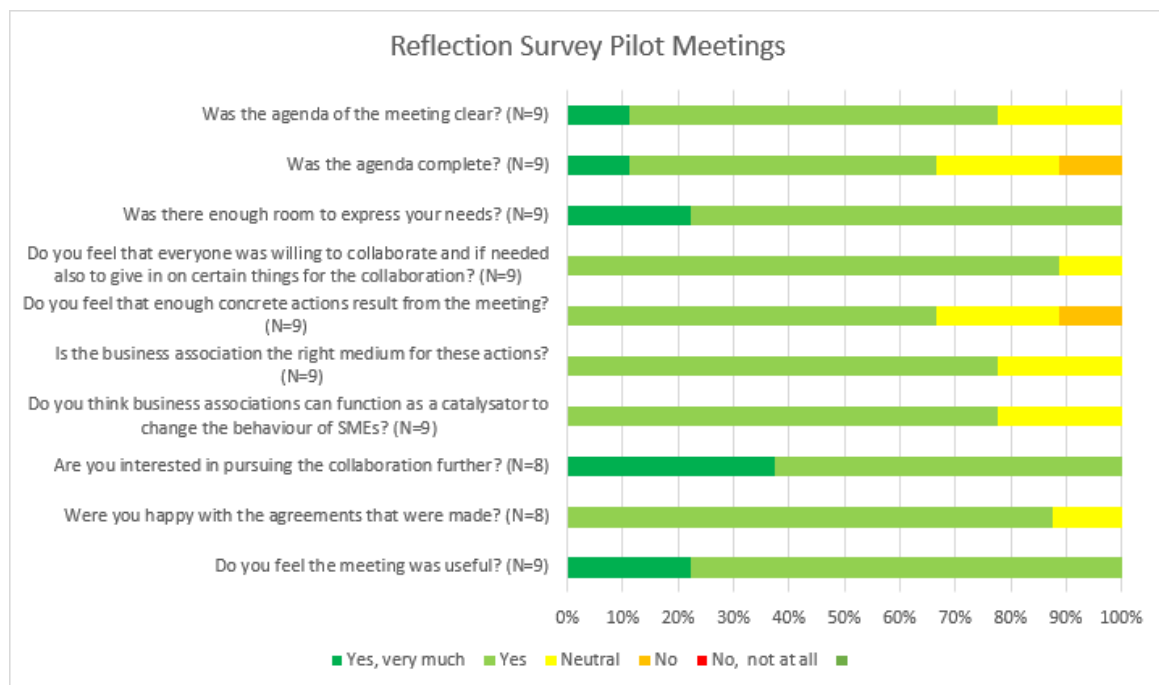


Figure 6. Reflection survey pilot meetings.

The figure shows mostly dark green (Yes, very much) and light green (Yes) colours, meaning that the attendants' answers to the survey were mostly positive. Most participants found the agenda of the meeting clear. Accordingly, the same goes for the question of whether the agenda was complete. However, one person answered no to this question. This participant commented that they missed some sharpness to the beginning of the meeting.

Every participant felt that the meeting offered enough space for everyone to express their needs. To the question of whether they felt that everyone was prepared to work together and to give in on certain things, everyone agreed except for one person, who answered 'neutral'. Furthermore, to the question of whether enough specific actions emerged from the meeting, two people answered 'neutral' and one person answered no. The next question was whether the participants felt that the BA is the right medium to pursue these actions with, to which most responded yes but two participants responded neutral. Then, to the

question of whether the participants think BAs can function as a catalyst for change the behaviour of SMEs, most answered yes while two participants answered 'neutral'.

Almost all participants were interested very interested in further collaboration, however, one member of the BA that was present skipped the question. All but one neutral participant were satisfied with the agreements made. To the final question of whether they found the meeting useful, all participants answered yes or 'yes, very much'. Lastly, participants were given the space to leave any comments. One participant commented that they missed the option 'I do not know', for the question of whether BAs can be a catalyst for change. The participant mentioned being critical, as many BAs are not a frontrunner in thinking sustainably. Another participant commented that the focus sometimes was a bit too much on individual agendas where it should have focussed a bit more on the common agenda.

4.5.4. Conclusion reflection strategic collaboration meeting

The researcher's and the participants' evaluations corresponded. Most aspects were evaluated positively, such as the fact that the participants could express their needs and the fact that all participants added to the discussion. The expected role of the BAs as catalysts for change was also confirmed by most participants.

Both the researcher and the participants felt that the specificity of the actions could be improved, which was mostly due to the fact that follow-up meetings were needed. Some negativity could be noticed with regard to the agenda, as the meeting with Tuinbranche Nederland was a bit unstructured. However, overall everyone considered the meetings to be useful and were interested in further collaboration.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Discussion of the results

The results of the first sub-question, which consisted of a web search and a quantitative survey, showed that many BAs report to be active within sustainability in some way. However, the BAs that had an explanation of how they were active within sustainability and had actual activities on sustainability, were limited. Almost none had any real sustainability requirements for their members. For the second sub-question, where nine BAs were interviewed more closely, again the number of BAs that would consider having requirements for their members was limited. While more BAs start to see the importance of sustainability for their own members and organization, WWF-NL should only collaborate with BAs that have proven to have an extended vision of BA activities and thus are at least open to some stricter collaborations for them and their members. The two BAs with whom pilot meetings were setup, have both shown to have this extended vision and to be actively involved in sustainability. These are the BAs that should get the focus of WWF- NL. Hopefully in the future, other BAs will start to follow in this more sustainable path.

