

## Chapter 10. Leveraging business diplomacy

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### INTRODUCTION

Multinational enterprises (MNEs) have to cope with at times difficult situations. On one hand, their freedom of movement is increasingly determined by international standards which lay out conditions in regard to their freedom of operations such as the OECD Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) guidelines (OECD, 2014) and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP).

On the other hand, 193 governments negotiated and signed the 2030 Agenda in 2015 which entails the collective goal of achieving 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs are expected to be achieved through multistakeholder collaboration between the 193 countries (developed and developing countries) involving business, governments and civil society. However, the finances needed to deliver the 17 goals at the global level are very high and cannot be accomplished by traditional official development assistance (ODA) nor by 'business as usual'. A 2019 study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) looking at the additional annual spending across low-income developing countries required in 2030 for meaningful progress on the SDGs in the areas of health, education, roads, electricity, water and sanitation an amount of US\$ 528 billion or the equivalent of 0.5 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP). For the emerging market economies, the price tag will be even higher at US\$ 2.1 trillion (Lipton, n.d., 5).

This gap cannot be closed without contributions from the business community, especially today as the world is incurring high costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The slogan 'the business of business is to do business and nothing else', attributable to the economist Milton Friedman, no longer suffices for businesses interested and willing to contribute to sustainable development. Today's business challenges are to contribute to social justice and to help reduce environmental degradation. Both are essential dimensions of a thriving business ecosystem embedded in sustainable development.

MNEs being established in different countries and having financial and human resources could contribute greatly to the achievement of the SDGs. For

instance, they could adopt the ‘Caux Round Table Principles’<sup>1</sup> and apply them to their own operational processes. Another important contributing factor for SDG implementation and the corresponding need for financial resources are the developments in the investment fund sector (e.g. environmental, social and governance (ESG) based funding) and SDG 17.17 regarding public–private partnerships (PPPs) that can be an additional support to reach the SDGs if the PPPs are structured according to SDG principles.

This book chapter suggests that MNEs should take into consideration the use of business diplomacy in order to successfully manage the growing number of standards of required good business practice as well as to identify opportunities for business investment and participation in the SDGs. MNEs need the knowledge and competence of business diplomats to avoid failures and loss of reputational capital such as was the case for Nestlé and its baby milk formula or for Shell Company’s misguided oil and gas exploration in Nigeria (Saner and Yiu, 2000).

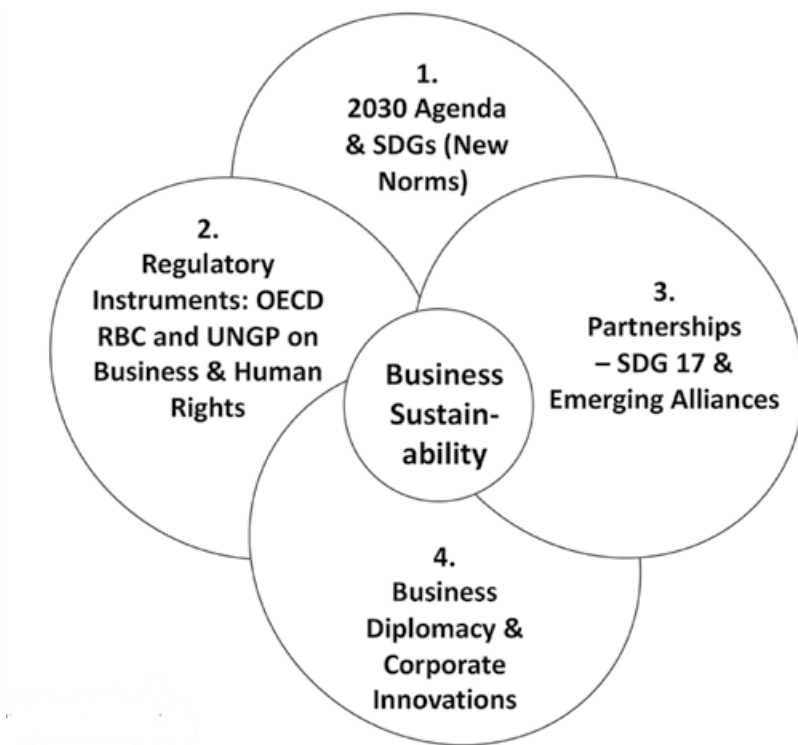
This chapter presents four sections as illustrated in Figure 10.1 to capture key elements of the global and corporate transformation process and to argue why global sustainability is synonymous with business sustainability. A healthy synergy ensures the wellbeing of both.

## 1. NEW NORMS: 2030 AGENDA AND SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (The General Assembly, UN, 2015) signed by 193 Member States of the United Nations coupled with the signing of the Paris Agreement the same year set the world on target to work toward reducing the emission of greenhouse gas and restoring biodiversity of the planet while solving social, environmental and economic challenges. Since then, the general public has understood the impact of climate warming on the freedom and opportunity to live the lives they value and human security they expect and aspire to.

Many of the MNEs and national companies remain indifferent about this fast-changing operational context. A recent study by Deloitte found that client and customer groups among the stakeholder groups, that is, investors or government regulators, are exerting high pressure on companies. The increasing demand from the investors’ groups on companies to comply with the ESG attest to this reality as well.

