

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) actors
How Swiss NGOs are influencing the sustainability agenda

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ABSTRACT

Although there is growing recognition that NGOs play a crucial role in driving the CSR agenda of business and in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, academic literature on how NGOs impact the formulation and implementation of CSR or corporate codes remains limited. As Switzerland is home to a high number of both national and international NGOs, the Swiss NGO landscape is particularly interesting for researching the role of the not-for-profit sector in furthering sustainable development. More precisely, the research examines how Swiss NGOs perceive their roles in influencing the CSR or sustainability agendas of corporations and what kinds of influence strategies they apply within this attempt. Furthermore, possible challenges that can pose threats to the legitimacy of NGOs or that can occur during the process of impacting the CSR of firms are depicted.

Assuming that NGOs can influence corporate decision-making regarding CSR via various influence strategies, and that the definition of NGOs as secondary stakeholders is no longer adequate, this study applies a qualitative approach through conducting fourteen in-depth expert interviews with fourteen professionals from NGOs, representing Swiss-based NGOs with both social and environmental sustainability missions.

The research contributes to a growing body of scholarship that underlines the importance of NGOs as crucial actors in influencing managerial decision making (Frooman & Murrell, 2005; Yaziji & Doh, 2009; Zietsma & Winn, 2008) by demonstrating, firstly, the wide set of strategies that NGOs employ to influence the CSR agenda of firms. Moreover, it can be said that attitudes toward CSR do affect how NGOs perceive their roles in influencing the CSR agenda of corporations, as they can predict the selection of certain influence strategies. More specifically, coercive strategies such as the implementation of manifestations or the execution of a social media campaign against irresponsible corporations are mainly used by NGOs who possess a critical attitude towards CSR, while collaborative strategies such as cross-sector partnerships or discussion round tables are mainly applied by NGOs who are less critical of CSR. Furthermore, differences between the two different camps of NGOs (critical vs. in favor of CSR) can be detected in the usage of pathway strategies or, in other words, the inclusion of allies such as the government or ordinary citizens. Overall, the results show that both forms of strategies can impact the sustainability agendas of businesses.

Although Swiss NGOs prove to be vital actors in driving sustainability agendas, it has to be noted that contextual constraints as well as factors referring to the organizational structure of a firm can impede the ability of NGOs to effectively impact CSR. In addition to these challenges,

NGOs who apply collaborative strategies face the risks of being co-opted by the business sector. Being aware of such challenges and knowing how to manage potential risks, allows NGOs to maintain legitimacy.

Last but not least, limitations of the study and implications for future research are highlighted.

Key words: Business, Coercive strategies, Collaborative strategies, Constraints, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Cross-sector alliances, CSR actors, CSR attitudes, Non-government organizations (NGOs), NGO impact, Sustainability agenda

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Preface

We do not have to win at the expense of others to be successful

– Paul Polman, CEO Unilever

This statement from Paul Polman illustrates the need for businesses to work in a social responsible manner, especially with regards to the growing complexity of global challenges. It is public figures like Paul Polman that inspired me to write my thesis about the role of NGOs as CSR actors, as the not-for-profit sector can be seen as a vital driver of promoting ethical and sustainable business practices.

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1. Introduction & Research Questions

Back in 1999, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed The Global Compact at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, emphatically calling upon corporations to contribute to a more sustainable development. The growing interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), combined with the raise of social and environmental reporting at the turn of the new century, indicates the changed role of corporations in today's society (Rodgers, 2000). According to a global CSR study, conducted by *Cone Communications* in 2015, 95% of global consumers expect companies to act in a social responsible manner instead of prioritizing financial goals. Thus, corporations are looking for new ways of legitimizing their operations with regards to a sustainable society, specifically through CSR.