During the web search in methodological step 2, it emerged that the SDGs were not used actively by the BAs, even though in the survey many of the participants answered that their BAs had activities focussed on reaching many of the SDGs. The interviews in methodological step 3 created some clarification for this difference. One BA stated to be active in many topics related to the SDGs in the survey, but as resulted from the interview, they were not aware what the SDGs exactly were. Some other interviewed BAs in methodological step 3 knew the SDGs but did not actively use them. They explained that they were not actively pursuing these SDGs but when answering the survey question, they gave as an answer the SDGs which were somewhat related to their organization's sustainability topics. The fact that the government has asked BAs to actively help their members in contributing to the SDGs was new information for almost all BAs. This shows that communication around the SDGs needs to be improved before WWF-NL can actively use them in BA collaborations.

The topics that arose for possible collaborations in methodological step 3 were quite diverse, though reducing the use of plastic was the most popular topic. Plastic is relevant for almost all sectors, and as followed from the interviews with WWF-NL in methodological step 4, this topic has recently become very important for WWF-NL. In an interview with WWF-NL the employee was first quite hesitant for the collaboration with Tuinbranche Nederland, however, the pilot meeting has showed some real potential and connections between Tuinbranche Nederland and WWF-NL's work and goals. Therefore, WWF-NL should be careful not to be too stringent when discussing possible collaboration topics, as this might hinder valuable collaborations.

The strategic collaboration format has proven to be relatively complete. However, in the pilot meeting with ANVR, ANVR invited another organization to the meeting, MVO Nederland, which is a knowledge platform. This organization was very helpful during the meeting and had many ideas and resources to bring to the collaboration. Therefore, it could be a good idea to incorporate a fourth attendant in the format; a knowledge platform in the corresponding sector. Furthermore, to really get to specific actions it became clear that a second meeting was mandatory, as attendants need to discuss plans with their organizations. However, overall the participants of the meetings seemed satisfied with the collaboration format.

The two pilot meetings have shown real potential for a collaboration between the BAs and WWF-NL. The two BAs were open to sustainability collaborations, were already active in sustainability and would

like to do more. A win-win situation can be created, as WWF-NL can offer them credibility. However, it should be noted that the meeting is just the start of a collaboration, many specific actions still need to be decided upon.

5.2. Theoretical discussion

Multiple theories were discussed in Chapter 2 of which some were incorporated into the Theory of Change of this research (section 2.4). Here we will discuss which of these theories still fit the research and which do not, what is missing and what the consequences of this research are.

5.2.1. Discussion on conditions for successful collaboration

The theoretical foundation of this research partly exists of different conditions that should contribute to a successful collaboration. Table 17 below shows an overview of these conditions as discussed in the theory section, but with an added reflection on the conditions by determining their applicability or usefulness in terms of high, medium and low.

Table 17. Reflection on conditions for successful collaboration with BAs.

Type of Conditions	Reference	Conditions	Applicability or usefulness of condition
Conditions for BAs	(Marques, 2017)	Reputational benefits	Medium
		Distinguishable benefits from non-members	Medium
		Sanctions can be avoided	Low
Conditions for collaboration	(Covey & Brown, 2001)	Manage relations with key-stakeholders	High
	(Grimm et al., 2016)	Take suppliers into account	High
	(Glasbergen & Groenenberg, 2001)	Collaboration should not be ad hoc	Medium
		Enough knowledge of the market	High
		Collaboration should not be exclusive	High
		International coordination should be present	Medium
Conditions for interaction	(Schulze-Cleven, 2017)	Build on existing practices	High
	(Covey & Brown, 2001)	Balance power asymmetries	Medium
		Recognize the rights of all parties	High
		Interests-based negotiation	High
	(Savage et al., 2010)	Focus on shared goals	High
	(Schulze-Cleven, 2017)	Active framing of social solidarity	Medium

Firstly, the three conditions for BAs mentioned by Marques (2017) have shown not to be necessary for a collaboration with BAs. While they might help for BAs to develop an extended vision, the present study shows that there are cases in which the BAs have an extended vision because they find sustainability important and see it as part of their duty without (much) external pressure.