The operational principles of the 2030 Agenda which center on a human rights-based approach requires a paradigm shift regarding business responsibility. From this lens, discussion of RBC can no longer focus on workplace issues and corporate governance alone, but has to incorporate a level of accountability for its impacts on the environment and on society. Non-traditional stakeholder groups throughout the corporate value chains, for example, suppliers, supply



Source: Author's own articulation.

*Figure 10.1 Elements contributing to future business sustainability*

chains, consumers and the communities where business operates and the wider ecological movements will have to be taken into consideration by the MNEs.

## 2. INTERNATIONAL REGULATORY INSTRUMENTS FOR RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT

Different attempts have been made to hold companies accountable. At the international level, there are different corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and instruments by governmental and intergovernmental bodies. Of the ones mentioned here three will be given a more elaborated review. These instruments include: United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, ISO 26000 Social Responsibility, OECD Guidelines for

Responsible Business Conduct, United Nations Global Compact, International Labour Organization (ILO) Tripartite Declaration, Principles for Responsible Investment, Equator Principles, IFC's Environmental and Social Standards, just to name a few (Hohnen, 2007, vii–viii).

Three international regulatory instruments are directly related to business conduct and delimit the boundary of corporate liberty and managerial practices. Although these instruments are voluntary in nature, they have gained greater credibility and greater attention by both corporations proactively and by stakeholders either to counter corporate excesses or to redress grievances. These regulatory tools are: OECD Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct, ILO Tripartite Declaration on Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) (ILO, 2017a) and UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights.

## 2.1 OECD Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct

Since 1961, OECD has produced guidelines for multinational enterprises and domestic firms all around the world whose objective was to conciliate a capitalist economy, economic growth and open markets with job creation, efficient capital allocation and environmental sustainability (OECD, 2014, 1–3). The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises were adopted in 1976 and became the first comprehensive international code of CSR. Since then the Guidelines have been updated five times and constitute today the most comprehensive set of government-backed recommendations on responsible business conduct in existence (Bonucci and Kessedjan, 2018, 11).

The last two updates took place in 2000 and 2011, which significantly strengthened the OECD Guidelines and improved its impact on corporate behaviour. The 2000 update envisioned the creation of a National Contact Point system (NCPs). NCPs are mandated to promote the Guidelines and respond to specific instances relating to allegations of non-observance of the Guidelines. This development rendered the Guidelines the only government-backed international instrument on RBC with a built-in non-judicial grievance mechanism (Bucci and Kessedjan, 2018, 11). There are 49 NCPs in both OECD and non-OECD countries (OECD, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, the Guidelines were expanded to include the protection of human rights. Consequently, the competences of the NCPs were enlarged. Thus, the OECD Guidelines are aligned with other international instruments such as the ILO Tripartite Declaration on Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and the UNGP. The 2011 update had other important developments such as its call for *due diligence* by businesses of their operations and supply chains to identify, prevent and mitigate actual or potential adverse impacts on labour, environment, human rights and anti-corruption, among others. In 2018, OECD

*Table 10.1 NCP cases in 2019 by theme*

By Theme	Proportion of Cases
Combating bribery, bribe solicitation and extortion	8%
Competition	3%
Concepts and principles	10%
Consumer interests	7%
Disclosure	20%
Employment and industrial relations	52%
Environment	22%
General policies	52%
Human rights	37%
Science and technology	1%
Taxation	3%

*Source:* adopted from OECD Watch (2019).

Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct was adopted at the OECD Ministerial level on May 30, 2018 (OECD, 2018). The OECD has also developed guidance to help enterprises carry out due diligence for RBC in specific sectors and supply chains, namely: minerals; agriculture; garment and footwear; extractives; and finance.

### **2.1.1 Impact to date**

So far, between 2000 and 2019, NCPs have handled more than 500 cases relating to company operations in over 100 countries and territories (OECD, 2020). A quick scan of the OECD RBC Database shows that highest percentage of NCP cases are part of two thematic areas, namely (a) employment and industrial relations (52 percent) and (b) general policies of the guidelines (52 percent). Human rights issues have the third highest number of cases at 37 percent (see Table 10.1). Most of the cases presented at the NCPs are multi-thematic in nature and cover a wide territory where multinational corporations (MNCs) operate.

A shorter timeline from 2011 shows that the three most prevalent themes have been: human rights violations (51 percent), general policies of the Guidelines (49 percent) and employment and industrial relations (37 percent) (OECD, 2021). This 're-distribution of prevalence' is in line with the overall trend of a human rights centered approach to business conduct.

A summary of the cases concluded with proposals for remedy of the complainants is available in the State of Remedy Report prepared by OECD Watch, a global network of civil society organizations with more than 130 members in over 50 countries. Its mission is 'to inform and advise the global

NGO community on how to use the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (OECD Guidelines) and its associated grievance mechanism to achieve corporate accountability and access to remedy for individuals harmed by corporate misconduct' (OECD Watch, 2021).