Paralleling business interest in sustainable development is the growing influence and involvement of non-government organizations (NGOs) in mainstreaming the CSR agenda. NGOs are generally defined as “private, not-for-profit organizations that aim to serve particular societal interests by focusing advocacy and/ or operational efforts on social, political and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection and human rights” (Teegen, Doh & Vachani, 2004, p. 466). There seems to be a clear explanation for NGOs' strong interest in the activities of the business sector and why NGOs are essential actors in fostering the CSR of companies. First of all, the Global Compact and the 2030 Sustainability Agenda encourage corporations to interact with the United Nations and with civil society groups (e.g., NGOs), in order to align their business practices with the principles of sustainable development. Therefore, NGOs are perceived as crucial actors within the CSR context as they have “the ability to meaningfully shape the contemporary discursive landscape within which corporations operate” (Dempsey, 2011, p. 446). Secondly, NGOs' growing interest in the private sector can be traced back to their “perception that political and economic power has shifted away from governments and toward corporations, in particular MNCs” (Winston, 2002, p. 72). The NGO community is convinced that corporations are extending their power over the economic, cultural and political sphere while not being held accountable enough for any social or environmental damages (Winston, 2002). This applies particularly for countries of the global South, where multinationals often have more economic control over governments. Thirdly, NGOs step in as providers of basic services in situations where the regulatory system (e.g., state) and the market (e.g., firms) have failed to do so (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). For instance, service NGOs such as Doctor without Borders provide medical treatment, food and shelter to their beneficiaries, while advocacy NGOs (e.g. Greenpeace), in contrast, apply pressure to market actors and regulators to get them to address and solve the issues by themselves.

Despite the fact that NGOs are increasingly being perceived as self-confident actors who play a crucial role as drivers of CSR (Arenas et al., 2009), the process through which NGOs impact the formulation and implementation of corporate codes is understudied (Doh & Guay, 2004). Not only do NGOs challenge corporate practices but they also create joint efforts with corporations to tackle global challenges, leading scholars (e.g., Dempsey, 2011) to argue that more research should focus on how NGOs use strategies in order to “address contemporary complexities of corporate globalization” (p. 462). As Skouloudis, Evangelinos and Malesios (2015) show, established stakeholder dialogues between corporations and NGOs lead to the “consolidation of a meaningful CSR strategy” (p. 108). Thus, the aim of this thesis is to shed light on this less researched issue by assessing how NGOs perceive their role in influencing a firm’s CSR activities and how they make use of different influence strategies within this process.

Guided by the fact that NGOs are assumed, at least in principle, to have an important role when it comes to holding corporations accountable and influencing a company’s CSR or sustainability agenda, this research examines the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Swiss NGOs perceive their role(s) in influencing CSR or sustainability agendas?

RQ2: What strategies of influence do NGOs use in their roles as CSR actors?

RQ3: What challenges do they encounter in the process?

1.1 Societal & Academic Relevance

As previously mentioned, NGOs demonstrate increasing sophistication in campaigns to challenge corporate practices and affect the perceived legitimacy of corporate activities. As an example, multinational pharmacy corporations have been under scrutiny of broad-based NGOs for price manipulation or side effects of some drugs (Spar & La Mure, 2003). This led to a growing NGO movement against traditional pricing and patent policies, calling for more access for poor people to life-saving medicine. When in 1996 the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis was formed, Daniel Vasella took over the CEO role and pushed forward the field of genomics, which was still in its infancy. Simultaneously, NGOs came together in the United States and Europe, demonstrating against the introduction of genetically modified products. Consequently, Novartis received a lot of criticism for its investments in the field of genomics. As Novartis could not ignore such criticisms, the company put more emphasis on a CSR agenda by establishing a code of conduct in 1999 and signing the Global Compact in 2000. Novartis recognized the benefits of compliance and reputation at an early stage.

As the Novartis example shows, NGOs can effectively influence the CSR and/or sustainability agendas of businesses. In general, NGOs have played an essential role as “sophisticated communicators” or CSR actors in altering Milton Friedman’s maxim of “the business of business is business” into “the business of business is everyone’s business” (Wootliff & Deri, 2001, p. 162). Furthermore, the rise of NGOs as key players within the CSR context is fuelled by recent developments such as the Sustainability Agenda 2030, stressing the need for cross-sector alliances (United Nations, 2015).

With this background, the thesis focuses specifically on Swiss NGOs because they are well established in Swiss society and have proven to impact the CSR or sustainability agenda of both Swiss businesses and multinational corporations in various ways (Mugglin, 2016). The Swiss transnational firm Nestlé has been under the scrutiny of NGOs for some time now because of, inter alia, human rights violations and misleading marketing (e.g., praising infant formula as essential for healthy childhood) (Newton, 1999). It can be said that NGOs have significantly influenced the CSR or sustainability agenda of Nestlé, as the transnational company is now more committed than ever to contributing to the elimination of malpractices within their supply chains (Mugglin, 2016), e.g., by launching Cocoa Plan back in 2009 and joining the Fair Labor Association in 2010 in order to improve workers’ lives worldwide. Hence, Swiss NGOs are particularly suited for the analysis of how they perceive their role(s) in influencing the CSR or sustainability agendas of corporations.

