

The Role of the Private Land Sector in Supporting the 2030 Global Agenda

*- The link between achieving the SDGs
and creating sustainable businesses*

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SUMMARY

This paper describes the role of the private land-related sector and land professionals in general in achieving the SDGs. It explains why the involvement of the private sector is crucial not only for achieving the SDGs, but also for the companies themselves in order to create a sustainable and long-lasting business.

Additionally, the paper focuses on the importance of incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies as a driver for the involvement, and how private companies can meet the challenge of contributing to the 2030 global agenda.

In this regard, a number of reasons for private companies to engage in the development efforts are identified – arguably leading to a win-win situation for all parties involved.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The absence of secure tenure rights over land and other natural resources has a vital and direct impact on the possibility of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

By 2030 the SDGs seek to end among others hunger and poverty, and ensure access to food for all. This calls for a focus on securing the rights to own, use, and access land for those who still lack a protection of their legitimate tenure rights, and for actions from the private land-related sector.

Solving the global issues related to rights over land and the management of these is fundamental for the opportunity of achieving the SDGs by 2030, as land and the related aspects are key elements for at least eight of the defined goals.

Throughout the last decades, efforts have already made done to address land issues but without results sufficient enough to meet the SDGs. In order to meet the set goals by 2030, it is therefore time to accelerate the process.

In general, land professionals possess severe knowledge and experience that is crucial to include in the process of addressing the challenges related to land. This includes both the thorough understanding of the causes for the issues experienced and the means for solving them, and the ability to find sustainable solutions. For that reason in particular, land professionals have an obligation to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

In line with SDG no. 17 “Partnerships for the Goals” this emphasizes the necessity of establishing partnerships between key actors and involving the private sector, in order to accelerate the progress and reach the goals.

In order to motivate the private sector to take significant part in the developing work related to the SDGs, this paper argues that prioritization of CSR could be used as a decisive driver. This can potentially lead to the possibility of creating a sustainable long-lasting business - that is attractive to both current and new employees, and also enables new market opportunities. The SDGs depend greatly on the involvement of the private land-related sector, but the dependency is very much mutual for the private companies in order to ensure future business success. The private sector involvement in the developing work thus creates a win-win situation for both parties.


2. LAND IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Figure 1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals. © United Nations

Research undertaken by a range of key actors, including the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, OECD, civil society organizations, and academic institutions, shows that security of land tenure rights is closely connected with the realization of development objectives related to poverty alleviation, food security, environmental sustainability and enhancing women’s empowerment. (Mennen, 2015)

The abovementioned connection between land and sustainable development is recognized in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the 170 targets that include a thorough focus on land. At least eight goals are directly land-related or include land implications as listed in the following figure.

	<p>SDG no. 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere</p> <p>This core goal addresses the cohesion between poverty alleviation and access to the necessary means to strengthen the security of land tenure rights.</p> <p>Particularly Target 1.4 concerns the land aspect by stating: <i>“By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.”</i></p>
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In order to achieve the goal, it requires significant efforts to formalize land ownership by the poor and vulnerable. (Mennen, 2015)



SDG no. 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

The Zero Hunger-goal emphasizes the importance of small-scale agricultural producers in order to ensure a sufficient amount of food to the world's poor and vulnerable.

Target 2.3 states: *“By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.”*

By that, it indicates and thus recognizes that access to land and protected land tenure rights is interconnected to protection and increase of small-scale producers productivity.



SDG no. 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

The right for women to own, control, inherit land and other forms of property, as stated in SDG no. 5, is among the targets to achieve gender equality.

This is emphasized in Target 5.a: *“Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.”*

The right for women to own and use land has been identified as a primary driver for achieving income, health, and empowerment objectives. Secure land tenure rights for women has through field studies been identified as crucial in order to improve their access to credit and investment in agricultural improvements. In addition, joint titling has shown to be of highly importance to improve the likelihood of women participation in family food and agricultural decisions. (Mennen, 2015)



SDG no. 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Target 10.3 states: *“Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.”*

The target hence implicates the importance of reducing inequality regarding access to land and protection of tenure rights against discriminatory policies and practices.



SDG no. 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

Target 11.3 states: *“By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.”*

The statement is related to the continuing lack of protection and recognition of tenure rights for informal urban settlements (slums) in developing countries and the pertained rural conditions that drive mass, unplanned urban migration.