Two groundbreaking cases in 2019 confirmed that the OECD Guidelines cover the impact of global warming and the responsibility of companies – including in the financial sector – to work toward implementation of the Paris Agreement targets. There is also a first-ever agreement in a case involving the responsibility of online platforms and the digital economy (Ingrams and Wilde-Ramsing, 2021).

Also taken into account is the accountability of the financial sector. For example, on November 14, 2017, the Dutch NCP accepted the OECD guidelines complaint brought by Greenpeace Netherlands, Oxfam Novib, BankTrack and Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie), in relation to ING's investments in fossil fuels (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, 1–2). The ING Bank unilaterally announced its decision,

to end our financing of new coal-fired power plants and thermal coal mines worldwide, effective immediately. ING also won't finance any new clients whose business is over 50 percent reliant on operating coal-fired power plants or thermal coal mines. As part of our responsibility to existing clients, we will honour standing commitments. (ING, November 27, 2015).

#### *2.1.1.1 A case example*

On April 19, 2019, the Dutch NCP issued its final statement, demanding that ING Bank sets concrete climate goals for its financial services that are in line with the Paris Climate Agreement (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2017).

ING Bank agreed to reduce its thermal coal exposure to close to zero by 2025 and refrain from financing new coal-firing power plants. In contrast to its first brush with the OECD Guidelines and Dutch NPC in 2017, ING reacted to the complaint differently regarding financing palm oil production in 2019. It went into a NCP facilitated dialogue with nongovernmental organization (NGO) complainants and presented a public position declaring its willingness to examine its palm oil investment portfolio (ING, 2021). In its newsletter, the ING states:

**ING's client relationships should be classified as 'linked to', rather than 'contributes to', according to the OECD Guidelines.**

A bank can either be 'linked to' the adverse impacts of its clients, or can 'contribute to' these impacts. This classification is most relevant as it defines the responsibility of and thus actions required by the bank. Much depends on a bank's due diligence processes and its leverage applied seeking to address adverse impacts. ING believes

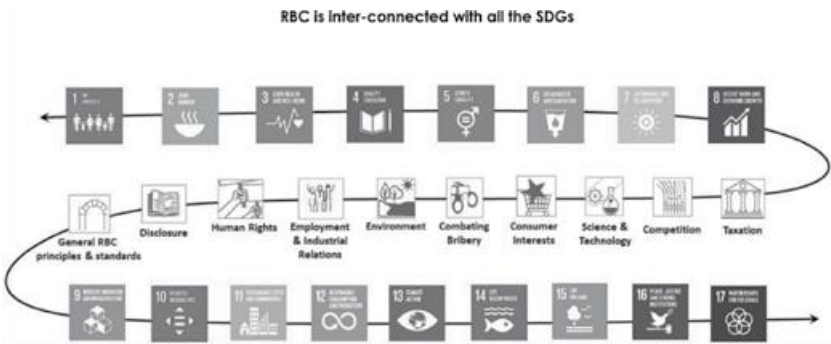
it is ‘linked to’ the alleged adverse impacts of its clients, rather than ‘contributes to’. (ING Newsroom, January 20, 2020).

2.1.2      **Concluding remarks on the interlink between the OECD Guidelines and SDGs**

Business practices are closely influencing the attainment of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. After all, business is one of the key actors that translate the global policy, that is, SDGs, into day-to-day realities on the ground, either in the workplace or in the community. Should most of the companies, big or small, domestic or international fail to take the SDGs and the targets into consideration and ignore its corporate responsibility of good citizenship through adherence to the OECD guidelines, then the world would be unable to reduce its vulnerabilities and disaster risks over the medium term. A visualization of the interconnection between SDGs and RBC are presented in Figure 10.2.

It is envisaged that through RBC due diligence, companies can achieve the following advantages (OECD, 2021):

- 1. Practically integrate SDGs into its core business
- 2. Start with the most significant impact
- 3. Consider the entire footprint of the company
- 4. Be dynamic and responsive
- 5. Contribute to resolving systemic issues
- 6. Engage rather than withdraw
- 7. Perform better



Source: OECD (2021).

Figure 10.2      *Interconnection between SDGs and RBC*

## **2.2 UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights**

In June 2011, the UNGP were approved. By clearly stating what the responsibilities of businesses are, the UNGP provides businesses with a framework to respect and avoid violations of human rights. The principles of UNGP were endorsed by the Human Rights Council, and many companies, business organizations, civil society organizations, trade unions, national and regional institutions and other stakeholder groups also support them (United Nations Human Rights, 2014).

The UNGP are a set of guidelines for states and companies to prevent, address and remedy human rights abuses committed in business operations. UNGP includes 31 principles. They are not legal obligations, rather clarify businesses' obligations to uphold human rights in their practices and provide states and businesses with guidance. Most importantly, they define corporate responsibility in this regard (United Nations, 2011).

The UNGP rests on three pillars, that is, protect, respect and remedy. In other words, the UNGP clarify different duties for different actors: it is the state duty to protect human rights, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and the state duty to guarantee access to a remedy for victims of business-related abuses.