Although NGOs can influence the CSR agendas of firms and therefore further sustainable development, the not-for-profit sector is confronted with growing criticism regarding its own activities (e.g., Do NGOs achieve long-term impact? Is there a risk that NGOs are selling out their identity for corporate funding? etc.) (Baur & Schmitz, 2012). Hence, this thesis also examines possible challenges that can occur when trying to impact the CSR agenda of businesses. As a result, the findings of the empirical research allow NGOs to gain a deeper understanding of potential pitfalls and possible risk management strategies.

The thesis is structured into four chapters in order to elicit whether Swiss NGOs perceive themselves as influential actors in fostering the CSR or sustainability agenda of businesses. Based on the research questions, this thesis firstly assesses the role of NGOs as influential CSR actors and shows previous impacts of NGOs on corporations’ CSR or sustainability agendas. As acknowledged stakeholders of firms, NGOs can make use of a wide range of strategies to influence a corporation’s CSR agenda, and thus their strategic business outline. Hence, the second section provides an overview of both collaborative and less collaborative strategies in influencing the CSR or sustainability agenda of corporations. Thirdly, several challenges that can occur during the process of influencing the CSR or sustainability agenda of firms are depicted,

including potential pitfalls regarding maintenance of mission autonomy (Parker, 2003) and dangers related to co-optation (Baur & Schmitz, 2012). As such, NGOs may be perceived as selling out their core identity when accepting funding from businesses during a cross-sector alliance.

Following the overview of relevant literature, the applied methodological approach of semi-structured in-depth expert interviews in obtaining knowledge about the meaning-making processes of Swiss NGO professionals will be described. Moreover, detailed information about the interviewed sample (participant profile), the interview guide as a research instrument and the usage of inductive thematic analysis will be provided. In a next step, the results of the conducted semi-structured interviews will be presented and interpreted in relation to the research questions. Lastly, the conclusion offers an overall discussion of the findings and a more nuanced understanding of diverse influence strategies, offering invaluable practical insights for both the not-for-profit as well as for the profit sector.

2. Literature Review

This section gives an overview of existing academic work, including relevant theoretical frameworks. Given the three research questions, this review is divided into three main parts: Firstly, the emergence of NGOs as CSR actors is discussed, followed by an outline of existing NGO influence strategies, entailing coercive as well as collaborative strategies. Lastly, challenges for NGOs to effectively influence the private sector are depicted.

Within the framework of this thesis, the terms CSR and sustainable development will be treated as equivalents, even though both concepts have established their place in academic debate separately (Kourula & Laasonen, 2010). “CSR” and/or “sustainable development” refer to “situations where the firm goes beyond compliance and engages in actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 118). This definition highlights two key points: First, CSR is legally non-binding and it can be implemented on a voluntary basis; second, by engaging in CSR, the firm is not primarily concerned with profit maximization, although CSR could deliver competitive advantage.

2.1. From secondary to primary stakeholders? Emergence of NGOs as CSR actors

Thijssens, Bollen, and Hassink (2015) provide evidence that secondary stakeholders, such as NGOs or community groups, increasingly influence managerial decision-making on CSR. Although Freeman (1984) defined a “stakeholder” as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s purpose” (p. 53), firms have traditionally paid attention to primary stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, customers, employees etc.) that are engaged in “formal contractual relationships” with organizations (Thijssens et al., 2015). By contrast, secondary stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, media, etc.) are defined as those who can influence or can be affected by the corporation, without engaging in contractual relationships. Although secondary stakeholders have the ability to mobilize public opinion against a company, the stakeholder framework does not acknowledge them as essential for a firm’s survival (Clarkson, 1995). However, recent research has shown (Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Newton, 2002) that NGOs can influence business and decision-making regarding CSR via lobbying, boycotts, the mobilization of public opinion, etc. Consequently, the definition of NGOs as secondary stakeholders seems no longer justified, especially when considering how companies engage with NGOs in order to align with their demands or benefit from their knowledge (Holzer, 2008).