SDG no. 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Target 13.2: *“Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning”*

In order to achieve the goal of combatting climate changes and the related impacts, land management and planning are key elements, e.g. when addressing the challenges through spatial planning, or through land use plans and strategies with the purpose of reducing agricultural emission.



SDG no. 15: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

SDG no. 15 includes the two targets listed below:

Target 15.1: *“Ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services by 2020, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and dry lands, in line with obligations under international agreements, and take further action as needed by 2030.”*

Target 15.2: *“By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, and by 2030, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.”*

Both targets emphasize the importance of undertaking proper and sustainable management of forest land.



SDG no. 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

Target 16.3: *“Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.”*

This requires that national institutions are strengthened in order to effectively enforce land tenure rights and ensure that everyone, including the poor and vulnerable, have equal access to mechanisms for addressing violations of their tenure rights.

Figure 2. Overview of the SDGs related to land.

The SDGs and their thorough focus on land and the pertaining issues represent a monumental opportunity to advance and coordinate land rights on agendas across the developing world. Although the goals and targets related to land rights do not provide a comprehensive approach, they do create a strong incentive to address this vital, complex and delicate topic. (Mennen, 2015)

3. LAND PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR OBLIGATIONS TO THE 2030 GLOBAL AGENDA

As land and the related aspects obviously are crucial elements in order to achieve the SDGs, the progress of meeting the targets, as measured through the 240 indications, depends to a great extent on the engagement of land professionals and the contribution of their expertise.

It is commonly known that public land institutions often possess a limited amount of both financial and human resources. Hence, they do not possess sufficient resources to meet the requirement set by the SDGs on their own.

In addition, the SDGs, including those goals related to land aspects, represent global challenges that require the involvement of all relevant actors, including the private sector. Such involvement is often referred to with regards to investments. Private investments are without doubt essential for the achievement of the SDGs but it does not singlehandedly fulfill the needs required. Contributions from the private land sector should therefore in addition occur through valuable knowledge of best practices and new technologies, innovative solutions, capacity development, general advice on land management, etc.

Estimations show that about 70 % of the World's population still lack security of tenure rights (McLaren, 2015). This indicates the extent of the land related challenges the SDGs intent to address by 2030. Keeping in mind the enormous amount of efforts needed to solve the land related issues within the next 12 years, this calls for innovative solutions and approaches and new technologies that will enable the progress to accelerate rapidly.

Private land-related companies thus have an opportunity as well as an obligation to play an essential part in these development efforts.

4. ENGAGING THE PRIVATE LAND-RELATED SECTOR

By looking at this obligation from a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) perspective, private land-related companies should see their role as an opportunity for contributing to the 2030 Global Agenda and making a difference while concurrently improving their business's durability.

In line with SDG no. 17 "Partnerships for the Goals" this contribution should be done through the establishment of partnerships between key actors, either as a public-private partnership or as cooperation just between individual private companies. As stated in SDG no. 17 there is a need for stronger commitments to partnership and cooperation to realize the SDGs. Such effort requires coherent policies and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors. (SDKP, 2018)

4.1 CSR – a driver for development

CSR has been at the top of the agenda in many private companies over the past couple of decades. Policies on CSR provide important benefits to companies in areas such as risk management, cost savings, access to capital, customer relationships, HR management and the ability to innovate. (EC, 2018)

CSR also offers a set of values on which more cohesive societies can be built. The CSR concept is supported by the UN Global Compact, offering a range of principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption.

Traditionally, it is seen as an opportunity to improve internal behavior and taking part in the social efforts carried out locally. It should however be stressed that CSR and inclusion of policies and strategies related to this, can be a driver for the involvement of private companies in the development work.

Experiences from private companies show that incorporation of CSR policies and strategies with a focus on among others the SDGs result in an advantageous situation for the companies. Next to being the right thing to do, the engagement in providing a foundation for economic, social and environmental growth in developing countries results in a huge opportunity for internal growth of the companies. The incentives for private land-related companies to engage with the SDGs can potentially lead to new market opportunities. This arises from the opportunity of creating a sustainable business that is attractive for especially young professionals and also leads to increased possibilities of retaining existing employees. (DD, 2017)

Most companies need to focus on the future and on how they can maintain or expand current markets, and thus create a sustainable business. In this regard, a focus on core values, such as acting responsible both internally and externally, is needed.



CSR – what is it?

Corporate Social Responsibility is a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders.