The UNGP Reporting Framework was launched in February 2015 by Shift and Mazars, a spin-off from the team of Professor John Ruggie, who was the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Business and Human Rights. This Reporting Framework provides comprehensive guidance to companies to report on salient human rights issues in line with their responsibility to respect human rights.

Human rights impacts are the most acute due to negative or positive social, environmental and economic impacts that a company can have on people. Salient human rights issues like child labour, unpaid overtime, attacking of labour union leaders are in turn the most adverse and severe impacts. Impacts that carry this level of severity can be seen to converge strongly with risks to the business, as demonstrated in the many instances where they led to litigation, reputation-damaging campaigns, disruption and delays of productions, increased costs of managing conflict and other costs or losses as in value to the business. This is particularly evident over the medium to long term (Shift and Mazars, 2015).

The UNGP Reporting Database included 90 companies in 2019. Of these, 43 percent have a stand-alone human rights policy. This number goes up to about 75 percent when also counting commitments included in a code of conduct (Langlois, 2016) and including some of the big-name information technology companies of the world. However, at the time of writing, the UNGP Database seems to have added no more postings to its website.



### **2.3 ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy**

The ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy was negotiated and adopted by governments, employers and workers in 1977. It was last 'revised in 2017 to be in agreement with new labour and policy outcomes that were put forth by the 329th International Labour Conference in 2017, namely, the UNGP endorsed by the Human Rights Council in 2011, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (Saner and Yiu, 2020). The revision has enriched the MNE Declaration by adding principles addressing specific decent work issues related to social security, forced labour, transition from the informal to the formal economy, wages, access to remedy and compensation of victims. It also provides guidance on 'due diligence' processes – consistent with the UNGP – in achieving decent work, sustainable businesses, more inclusive growth and better sharing of the benefits of foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly relevant for the achievement of SDG 8.

It is an ILO instrument that provides direct guidance to companies on social policy and inclusive, responsible and sustainable workplace practices. The aim is to encourage the positive contribution which MNEs can make to economic and social progress and the realization of decent work for all; and it highlights the central role of freedom of association and collective bargaining as well as industrial relations and social dialogue (ILO, 2017a). The ILO MNE Declaration also aims at minimizing and resolving the difficulties to which MNE's various operations may give rise (ILO, 2017b).

The principles of the ILO MNE Declaration are intended for MNEs, governments of home and host countries, and employers and workers' organizations. They cover areas such as employment, training, conditions of work and life, and industrial relations as well as general policies (ILO, 2017c). Similar to the OECD RBC Guidelines, the ILO MNE Declaration also provides guidance on 'due diligence' processes – consistent with the UNGP in addition to its well-established social dialogue mechanism that ensures inclusive, sustainable, responsible business behaviour of MNEs in host countries and compatibility with national development objectives and policies.

In cases where enterprises are involved in human rights abuses, there are three complementary mechanisms available: one is the (state-based) judicial system while the other two are state-based and private non-judicial mechanisms. State-based judicial mechanisms are premised on the country's judicial system that provides sufficient guarantees for the protection of human and workers' rights by national or multinational companies. Pros and cons of such a mechanism are reflected in the political orientation of the country. State-based non-judicial mechanisms take the form of labour inspectorates,

mechanisms for solving environmental disputes, consumer protection bodies, national human rights institutions, government ombudsman services and complaint mechanisms established under special-purpose or sector-specific regulatory regimes (e.g. public health and safety or OECD NCPs). There are tripartite-appointed national focal points responsible for the promotion of the MNE Declaration.

To sum up, there is a convergence and complementarity of the three international instruments that define the space of business operations (Table 10.2). Equally noticeable is the alignment of these instruments with the SDGs. However, important differences exist that differentiate the potential impact that each instrument can and will make in terms of reducing potential abuse of human rights, especially when a power differential is tipped in favour of MNEs and employers.

### **3. STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS**

Partnership is central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Preamble of the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda states,

All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want to heal and secure our planet. (Declaration of 2030 Agenda, Preamble, 2015)

The 2030 Agenda essentially redefines the relationship between business, public administration, communities and stakeholders and urges the formation of networks vertically and horizontally in order to tackle some of the most interlinked and multilevel problems. This call for effective and meaningful partnership goes beyond resource mobilization and resource sharing but spans the boundary to include different actors and stakeholders in the process of design, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. It goes without saying, diverse perspective and voices, in addition to cross-sectoral learning, knowledge creation and technology transfer, shall improve the quality of decision making and ensure a greater chance of success in achieving these complex system level transformations.