Corporations recognize that being socially responsible yields competitive advantages and reputational benefits (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). As the public is in favor of CSR, NGOs can influence the public perception of businesses by the detection of corporate malpractices or cases of “greenwashing”, that is, making a false claim about the environmental benefit of a product or service. This gives NGOs leverage as they can influence public perception. Following the Deepwater Horizon Catastrophe in 2010, the oil company BP was criticized for its lack of corporate environmental responsibility and for greenwashing its efforts with the “beyond petroleum”-campaign (Matejek & Gössling, 2014). As a result, BP was faced with a reputational, financial and operational crisis. In summary, the case shows that the greater value a corporation places on its sustainability efforts, the more susceptible its brand will be to activist pressures.

On the other hand, there is also recognition of the value that can come from a shared approach, namely NGOs and corporations working together. Even the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines cross-sector partnerships as a key point in finding joint solutions to global sustainability issues (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, direct interactions between NGOs and corporations are a result of the declining involvement of the public sector, e.g., governments, in the shaping of CSR (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Therefore, the definition and shaping of CSR is often the task of both, private sector and NGOs (De Bakker, 2012). Moreover, the collaboration between NGOs and business can yield in mutual benefits and drive each other’s success (Dahan, Doh, Oetzel & Yaziji, 2010). From a corporate perspective, the strengths that NGOs can bring to partnerships are legitimacy, awareness of social forces (e.g., NGOs as early warning systems), extensive networks (e.g., access to information), and technical expertise (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Partnerships allow firms, inter alia, to foresee shifts in demand (e.g., restructure business plan based on new trends) and increase competitiveness. Hence, it is in the interest of the private sector to establish alliances with NGOs and to profit from their competencies regarding CSR (e.g., Jonker & Nijhof, 2006). From an NGO perspective, collaboration with business can result in financial, human resource and reputational benefits (Yaziji & Doh, 2009).

Consequently, NGOs view corporations as necessary partners to ensure greater social value (Austin, 2000). NGOs are increasingly involved in the definition and shaping of CSR, establishing collaborations with firms “to promote social and environmental actions, provide technical assistance, elaborate commonly agreed certification schemes, promote and design CSR” (Arenas, Lozano & Albareda, 2009, p. 176). It is central to distinguish between different NGO types, because not all NGOs (e.g. service, advocacy, hybrid) act out of the same concerns and/or approach their relationship with corporations in the same way (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). For example, advocacy NGOs aim to shape the social, political or economic arena, therefore, they

can act as monitors, as researchers, or as promoters of CSR. Service NGOs, in contrast, fulfill basic needs of their beneficiaries in situations where governments have failed to do so. These roles are not mutually exclusive and they can be pursued at the same time.

Even while acknowledging that advocacy NGOs can shape the CSR agenda of corporations, it is important to recognize contextual differences. While in Western societies NGO pressure is perceived to be a primary driver for CSR, the impact on CSR in other institutional settings is still relatively low. In Spain, for instance, NGOs are self-confident actors related to CSR and perceive themselves as “agents of social transformation” (Arenas et al., 2009). Nevertheless, their impact on CSR is being hampered by concerns related to trust and the perceived legitimacy of NGO tactics and methods. Moreover, depending on the institutional context, NGOs are trying to lay the groundwork for different aspects or sub-topics (e.g., environmental issues, human rights, employee rights etc.) of CSR. As shown by Skouloudis et al. (2015), the protection of human rights is the most salient topic for Greek NGOs. This can be traced back to the specific business context, as firms in Greece do not portray sufficiently on their CSR efforts. This gives rise to Greek NGOs’ response, by promoting and developing codes of conduct that take into account human rights.

As outlined above, different institutional settings have decisive influence on perceptions of NGOs as relevant and efficient drivers for CSR. NGO influence on CSR practice also depends on how managers/corporate executives perceive them and whether managers take their concerns into account. According to the theory of stakeholder identification, stakeholder salience is given when a high number of the following features can be attributed to a stakeholder (e.g., NGO): power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). A stakeholder who consists of all three attributes can be defined as a “definitive stakeholder” (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 878).