Secondly, for the conditions on collaboration, Covey and Brown (2001) discussed that multiple stakeholder should be present. Inviting SMEs who were members of the BA has proven very effective, as they can give an overview of the possibilities and needs of the members. Furthermore, first-tier suppliers were invited, as they would play a decisive role in ensuring sustainability (Mentzer et al., 2008) and including them would help in getting them to comply to changes (Grimm et al., 2016). In one of the pilot meetings two first-tier suppliers were invited, who certainly had a leading role in adopting sustainable practices for their customers and were excited to be part of the collaboration. The theories about the first-tier suppliers have therefore been confirmed. Glasbergen and Groenenberg (2001) discuss different conditions for the collaboration which are all applicable to some extent. Especially useful were the conditions which stated that market knowledge is necessary, as this was a requirement for the success of both the pilot meetings, and the condition that the collaboration should not be exclusive, as this will lead to the biggest collective change. This was confirmed during the interviews of methodological step 3 but also during the pilot meetings of methodological step 6. Then the condition of Schulze-Cleven (2017) was to build on existing practices. Therefore, this research based the collaboration topics on existing practices that BAs were already carrying out. While this has proven to be an effective way to find common ground for direct collaboration projects, it might also be an easy way. Because of the explorative nature of this research and the collaborations, it is sensible to start with these kinds of BAs. However, to really create collective change within SMEs in future collaborations, collaborations should start on topics that are new and challenging. Some examples of more controversial BAs that have potential for future collaborations will be elaborated on in section 5.5.

Lastly, the conditions for interaction were mostly based on critical cooperation as defined by Covey and Brown (2001), to guide a process that will facilitate sustained constructive engagement between the different parties. Overall the process of critical cooperation was successful, attendees felt there was enough room for them to express themselves and everyone was able to identify their strengths in the possible collaboration. It therefore has been found very useful to recognize the rights of all parties and conduct interests-based negotiation. However, some critique arose that due to the available time for personal needs, the focus was too much on individual needs instead of the common need. Thus, the condition of Savage et al. (2010) to focus on shared goals is very applicable and should be integrated even more in the format. Additionally, a condition for interaction based on Schulze-Cleven (2017) was to actively focus on how the collaboration would benefit everyone. It helps to focus on benefits, however, most attendees were already conscious of how a sustainability collaboration would benefit them.

5.2.2. Discussion on Theory of Change and additional theory

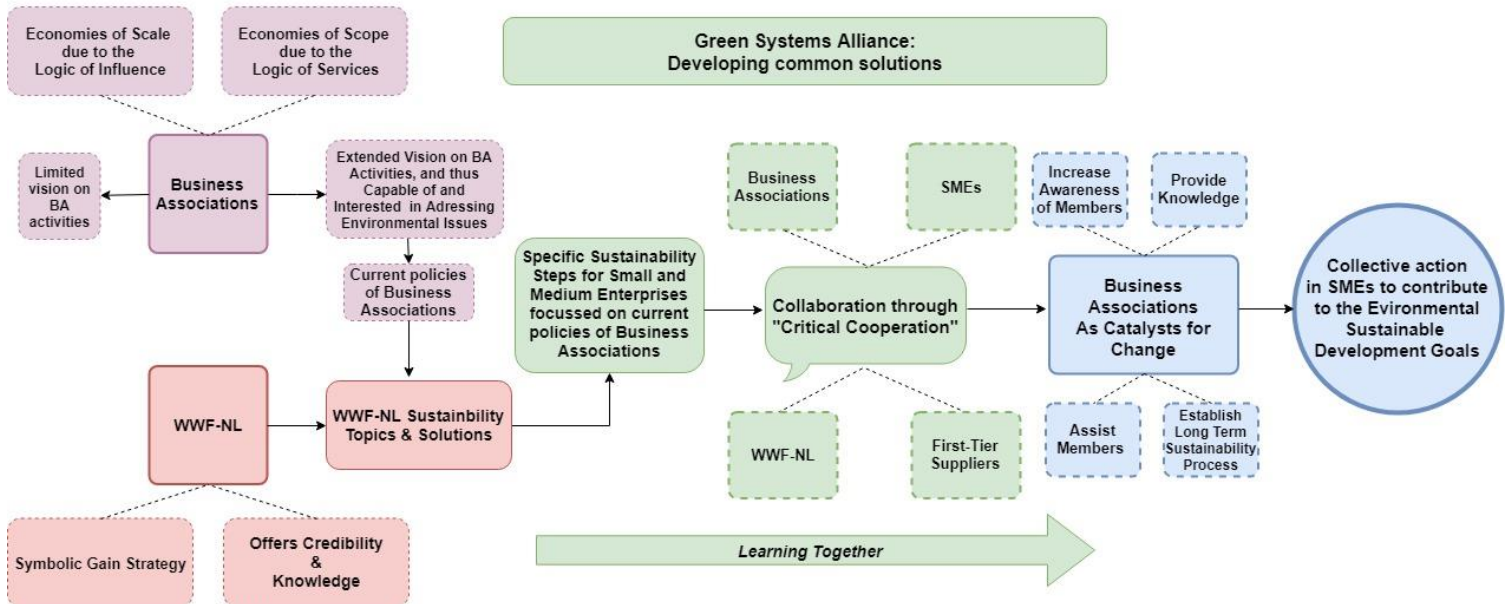


Figure 7. Repetition of Theory of Change

The results of this research partly fit the distinction made by Marques (2017) pictured on the top left of the Theory of Change, between BAs that have a limited vision of BA activities and serve their members only, and BAs that have an extended vision of BA activities. Thus, they are capable of and interested in addressing environmental issues. This distinction still exists, and therefore it is important to find BAs that have an extended vision of BA activities for collaborations between WWF-NL and BAs. Most BAs with a limited vision on BA activities will not be interested in a collaboration with WWF-NL, as showed by the results of methodological step 2. However, the interviews did show that capability and interest in addressing environmental issues can also come from a self-interest for SMEs, as consumers demand more sustainability and resources become scarce. As discussed by Carter and Rogers (2008), sustainability could also contain financial benefits and market advantage. As more BAs and SMEs realize this, the group that is interested in addressing environmental issues will grow.