#### **3.1 Partnerships as Means for Implementation in the 2030 Agenda**

SDG 17 suggests different forms of partnerships – strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. It stipulates different means for implementation that need to

*Table 10.2 Comparison of three international standards dealing with business conduct*

Criteria	OECD Guidelines for RBC	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP)	ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning MNEs and Social Policies
Signatory Countries or Endorsement	49	171	187
Aim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most comprehensive set of government-backed recommendations on what constitutes RBC and cover all major RBC areas, such as: information disclosure, human rights, employment and industrial relations, environment, combating bribery and corruption, consumer interests, science and technology, competition, and taxation. They are fully aligned with the recommendations of the UNGP</li> <li>• To promote positive contributions by enterprises to economic, environmental and social progress worldwide and minimize the difficulties to which their various operations may give rise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not intended as operational guidance, but does list such guidance and other resources to support practical implementation</li> <li>• A set of 31 principles directed at states and companies that clarify their duties and responsibilities to protect and respect human rights in the context of business activities and to ensure access to an effective remedy for individuals and groups affected by such activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage the positive contribution which MNEs can make to economic and social progress and the realization of decent work for all; and to minimize and resolve the difficulties to which their various operations may give rise</li> </ul>

Criteria	OECD Guidelines for RBC	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP)	ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning MNEs and Social Policies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Guidelines reflect the 'shared values' of the governments of countries from which a large share of international direct investment originates and which are home to many of the largest multinational enterprises. They are a 'point of reference' for enterprises (and stakeholders) and thus 'complement and reinforce private efforts to define and implement responsible business conduct'</li> </ul>		
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multinational enterprises (not domestic only ones) with regard to their operations inside or outside their home country</li> <li>The Guidelines address both an enterprise's headquarters and its local entities which are expected to cooperate with each other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The UNGP apply to:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all states, and</li> <li>all businesses whether international or local, whatever their size, location, sector, ownership or structure</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multinational and national enterprises, governments (host and home country) and social partners</li> <li>The scope is now extended to the global supply chain and to labour administration/inspection</li> </ul>

Criteria	OECD Guidelines for RBC	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP)	ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning MNEs and Social Policies
Formalized Due Diligence Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• Established Guidance document, 'OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct'</li> <li>• Sector-specific Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas'</li> <li>• The OECD Guidance is global in scope and applies to all mineral supply chains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Background note (United Nations, 2011) on 'Corporate Human Rights Due Diligence – Identifying and Leveraging Emerging Practice'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• In the revised edition of the Declaration, it provides 'guidance' on 'due diligence' processes (Clause 10 d) – 'to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their actual and potential adverse impacts that relate to internationally recognized human rights, understood, at a minimum, as those expressed in the International Bill of Human Rights and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work'</li> </ul>
Non-judicial mechanism to examine grievance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, clearly designated state-based authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Human Rights Council appointed Special Rapporteur, Independent experts and Working Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, state-based labour inspectorate</li> </ul>

Criteria	OECD Guidelines for RBC	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR)	ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning MNEs and Social Policies
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Each Adherent is required to set up a National Contact Point (NCP) to further the effectiveness of the OECD Guidelines by undertaking promotional activities, handling inquiries, and contributing to the resolution of issues that arise relating to implementation of the OECD Guidelines’</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘As part of their duty to protect against business-related human rights abuses, governments should take appropriate steps to ensure, through judicial, administrative, legislative or other appropriate means, that when such abuses occur within their territory and/or jurisdiction any affected worker or workers have access to effective remedy’ (Clause 64)</li> <li>• General ILO Recommendation applies – Examination of Grievances Recommendation, 1967 (No. 130)</li> <li>• Use the NCP mechanism for redress</li> </ul>
Binding and Enforceability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary, principles and standards of good practice</li> <li>• On the other hand, the guidelines are binding for the countries adhering to them in the sense that they shall implement and promote them. This duty consists primarily of setting up ‘National Contact Points’</li> <li>• NCP has the obligation to investigate if the case (complaint of grievance) is accepted which could lead to court action or other forms of enforcement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary</li> <li>• No Enforcement</li> <li>• Enhancing internationally recognized human rights and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary</li> <li>• No enforcement</li> <li>• They cannot be used to minimize the effect of ratified ILO Conventions. They reflect ‘good practice for all’</li> </ul>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

be integrated and engaged in the implementation of SDGs. These partnerships address different aspects of the action consisting of finance (Targets 17.1–17.5), technology (Target 17.6), know-how transfer and capacity building (Target 17.9), trade (Target 17.10–12) and systemic issues. These systemic issues address policy and institutional coherence (Targets 17.13–17.15), multistakeholder partnerships (Targets 17, 16–17) and data, monitoring and accountability (Target 17.18–19). Each target intimates a major sector or sub-sector to work in by motivated businesses committed to the common good.

Multistakeholder partnerships are key to SDG 17 – including two related targets:

- 17.16 – Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multistakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the SDGs in all countries, in particular developing countries
- 17.17 – Encourage and promote effective public, public–private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

To date, there are in total 5,450 partnerships or commitments registered on the UN's global registry of voluntary commitments and multistakeholder partnerships. Table 10.3 shows the number of partnerships/commitments by individual SDGs.

SDG 14, Life Below Water has the highest number of registered partnerships/commitments (37 percent) followed by SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth (29 percent) and SDG 4, Quality Education (22 percent). Only 9 percent of the registered partnerships are working on SDG 10, reducing inequalities which deals with discrimination, exclusion, unequal treatment inside the country and levels of development between countries.