CSR is generally understood as being the way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives, while at the same time addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders. (UNIDO, 2018)

Key CSR issues include:

Corporate accountability, sustainability, and responsibility, environmental management, labor standards and working conditions, human rights, good governance, and anti-corruption measures.

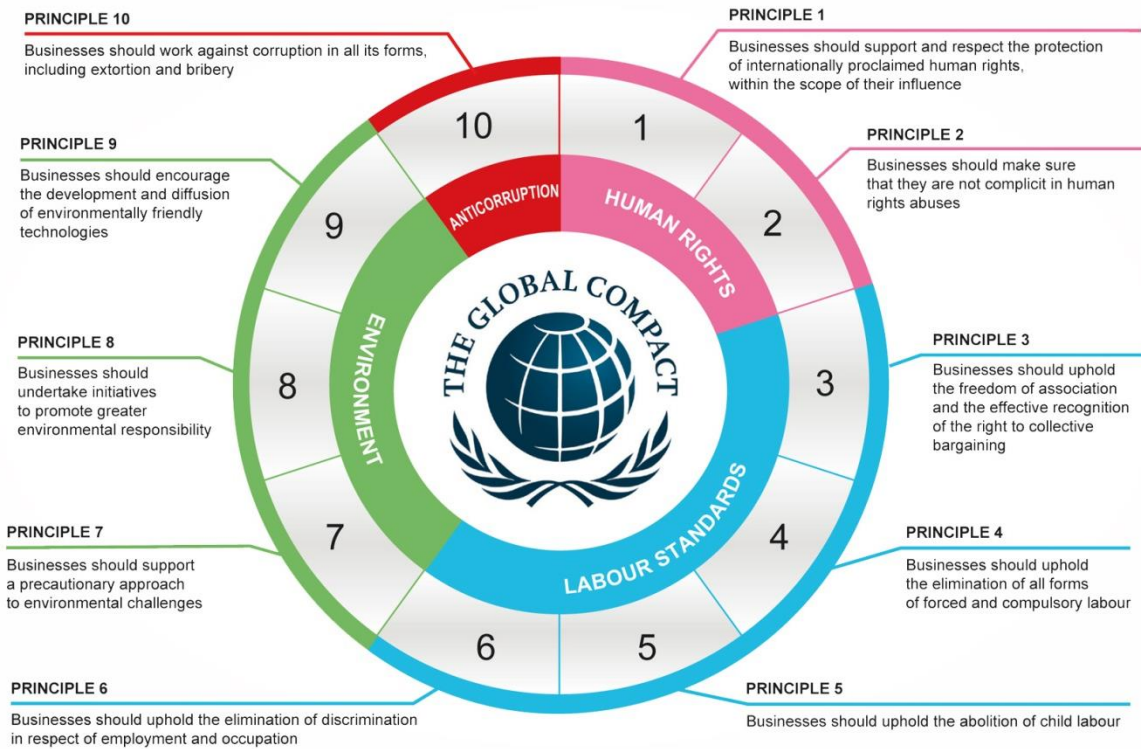


Figure 3. The ten UN Global Compact principles. © UNGC

This is further stressed by the fact the young professionals nowadays have a large focus on to what extent companies take responsibility for their own behavior - internally and externally, and the existence of CSR policies is often highly prioritized. The right values matter enormously for young professionals. It is no longer “just” enough to have a great and professionally challenging working environment and providing interesting developing opportunities for the employees. The current generation of young professionals also demands that companies take responsibility for their actions, in order to find them attractive as employers. In other words, especially young employees want to be proud of their workplace and make a difference.

Studies show that by connecting social impact activities with talent development impact is identifies within the following four aspects:

1. Recruitment

Young professionals are attracted by companies that enable them to pursue professional, personal, and social goals simultaneously. (Eggers et.al., 2015). Increasingly, young professionals across the world witness fundamental problems undermining our societies and are not interested in working for companies that can't see beyond business as usual, or that refuse to take responsibility by participating in finding the solutions. (Eggers et.al., 2015).

Research indicates that 70 % of young professionals find a company appealing based on its commitment to the local community, and that opportunities for career development often weight higher than the salary. (McConnell HRC, 2014)

2. Engagement and Retention

A focus on social impact activities within a company improves the workforce engagement generally, but especially among young professionals. This will potentially lead to a higher level of retention of young employees. (Eggers et.al., 2015).