This also fits the theory of Nordqvist (2010) on the practical influence of BAs. He states that BAs perceive their role as helping the industry in times of pressure and therefore the BAs should also help their members in times of pressure for sustainability. If these self-interested BAs and their members see the value of acting more sustainably for their sector, they are capable of addressing environmental issues and can thus become possible candidates for the collaboration. Therefore, with growing sustainability demand the group of BAs that are suitable BAs for collaboration grows. However, the results from the web search show that sometimes sustainability is used solely as a public relations spin, as the BAs mention sustainability topics and themes are important to them, but no real activities around sustainability are organized. This was predicted by the theory of Vivoda and Kemp (2018).

Pictured on the bottom left of the Theory of Change is the nature of WWF-NL. The results show that WWF-NL is an organization that can offer credibility and knowledge, as was predicted by the theory of Hartmann and Stafford (1997). Specifically, the credibility and the associated wide reach of WWF-NL is something many BAs would like to benefit from. While some topics of WWF-NL are too specific for common

businesses (deforestation etc.), this year's biggest topic plastic is something that affects every business and therefore offers a good basis for collaborations.

The practical influence of BAs as intermediaries, as discussed by Chappin, Hekkert, Meeus and Vermeulen (2007), has been confirmed throughout the research. This might also be the easiest and most straightforward way to influence SMEs through BAs. In the Theory of Change the more elaborate theory of Schwartz and Bar-El (2015) was used, who described the practical influence of BAs as catalysts for change. The results indicate that BAs can increase awareness of the members, provide them with knowledge and sometimes will also assist them through the changes. Whether an actual long-term sustainability process will be set up has not been proven. However, the pilot meetings have shown that if challenged, the BAs do have potential to function as catalysts for change.

A factor that causes the need for BAs to be challenged, is that BAs which are currently working on sustainability establish this process usually with a limited group of members, who voluntarily participate in this process. Adding to that, most of the BAs acknowledge that they are first and foremost a service for their members, and therefore have a limited vision of BA activities. While some have shown that a BA can be interested and capable of addressing environmental issues, as they have an extended vision of BA activities, it seems as if not all BAs are ready for this kind of commitment. For this reason, some BAs have shown their concern that they may not be the medium that WWF-NL is looking for. However, with the BAs that do have an extended vision on BA activity the collaborations can be set up. Hopefully these BAs will be an example for other BAs, and more collective change will occur.

Part of the rationale for this research was the demand of the government that BAs should help their members to act on pursuing the SDGs. Furthermore, the goal of the Theory of Change was to collectively pursue more action towards reaching the SDGs. The SDGs are not actively pursued by WWF-NL but were expected to be an efficient way of communicating with the BAs. However, the survey showed that five of the participants did not know the SDGs and eight participants have not pursued activities around the SDGs.

While some of these SDGs are not only quite difficult to contribute to, they are far away from the business of most BAs and some are also mostly focused on government action (for example SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals, mentioned by more than 40% of the 21 respondents). This could mean that many of the BAs do not really know what the SDGs entail and do not actively try to contribute to them. This matches the results from the interviews, where many BAs critiqued how the SDGs were set up, that they were not suitable for businesses and that the government does not communicate about them clearly. This shows that to collaborate with BAs and their members, the focus does not need to be on the SDGs. The organizations are more focussed on the broad term of sustainability and some fitting aspects to this.

To conclude, most of the theories used in the Theory of Change have been confirmed during the research. Some theories have been proven to be outdated, and that is where this research has a theoretical contribution. Specifically, for BAs, for which theory has been lacking, this research shows that the classic nature of BAs is shifting, and that while sustainable practices might not be the norm for BAs, there is a growing potential in their practical influence. They can indeed function as catalysts for collective change.

5.3. Limitations of this research

This research was limited by the timeframe and means available to the researcher. Firstly, as WWF-NL did not yet work together with BAs, no contact information was available. This meant that there was no easy

way to distribute the survey of methodological step 2, and thus the email addresses used were gathered by the researcher personally. Often no personal address was found other than an information address, which could have led to the low response rate of the survey. Consequently, the small sample size of methodological step 2 had a negative impact on the reliability of those results.

Secondly, the limited timeframe influenced the number of strategic collaboration meetings that could be organized. Methodological steps 1 to 4 took a considerable amount of time before the meetings could be scheduled. Moreover, getting different parties together at the same date was difficult which led to more time constraints. It could have been useful to conduct more pilot meetings. Furthermore, the limited timeframe made it difficult to measure long-term outcomes. The question therefore whether actual collective action will take place that contributes to the SDGs, will have to wait for an answer.