### **3.2 Spectrum of Partnerships**

Besides SDG 17 and its targets for partnerships, the UN system defines partnerships for the SDGs as follows:

Partnerships for sustainable development are multi-stakeholder initiatives voluntarily undertaken by governments, intergovernmental organisations, major groups and other stakeholders, which efforts are contributing to the implementation of inter-governmentally, agreed development goals and commitments. (The Partnership Initiative, 2019, 8)

*Table 10.3 Registered multistakeholder partnerships and commitments by SDGs at the partnership for SDGs online platform of the UN*

	<i>SDG Goals</i>	<i>No of Recorded Partnerships</i>
#1	No Poverty	843
#2	No Hunger	769
#3	Good Health & Wellbeing	708
#4	Quality Education	1212
#5	Gender Equality	945
#6	Sanitation & Drinking Water	700
#7	Affordable & Clean Energy	700
#8	Decent Work & Economic Growth	1244
#9	Industrial Innovation & Infrastructure	548
#10	Reduced Inequalities	509
#11	Sustainable Cities & Communities	703
#12	Responsible Consumption	915
#13	Climate Action	1113
#14	Life Below Water	2036
#15	Life on Land	708
#16	Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	634
#17	Partnerships for the Goals	1281

*Note:* N = 5,450

*Source:* Authors' own articulation based on the data found at UN SDGs Partnership Platform, accessed July 5, 2021 at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/>.

A review of the current partnerships shows there is a broad spectrum of 'partnerships', some transactional, others transformative; some opportunistic, others structural; some single purpose, others multifunctional; some local, others international or global.

The partnership Initiative and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in their joint publication (United Nations, 2019) proposed the following classification and labeled it the Partnership Spectrum, which captures the multiplicity of such partnership and alliance possibilities. The proposed partnership consists of three approaches namely: (a) *leverage exchange* – relations are transactional and tend to be one-way, (b) *transformative exchange* – the relationship is about being more multilateral involving many actors in an effort to achieve collective impact and systemic transformation and (c) *combine/integrate* – two or more partners create synergies that are greater than the sum of individual resources.



### 3.3 Value Proposition: A Business Case

Corporations of the top Fortune 1000 companies should consider the following strategic options:

*Financial:* the Business & Sustainable Development Commission, which is led by over 30 business and civil society leaders, has produced compelling research mapping the economic prize that could be available to business if the SDGs are achieved. The Commission's 2017 report points to market opportunities of at least US\$ 12 trillion a year that could be unlocked by 2030 (United Nations, 2015, 12). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the world economy has slowed down. However, when recovery starts, efforts to mitigate the threat of climate change and to redress system vulnerability by countries and cities around the world will reignite the consumer demands from food chains, to urban mobilities, energy, materials, health care and wellbeing. This financial rebound will be tied in with innovation and technological upgrading.

*Technological:* the unintended 'benefits' of the global disruption by the pandemic is the rethinking of production of goods and services and how they are organized and how work is performed. Industrial 4.0, smart cities, big data, and analytics, for example, have seen an accelerated proliferation in the past 15 months. These technological and social innovations aligned with the SDGs have already brought about productivity gains and created new values, both material and immaterial. Continued development along this trajectory will benefit the advancing companies.

*Reputational:* consumers and employees expect the company to be responsible and responsive which could generate positive reputational capital and trust. These are two 'social capitals' that are valuable for the sustainability of the business.

*Employment and license to operate:* it is expected that by achieving the SDGs a total of 380 million new jobs will be created by 2030 (AlphaBeta, 2017, 38). This will be a major contribution by business especially when many young people are excluded from the labour market right now. This will be particularly valuable when jobs provide living wages, skill development opportunities and minimum social protection along the lines of SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth.

## 4. BUSINESS DIPLOMACY: AN UNDER LEVERAGED CORPORATE COMPETENCE

The SDGs offer a royal road for a positive corporate future. The missing ingredient is the corporate capacity in developing its strategic view and a comprehensive view of economic, social and environmental sustainability. To identify opportunities that are embedded in the additional value of US\$ 12

trillion per annum will require business diplomacy (BD) know-how and a team of business diplomats to work on the ground in order to identify the business opportunities and be market leaders in the context of SDGs.

#### **4.1 A Brief Description of the Concept of Business Diplomacy**

Business diplomacy is not a new contemporary phenomenon. Since ancient times, traders had twin tasks – selling goods/services and negotiating levies, tariffs, right to conduct business, conditions of residence and so on. In the international system BD takes prominence when globalization is accompanied by an increase of interaction with non-traditional business partners (civil society, regional political groupings) (Saner et al., 2000; Saner and Yiu, 2009). International BD is the *representation and communication* related activities deployed by international businesses with host government representatives and non-governmental representatives in order to establish and sustain a positive relationship to maintain legitimacy and a ‘license to operate’ (Kesteleyn et al., 2014; Ruël and Suren, 2017).

#### **4.2 Domains of Business Diplomacy in Identifying Business Opportunities through SDGs Framework**

As said in the preceding sector of this chapter, this ‘positive relationship’ has been expanded beyond the economic benefits, such as economic growth or employment growth, and also consists of inclusive social and environmental objectives as incorporated in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. After years of practicing corporate social responsibilities, private sector businesses are better prepared in conducting business in a profitable manner and at the same time providing decent working conditions, respecting workers’ rights and/or reducing environmental pollution. However, to bundle and achieve these three aspects into one overriding objective remains challenging for many companies especially small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Therefore, increasing BD competence is also relevant for business organizations, such as chambers of commerce, industrial associations, employer federations and trade unions.