3. Skills and Leadership Development

Social initiatives furthermore provide an opportunity for skill-building and leadership development. It contributes to achieving a better understanding of the bigger picture, improve out-of-box thinking, solve complex societal challenges, and eventually make business issues easier to solve. Such initiatives thus initiate innovation by placing employees in a new context, allowing them to learn new skills while serving a greater cause. (Eggers et.al., 2015).

4. Sustainable impact

Moreover, a focus on CSR is likely to create long-term business partnerships among private companies, and between private companies and sector organizations. (Eggers et.al., 2015).

Besides talent development, incorporation of CSR strategies and dedication to contribute to society improvement arguably leads to a boost in employee engagement, potentially leading to an improved effectivity and thus financial output. In addition it affects the likability of attracting and retaining engaged, responsible, and valuable employees in general. (DD, 2017)

The focus on CSR should however not be limited to the local society but rather to a bigger perspective on how the company can contribute to CSR on a higher scale such as the SDGs. The findings in this paper show that incorporation of CSR strategies has a potential to be a tool for combining contribution to development initiatives and at the same time enable companies to differentiate in the market ... Not only in relation to geographical markets and customers, but more importantly as a differentiator to attract new employees.

4.2 CREATING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS THROUGH CSR AND THE SDGs – A CASE FROM DENMARK

One of the main challenges for the Danish private land-related companies the last years, since the financial crisis in 2008-13 has been to attract new and highly qualified employees within a limited market. This emphasizes the need for the companies to differentiate from their competitors.

In order to ensure such differentiation, companies need to enlarge the focus on creating an attractive work environment and accommodate current and future employees' requests. As highlighted by the studies referred to in this paper, employees have an increasing focus on to what extend their employer is taking on the social responsibilities expected by them.

In realization of the changing times and focus and as a response to the required contribution to the SDGs by the private sector, the largest land surveying company in Denmark, LE34, has incorporated a CSR policy with a focus on the SDGs into the company strategy.

With 350 employees, a history that goes back 200 years, and delivery of core services within surveying, land registration, land management and administration, and spatial planning, LE34 is one of those land companies that has an obligation to contribute with key knowledge to the achievement of the SDGs. The company has, in addition, long lasting experience on working with governments and local authorities on securing land tenure rights and participating in maintaining and improving the national cadastre.

In addition to striving for being sustainable on the longer term and create value, the company started a strategic process in 2015 with the purpose of defining the company focus for the next years. Keeping in mind that shareholder value is not only about profit but maybe more importantly about branding, solutions, innovation and acting responsible internally and externally, CSR quickly became a central element in the strategic process.

The outcome of the efforts was a “strategic wheel” consisting of 10 strategic elements - elements that will enable the company to deliver on the long term vision: to maintain market positions, to be acknowledged as a market leading and ambitious partner and to create value for the customers through innovative solutions and expert advice.

One of the main obstacles identified during the process is to attract new highly skilled employees in an extremely competitive market. As employees are the backbone of the company they are also the foundation of the future success. Their professionalism, motivation, engagement, and ambitions are essential in order to create and maintain an attractive and sustainable long-lasting business.

As a means to retain an innovative, inspiring, and great work environment and keep and attract employees, CSR has been selected as one of the 10 strategic elements in the “strategic wheel”. It is thus on the top of the company agenda prospectively and has become a part of the company identity. A policy on CSR has been developed and incorporated, and is still in the process of being further developed.

One of the elements in the CSR policy is to increase the company's international efforts related to the SDGs. Historically, the company has been working internationally on a lower scale, primarily through the delivery of specific cadastral services to projects in Eastern European Countries. Whereas the new CSR policy has a global scope with the objective of contributing to the work concerning land issues related to especially SDG no. 1, 2 and 16.

The intention is to take on the required responsibility and contributing to achieving the SDGs through provision of key knowledge and consultants with a high level of experience within a broad range of land related services. To do this properly, the company focusses on carrying out the involvement through partnerships with other private companies that can add additional related key-knowledge and services.

The process of implementing the CSR policy and establishing international partnerships is still in the preliminary phase, but is already showing significant signs of the expected outcomes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Solving the global issues related to managing tenure rights to land and the use of land is fundamental for the opportunity of achieving the SDGs by 2030. This depends to a large extent on the involvement of the private sector.

As presented in this paper, a focus on CSR and contribution to the SDGs can enable private land-related companies to differentiate in the market, recruit and retain skilled employees, and, in the longer term, create a sustainable business. This can, in turn, be the motivation for private companies to engage in the matter, and potentially lead to a win-win situation for all parties involved.

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