Lastly, an aspect that can be identified as a limitation of this research, is that the participants after methodological step 2 were sampled by non-probability sampling. While this choice of sampling has had benefits for the goal of this research, it is harder to make assumptions on the rest of the BAs. Therefore, the validity of some results can be questioned.

5.4. Recommendations for further research

Some recommendations can be given for further research. As the theory about BAs in general is limited and relatively old, more research is needed to discover in which ways BAs can have an impact on the sustainability of their members. Starting with more general questions on BAs such as: What is the current role of BAs and can these be influenced? Or: What is important in collaborating with BAs? Also, more specific questions on BAs and creating collective change can be postulated: Can the nature and the traditional view of BAs be influenced so that BAs will create environmental change? Or: In what ways can BAs be used as intermediaries to create collective action in SMEs?

Another aspect that needs further research concerns the SDGs. The results showed that they are relatively unknown and criticized for their applicability in business life. However, governments want them to be used as a framework. Therefore, further research should look into whether the SDGs could be integrated more into business practices and how the SDGs can be more translated into more specific actions.

A last recommendation for further research is specific to WWF-NL and its process in collaborating with BAs. It would be interesting to see how the collaborations work out, whether the collaborations can be expanded over multiple BAs and whether eventually collective change is reached within SMEs. Furthermore, as mentioned, it would be good to keep improving the strategic collaboration format with new theories.

5.5. Potential in interviewed BAs

In this research, collaboration was continued with two of the BAs. While it is necessary to work with BAs that have an extended view on BA activities and thus are willing to be active in sustainability, these two BAs were also chosen by WWF-NL because they were already active in the topics of collaboration. However, after the learning process of how to organize a collaboration with BAs to start collective change within SMEs, the collaborations can expand to more controversial BAs. Two examples will be discussed here.

Firstly, BA Federatie NRK. While many of the possible topics for collaboration were focussed around plastic, starting a collaboration with the plastic industry itself would be controversial. However, as

plastic is getting more negative attention, the Federatie NRK knows they must be open to conversations around the problems of plastic and have an extended view on BA activities. They have actively started an online discussion by setting up the website www.rethinkplastics.nl. In the interview of methodological step 3 it becomes clear that their preference would be that behavioural change is created from the consumer side. However, after some more questions, it appears that they are open to changing their own behaviour and adjusting one-time plastics. It might be a difficult organization to collaborate with, however the gains might be huge.

Another example is the BA HollandBio, which represents the biotechnology sector. This is a difficult topic for WWF-NL to engage with, as opinions on the sustainability of biotechnology are mixed. BioTechnology has received much criticism and is viewed by some as highly unsustainable, specifically on the topic of food. On the other hand, in the interview it became clear that many players in the field of biotechnological food would like to operate sustainably and would like to contribute to a sustainable future. They see producing enough food for people, while respecting nature, as something biotechnology could help with. Realizing this is quite difficult for them, as many NGOs and other parties are unwilling to discuss and collaborate with them. Therefore, while it would be controversial to start a collaboration with HollandBio, they do seem to have an extended vision of BA activities and thus the collaboration could bring about real change.

6. CONCLUSION

As the private sector is the main productive sector in the global economy (Sachs, 2012), the Dutch government has asked BAs to support SMEs in contributing to the SDGs (Rijksoverheid et al., 2018). As WWF-NL would like to create collective change in SMEs, they are interested in setting up collaborations with BAs. Therefore, the research question of this research was:

‘How could a collaboration be organized between business associations and WWF-NL which leads to collective change in small and medium-sized enterprises?’

The results of this research show that a collaboration can be organized between BAs and WWF-NL through a strategic collaboration meeting format. This format includes selective steps in which the potential BAs are filtered, SMEs and first-tier suppliers are invited, practicalities are decided upon and an agenda is provided which ensures room for critical cooperation. Following these steps proved successful. During these collaborations, collective change within SMEs is attempted. Due to time constraints of the present study the efficacy of these collaborations for reaching collective change has not been proven yet. However, this research shows that BAs, with an extended vision on BA activity, can act as catalysts for collective change.

The research question was framed around the SDGs. However, BAs do not seem to actively pursue the SDGs. Moreover, some BAs are not actively involved in sustainability activities or at present would not be interested in collaborating with WWF-NL. This fits the theory that the classic nature of BAs still exists to some degree, with some of the BAs being only as innovative as their weakest members. However, a growing awareness of the importance of sustainability for each sector is starting to change the behaviour of BAs. The collaboration should stay focussed on BAs that have an extended vision on BA activities, luckily these BAs are growing. With help from WWF-NL, BAs can play the perfect intermediary to create change within SMEs towards becoming more sustainable.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WWF-NL

1. Collaborate with multiple business associations in different sectors and start using them as intermediaries to reach SMEs.
-

There is growing potential in working together with BAs. However, choose to work with BAs that have an extended vision of BA activities and are ready for real sustainability collaborations. It needs to be clear that WWF-NL has certain wishes that the BA needs to adjust to. When they are willing to do this, WWF-NL can offer something like recognition in the media to their organization. The easiest step to take with BAs is to use them as an intermediary to reach SMEs. They can share information that WWF-NL wants to communicate to SMEs with their members.