To be strategic, BD needs to be deployed to identify areas that MNEs and other businesses can explore in order to identify the best fit between the mission of the corporation and that of actionable impact themes within the SDG framework. At different levels, BD aims to establish collaborative relations with other stakeholders in order to work on initiatives falling within these actionable impact themes. All the tasks and skills relating to the BD mentioned in the preceding section need to be deployed to ensure success for the company, the partners and the community.

In essence, the function and tasks of BD are to *identify, ally, co-design, monitor, sustain, learn and scale new business ventures which are SDG aligned*. Representation, communication, influencing and negotiations are the key competence areas of BD and leadership.

### **4.3 Why Business Diplomacy Is Necessary: An Example**

Examples highlighting the need for competent management of nonbusiness stakeholder relations have been built up since the initial publication on this subject area (Saner et al., 2000; Saner and Saner-Yiu, 2005; Wolters, 2012; Kesteleyn et al., 2014; Yiu and Saner, 2017). Cases such as 'Shell in Nigeria' has become the synonym of bad business practice ever since the MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) was founded in 1990 and the Ogoni Bill of Rights was declared, leading to several peaceful protests under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa and generating wide international support. This international support increased manyfold after the illegal assassination of Ken Saro-Wiwa and six of his associates by the then military regime of Nigeria. Court cases filed against Shell in New York, London and the Hague could not be stopped by Shell despite millions of dollars spent on development (CSR) investments, for example, an initial investment made in Gabon for forestry protection by Shell and the conservation of chimpanzees were well publicized on international media. On January 29, 2021, a Dutch court ordered Royal Dutch Shell Plc's Nigerian unit to pay compensation for oil spills in a territory of two villages that occurred over a period of 13 years. Shell Nigeria has been declared liable for damages from pipeline leaks near the villages of Oruma and Goi as stated by the Hague Court of Appeals in its ruling. The court also ordered the Nigerian unit of Shell and its Hague-headquartered parent company to build better warning systems so future leaks can be quickly detected. This is the first case that an MNE and its foreign subsidiary have been tried in the Netherlands for allegedly breaching 'duty of care' abroad. This will have far-reaching implications since future suits might be brought against oil firms. Referring to 'duty of care' the Hague Court of Appeals declared that Shell's global headquarters in the Netherlands is also liable toward the Oruma villagers in preventing future oil spills (Baazil et al., 2021). Shell has other legal woes to contend with. In a separate action brought by Milieudefensie, one of the plaintiffs in the Oruma villagers case, The Hague District Court on the May 26, 2021 has ordered Shell to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the Shell group by 45 percent in 2030, compared to 2019 levels (The Hague District Court, 2021). This is another landmark court judgment that clearly links fossil fuel extraction to violations of human rights (Nardelli and Shankleman, 2021) and indicates that corporations are accountable for climate change.

The case describes a failure by a global company to proactively solve a conflict with the local indigenous populations of the Nigeria Delta and later with the civil society groups at large. This conflict intensified into years of tit-for-tat confrontations and ended with dramatic outcomes with ripple effects reaching into the future. It could be said that Shell relied on the traditional approach of dealing with such substantive contention by hiding behind legal proceedings rather than by engaging with the stakeholders and holding dialogues and consultations with the people of communities affected by the negative impact of its business practices.

#### **4.4 Function and Tasks of Business Diplomacy: External Processes**

In the new context of the SDGs, the following tasks need to be proactively carried out by the business diplomats on behalf of his/her MNE, namely:

1. Identify the new market potentials born out of SDG transformations in different sectors;
2. Scout and map high-risk stakeholder groups for possible new initiatives aligned to the SDGs;
3. Identify potential partners for longer term and shared interests with different stakeholder groups in meeting SDGs' requirements;
4. Build alliances and coalitions to solve common problems due to the 2030 political agenda;
5. Amplify feedback from consumers/clients and community feedback for rethinking existing production processes to achieve neutrality at the beginning and to achieve value addition in the medium term;
6. Shape the emerging SDG ecosystem at different levels: local, national, regional and global via appropriate mechanisms and structures;
7. Manage situational ambiguity and create shared narratives within corporation and outside of corporation (corporate messaging);
8. Promote mainstreaming SDGs and related business opportunities into corporate policies and strategy;
9. Support the integration of local information and data on stakeholder relations with centralized data pool and analytics;
10. Stocktaking the business relationships with all stakeholders at the key markets that the corporation operates.

These tasks and responsibilities are part of the work portfolio of a BD management function/unit. They reconfigure existing competences through coordination and effective management of the multitude of interfaces with stakeholder groups. These interfaces range from interacting with the UN to engaging with national governments, local communities, civil societies and other businesses

to value sustainability and to formulate new economic arrangements as a priority for the Build Back Better endeavour around the world.