The collaborations with ANVR and Tuinbranche Nederland should be continued. During the next months, collaborations should expand to two other BAs that are already active in sustainability. When enough experience has been gained, collaborations should start with more controversial BAs.

2. Challenge the traditional view of business associations.
-

When collaborating with BAs, the traditional view of BAs could get in the way of innovative action. This traditional view entails that business associations have a limited view on BA activities, which means they are restricted to the interests of their members and as an organization are as slow as their worst member. This research shows that BAs are increasingly interested in improving their members' sustainability. Therefore, challenge BAs by discussing obligations for members and by improving standards according to front-runners instead of laggards.

3. Do not use the SDGs as a framework for collaboration (yet).
-

Most BAs and related organizations that are interested in contributing to similar goals as WWF-NL do not feel moved to contribute to the SDGs specifically. The SDGs are relatively unknown or seen as too broad with not enough specific goals. This makes it very difficult to communicate specifically on the SDGs with the organizations, as they frame their potential value more in common topics such as 'Sustainability', 'Circular Economy' or 'CO2 reduction'. If in five years communication on the SDGs is better and they are adjusted more to SMEs, the SDGs can be used as a framework.

4. Use the strategic collaboration meeting format provided in this research but be flexible, and make sure to have enough capacity for follow-up actions.
-

Using the format in the research can help with structuring the strategic collaboration meeting. Some aspects of the format are quite important, e.g. making sure critical cooperation is reached and that all parties feel that their needs are adhered to. Also, it is important to follow the agenda clearly. However, in some parts more flexibility can be desirable. For example, who to invite to the meeting can differ for each situation and BA. Moreover, the format can be improved and expanded as more collaborations are set up.

Be aware that these projects, while having the potential to reach a large number of SMEs, are time-consuming. Make sure to make enough resources available.

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APPENDIX A

Survey questions of methodological step 2. Quantitative survey for business associations.

Enquête:

- 1) Statement: “Our organisation is engaged in sustainability activities”

Totally agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Totally disagree

- 2) Statement: “Our organisation has, besides its engagement for sustainability, an active sustainability policy”

Totally agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Totally disagree

- 3) To which areas does your organizations pay attention?

- Climate and Energy
- Food
- Raw Materials
- Biodiversity
- Plastic
- Water
- Other

- 4) Does your organization have a sustainability policy statement for your sector?

- No, it does not exist
- We are currently working on it
- We only have a sustainability vision
- Yes, there is a sustainability policy with mainly intentions
- Yes, there is a sustainability policy with obligations for members
- Different, namely

- 5) Statement: “Our organization is familiar with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” (If you answered Totally agree or agree, go to question 6. If you answered neutral, no or totally disagree, go to question 7.)

Totally agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Totally disagree

- 6) Have you organized specific activities to contribute to the SDGs? If yes, to which SDGs?

- 1. No poverty
- 2. Zero hunger
- 3. Good health and well-being
- 4. Quality education
- 5. Gender equality
- 6. Clean water and sanitation
- 7. Affordable and clean energy
- 8. Decent work and economic growth

- 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- 10. Reduce inequality
- 11. Sustainable cities and communities
- 12. Responsible consumption and production
- 13. Climate action
- 14. Life below water
- 15. Life on land
- 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
- 17. Partnerships for the goals

6b) Since when have you been organizing these activities?

Date

7) "Are you planning on continually organizing activities to contribute to the SDGs?"

- No, we are only continuing with current activities
- Maybe, we do not know yet
- Yes, we are starting (another) activity on one subject
- Yes, we are starting multiple activities on one subject
- Yes, we are starting multiple activities on multiple subjects
- Differently, namely

Helemaal eens – Eens – neutraal – Oneens – Helemaal Oneens

8) Statement: "WWF-NL can have added value for our organization to reach our sustainability goals"

Helemaal eens – Eens – neutraal – Oneens – Helemaal Oneens

9) Are you interested in adding more to this research and in a collaboration together with WWF-NL? If yes, leave your contact details.

Yes - No

10) If there is anything you would like to share with us, on what you are doing on sustainability or any documents on your activities, you can tell us here or send an email to: cdersken@wwf.nl.

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APPENDIX B

Interview guide for methodological step 3. Qualitative interviews with business associations.

Vragen:

- 1) Can you tell me a bit more about what your organization is currently doing on the topic of sustainability and the SDGs?
- 2) Are there specific areas in your sector of which you think a lot of progress can be made?
- 3) Do you, or any of your members, have ideas on what you can and would like to contribute to the SDGs?
- 4) Do you think that, when we come up with concrete steps to contribute to the SDGs, that your members are willing to participate?
- 5) What do you find important in a collaboration meeting with WWF-NL? (You could think about who should be present during the meeting, the location, how arrangements can be made.)
- 6) Do you have specific members that could be valuable during the collaboration meeting?
- 7) Do you have sector specific suppliers that are important to invite to the collaboration meeting?
- 8) Are you open to starting a collaboration with WWF-NL and participating in the next step of this research?

APPENDIX C

Results of methodological step 1. Web Search.

Business Association	Website Sustainability	Online Sustainability	SDGs
Agriculture and Fishing			
Anthos, Koninklijke Handelsbond voor Boomkwekerij- en Bolproducten	-	Yes	-
Dutch Produce Association DPA	-	-	-
Koninklijke Algemeene Vereeniging voor Bloembollencultuur KAVB	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Aardappel Organisatie NAO	-	Yes	-
Nederlandse Federatie van Edelpelsdierenhouders NFE	Yes	-	-
Nederlandse Fruittelers Organisatie NFO	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging Groothandel in Bloemkwekerijproducten VGB	Yes	-	-
VisNed	Yes	Yes	-
Industry			
Belangenvereniging Recycling Breken en Sorteren BRBS	Yes	Yes	Yes
Biosimilars en generieke geneesmiddelindustrie Nederland BOGIN	Yes	Yes	-
Data Driven Marketing Association DDMA	-	-	-
Federatie Nederlandse Rubber- en Kunststofindustrie NRK	Yes	Yes	-
Koninklijke Centrale Bond van Meubelfabrikanten CBM	Yes	Yes	-
Koninklijke VNP	Yes	Yes	-
MODINT, ondernemersorganisatie voor mode, interieur, tapijt en textiel	Yes	Yes	-
MVO, de ketenorganisatie voor Oliën en Vetten	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nederlandse Branchevereniging voor de Timmerindustrie NBvT	Yes	-	-
Nederlandse Brouwers	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Emballage- en Palletindustrie Vereniging EPV	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Vereniging Frisdranken, Waters en Sappen FWS	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van Zeepfabrikanten NVZ	Yes	Yes	-
netbeheer nederland	Yes	Yes	-
Stichting Golfkarton	Yes	-	-
Vereniging Industriële Bouwgrondstoffen VIB	-	-	-
Vereniging van de Nederlandse Chemische Industrie VNCI	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vereniging van Infrabedrijven MKB Infra	Yes	-	-
Vereniging van Nederlandse Fabrikanten van Bakkerijgrondstoffen Nebafa	Yes	-	-

Vereniging van Nederlandse Fabrikanten van Eetbare Oliën en Vetten VERNOF	-	Yes	-
Vereniging van Nederlandse Fabrikanten van Kinder- en Dieetvoedingsmiddelen VNFKD	-	-	-
Vereniging van Nederlandse Glasfabrikanten VNG	Yes	-	-
Vereniging van Nederlandse Suikerfabrikanten en Raffinadeurs NSR	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging van Ondernemingen van Betonmortelfabrikanten in Nederland VOBN	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging van Verf- en Drukinktfabrikanten VVVF	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging van Waterbedrijven in Nederland VEWIN	Yes	Yes	Yes
Werkgeversvereniging WENb	-	-	-
Construction industry			
AVAG, Platform Toeleveranciers Glastuinbouw	-	-	-
Bouwend Nederland BN	Yes	Yes	-
Cascade, Vereniging van zand- en grindproducenten	Yes	Yes	-
CUMELA Nederland	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging Koninklijke Nederlandse Bouwkeramiek KNB	Yes	-	-
Vereniging Nederlands Kalkzandsteenplatform VNK	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging van Nederlandse Aannemers met Belangen in het Buitenland NABU	Yes	-	-
Trade			
Detailhandel Nederland	Yes	-	-
Dutch Fund and Asset Management Association DUFAS	Yes	Yes	-
Federatie Goud en Zilver	Yes	Yes	-
Federatie Nederlandse Levensmiddelen Industrie FNLI	Yes	-	-
Frugi Venta (Groenten en Fruit Handelsplatform Nederland)	-	-	
Inretail	Yes	Yes	Yes
Koninklijke Vereniging van Nederlandse Wijnhandelaren KVNW	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlands Verbond van de Groothandel NVG	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Cosmetica Vereniging NCV	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Vereniging voor de Bakkerij NVB	-	-	-
Ondernemersorganisatie LTO Glaskracht Nederland	Yes	Yes	
Ondernemersorganisatie voor de installatiebranche en de technische detailhandel UNETO-VNI	Yes	Yes	-
Raad Nederlandse Detailhandel RND	Yes	-	-
SpiritsNL	Yes	Yes	-
Thuiswinkel.org	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging Afvalbedrijven	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging MailDB	Yes	Yes	-
Catering industry			