#### **4.5 Function and Tasks of Business Diplomacy: Internal Processes**

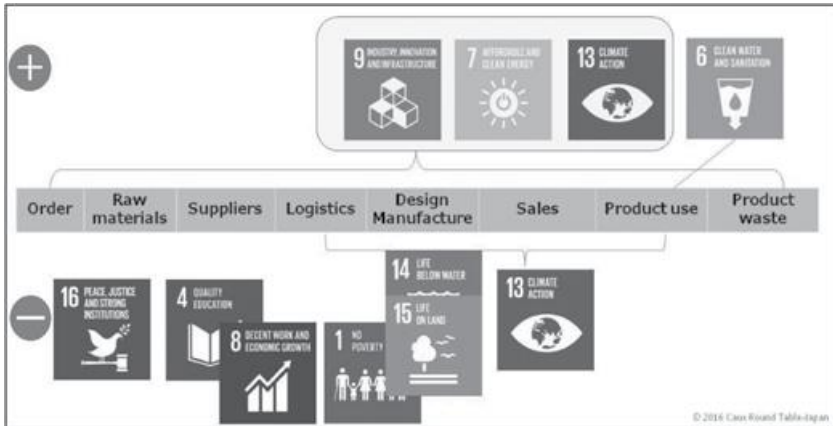
‘Doing good’ or being responsible may start at home by improving or reducing the footprint of a company’s natural and social environments where the corporation operates. To this end, BD may assist the company by critically analyzing its production processes and identifying which of its production steps are affecting which of the 17 SDGs either positively or negatively. This analysis needs to be performed through the lens of different stakeholder groups especially the most vulnerable who are affected either positively or negatively by a MNE’s activities.

Figure 10.3 provides a fictitious case of a manufacturing company and its internal supply and value chain activities. It depicts the company’s links with the SDG goals and targets and its actual impact on the environment and specific stakeholders. The company may proactively engage in consultation to find out opportunities and ways to co-design possible new operational solutions/processes and relational engagement with its stakeholders. Broad-based consultations inside and outside of the company may better enable the MNE to identify win–win or synergistic solutions. Such co-creation processes need to be identified and supported by the business diplomat as part of its strategic contribution to the business’s sustainability. Such internal communication plays a critical part of BD and is part of a company’s transformation linked to its commitment to achieve positive results for its triple bottom lines.

Business diplomats acting as the linking pin between external and internal business environments shaped by the 2030 Agenda and the internal corporate parameters and capabilities can foster new alliances with stakeholders inside and outside of the corporation and catalyze emergent transformation necessary for innovation.

Looking at the internal processes depicted in Figure 10.3, greening the energy source (SDG 7) could be one of the more obvious entry points to align corporate conduct with the SDGs. Where BD could be most helpful is to find innovations which improve working conditions and increase social protections (SDG 8) without increasing operational expenditures, while increasing employee security and sense of wellbeing.

To sum up, BD could and should be deployed to manage internal and external interfaces where business operations induce either positive or negative consequences. Where the impact is positive, learning needs to take place to replicate this experience to other locations where the company is active. Where the impact is negative, learning is also important to prevent similar events from taking place. BD is about proactively managing these interfaces and estab-



Source: Human Rights Due Diligence Workshop, Manufacturing Infrastructure, 2016, Caux Round Table, Tokyo.

*Figure 10.3 Impact assessment of the core business processes within the company on the 17 SDG goals*

lishing long-term working partnerships with different stakeholders in order to strengthen the health of a business ecosystem.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The prolonged pandemic of 2020 has caused devastating social and economic consequences. Governments and international society alike are now strategizing on how to build better futures so that the sustainability agenda could be accelerated and the resilience and sustainability of the global system be strengthened.

In this new context, the role of MNEs stands out due to their unique execution and innovation capacities. They are asked to take on a central function in the economic recovery and their corporate responsibilities in mitigating the negative social and environmental externalities.

Businesses contribute to wealth creation and generate jobs. They could also contribute to the necessary innovations and investments needed for post-COVID recovery and the SDGs implementation.

Business diplomacy can assist enterprises to better leverage their capacity to interact with both internal and external stakeholders and put their capability to the use of building coalitions and alliance with other stakeholders to steer the world toward a sustainable path. Partnerships among different actors could

ensure a more inclusive and representative process. Business diplomats are best suited for this multistakeholder challenge.

Significant financial incentives exist, for instance, by the potential value creation estimated at US\$ 12 trillion per annum through all forms of SDGs-related innovation, and another US\$ 4 trillion per annum through infrastructure investment for SDGs implementation. BD can help navigate the entry points and co-create new business opportunities by working with stakeholders and partners within the company and outside with the community.

On the enforcement side, an increasing number of international instruments are created to regulate business operations and to ensure ethical business conduct. Three most mature state-based instruments were discussed in depth. They are the OECD Guidelines for RBC, the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning MNEs and Social Policy and the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights. BD is meant to safeguard the interest of the MNEs and to respond to the needs of the community as well as the requirements for RBC as prescribed in these international instruments.

## NOTES

1. The Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism, <https://www.cauxroundtable.org/principles/> (last accessed March 24, 2022).
2. This list can be accessed at <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/ncps/> (last accessed March 24, 2022).

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