Koninklijke Horeca Nederland	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging Nederlandse Cateringorganisaties VeNeCa	Yes	Yes	-
Vereniging voor de Bakkerij- en Zoetwarenindustrie VBZ	Yes	Yes	-
Transport and Communication			
EVOFENEDEX	Yes	Yes	-
Koninklijk Nederlands Vervoer KNV	Yes	Yes	-
Financial instiutions			
Dutch Fund and Asset Management Association DUFAS	Yes	Yes	-
Factoring and Asset based financing Association Netherlands FAAN	-	-	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van Banken NVB	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nederlandse Vereniging van Gevolmachtigde Assurantiebedrijven (NVGA)	-	-	-
Verbond van Verzekeraars	-	Yes	-
Vereniging Effecten Uitgevende Ondernemingen VEUO	-	-	-
Zorgverzekeraars Nederland ZN	-	Yes	-
Business services			
Algemene Bond Uitzendondernemingen ABU	-	-	-
Algemene Werkgeversvereniging Nederland AWWN	-	-	-
Holland Quaestor	Yes	-	
IDEA, Independent Dutch Eventmarketing Association	-	-	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van Handelsinformatiebureaus NVH	-	-	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van Leasemaatschappijen NVL	-	-	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van Participatiemaatschappijen NVP	Yes	-	-
Vereniging van Nederlandse Tankopslagbedrijven VOTOB	Yes	-	-
Vereniging VBO Makelaar	Yes	-	-
Werkgeversvereniging WENb	-	-	-
Health and Wellbeing			
Bond van Groothandelaren in het Pharmaceutische Bedrijf BG Pharma	Yes	-	-
GGz Nederland	Yes	Yes	-
HollandBio	Yes	Yes	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van de Farmaceutische Industrie van Zelfzorggeneesmiddelen en Gezondheidsproducten Nefrofarm	Yes	-	-
Nederlandse vereniging van ziekenhuizen NVZ	Yes	-	-
PROVOET	Yes	-	-
Vereniging Gehandicaptenzorg Nederland VGN	Yes	Yes	-

Vereniging Innovatieve Geneesmiddelen	-	-	-
Zelfstandige Klinieken Nederland ZKN	-	-	-
Remaining			
Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging van Reisonderningen ANVR	Yes	Yes	-
Brancheorganisatie Kinderopvang	-	-	-
Branchevereniging VHG	Yes	Yes	-
Cedris, brancheorganisatie voor sociale werkgelegenheid en arbeidsintegratie	-	-	-
Club van Elf, de	-	-	-
Coöperatie van Vrouwelijke Ondernemers U.A.	-	-	-
de Mediafederatie	-	Yes	-
Greenport Holland	Yes	Yes	-
HISWA Vereniging	Yes	Yes	-
Koninklijk Verbond van Grafische Ondernemingen KVGO	Yes	Yes	-
Koninklijke OnderhoudNL, Federatie van Ondernemers in het Schilders-, Afwerkings- en Glaszetbedrijf	Yes	Yes	-
Plantum	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nederland ICT	Yes	-	-
Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding NRTO	-	-	-
Nederlandse Vereniging van Procesmatige Grondreinigingsbedrijven NVPG	Yes	Yes	
NLingenieurs	Yes	Yes	-
Ondernemersorganisatie Schoonmaak- en Bedrijfsdiensten OSB			
Ondernemersvereniging ORAM	Yes	Yes	-
Organisatie voor Vitaliteit, Activering en Loopbaan OVAL	-	-	-
Stichting NYSA	-	-	-
VEBON-NOVB	Yes	-	-
Vereniging van Bloemenveilingen in Nederland VBN	-	-	-
Vereniging van Orgelbouwers in Nederland VON	-	-	-
Vereniging Vrije Theater Producenten VVTP	-	-	-

APPENDIX D

Reflection questions of methodological step 7. Reflection by observer of the two pilot meetings.

1. Did everyone who was invited attend the meeting?
2. Did everyone participate (actively)?
3. Were all participants valuable during the meeting?
4. Were all participants happy to be at the meeting?
5. How is the timeframe of the meeting?
6. Does the structure of the meeting run smoothly?
7. Did specific ideas arise during the meeting?
8. Was everyone willing to collaborate (and therefore, also willing to give in on certain things)?
9. Were agreements made during the meeting?
10. Was there enough follow-up action after the meeting?
11. Was the goal of critical cooperation (Covey and Brown, 2001) reached? (Were the strengths of all parties used? Were gains of value created for many stakeholders?)
12. Were the four channels of BAs (Schwartz & Bar-El, 2015) to have influence as a catalyst confirmed? (Increase awareness of members, provide knowledge, assist members and establish long term sustainability process.)

APPENDIX E

Survey questions of methodological step 8. Reflection survey of the pilot meetings.

SurveyMonkey

1) Was the agenda of the meeting clear?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

2) Was the agenda complete?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

2b) If no, what was missing?

...

3) Was there enough room to express your need?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

4) Do you feel that everyone was willing to collaborate and if needed also to give in on certain things for the collaboration?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

5) Do you feel that enough concrete actions result from the meeting?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

6) Is the business association the right medium for these actions?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

7) Do you think business associations can function as catalysts to change the behaviour of SMEs?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

8) Are you interested in pursuing the collaboration further?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

9) Were you happy with the agreements that were made?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

10) Do you feel the meeting was useful?

Yes, very much – Yes – Neutral – No – No, not at all

10b) Do you have any remarks?

...