Greenpeace, for instance, made itself a definitive stakeholder by launching the Detox campaign against various clothing manufacturers, such as Zara (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). The goal of this campaign was to convince apparel manufacturers to remove dangerous chemicals from their supply chains or, in other words, to detox. When Greenpeace decided in November 2012 to specifically target Zara, the NGO increased its power with the help of different communication channels (e.g., social media) and the acquisition of followers. Within one week, the social media pages like Facebook, Twitter and Weibo managed to attract over seven million people who were following the Zara detox campaign. Legitimacy was established through images, showing people who were suffering from the hazardous chemicals. Lastly, Greenpeace increased the urgency of the issue by committing themselves to the cause, and by

highlighting their efforts. Hence, managers/corporate executives of various clothing brands (e.g., Nike, Adidas, Puma, H&M etc.) acknowledged Greenpeace as a salient stakeholder.

As the Zara Detox case illustrates, the contemporary CSR movement aims to persuade corporations to adopt voluntary codes of conduct and implement business practices with respect to human rights and the environment. The development of voluntary codes, such the Global Compact (Ruggie, 2011) and the Forest Stewardship Council (Domask, 2003), highlight NGOs' ability to impose checks on business activities. At the same time, NGOs have realized that voluntary codes are sometimes just not enough to ensure sustainable business practices (e.g., BP Greenwashing scandal). The voluntary character of the Global Compact, for instance, generated suspicion and sharp criticism by many NGOs (Ruggie, 2011). For all these reasons, a coalition of Swiss NGOs launched only recently the national "Responsible Business Initiative", aimed at introducing a binding framework to protect human rights and the environment worldwide (Swiss Coalition for Corporate Justice, n.d.).

As voluntary codes often lack a coercive force and legal mechanisms, the impact of such codes on the CSR agenda can be sometimes limited. Hence, NGOs have developed a wide range of strategies to influence a firm's CSR or sustainability agenda. The next chapter sheds light on existing influence strategies.

2.2. NGOs' influence strategies towards corporations

In order to examine what kind of tactics NGOs use to influence a corporation's sustainability agenda, a closer look at the dependence relationships between the stakeholders and firms is needed. In his article *Stakeholder Influence Strategies*, Frooman (1999) developed a framework to explain and predict how stakeholders try to influence the corporation's decision making. As he pointed out, in stakeholder research much research has already been done on characterizing stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Thijssens et al., 2015), leaving influence strategies applied by stakeholders largely unconsidered. For this reason, he aimed "to build a model of stakeholder influence strategies that will address this missing part of stakeholder theory and ultimately enable managers to better understand and manage stakeholder behavior" (Frooman 1999, p. 191). Building on these ideas, this framework applies to NGOs as one specific group of stakeholders. The type of influence strategy stakeholders, i.e. NGOs, employ, depends on the type of resource relationship the stakeholders have with a firm (Frooman, 1999). Resources on which both actors can depend on are of financial, informational, or physical nature (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The degree of resource relationships can be defined in terms of who relies on whom (Frooman & Murrell, 2005). This implies that power is a central characteristic of resource

relationships, i.e., the one organization supplying the resource has some leverage, and consequently power over the one receiving the resource.

A combination of these dependencies or power relations results in four types of resource relationships that stakeholders and corporations can be in: stakeholder (NGO) power, firm power, high interdependence, and low interdependence (Frooman, 1999). Based on this initial categorization, Frooman and Murrell (2005) provided a refined set of propositions about the stakeholders' strategic choices based on the dependency relations between firms and stakeholders. But first, it is important to distinguish between two types of stakeholder influence strategies, namely manipulation and pathway strategies. Manipulation strategies can be divided into coercive and compromise strategies. While coercive strategies threaten to reduce a benefit or increase a cost to a firm (negative nature), compromise strategies result in the increase in benefit or reduction in cost. Regarding the pathway strategy, the stakeholder chooses to do the manipulation directly or indirectly through an ally (e.g., consumers, government, political party). Based on these categorizations, the following assumptions regarding NGO influence on firms can be made, depending on the defined resource relationships:

Table 2.2. Typology of Relationships and Strategies

		Is the stakeholder dependent on the firm?	
		Yes	No
Is the firm dependent on the stakeholder?	Yes	Direct compromise (high interdependence)	Direct coercion (stakeholder power)
	No	Indirect compromise (firm power)	Indirect coercion (low interdependence)

Note. Based on Frooman (1999); extended by Frooman & Murrell (2005)

These influence strategies have been assessed in various contexts, such as within the forest industry's practice of clear-cutting rain forests in British Columbia, Canada (Zietsma & Winn, 2008). Furthermore, the examination of the framework provides evidence that influence chains are often multilinked; for example, the non-profit environmental group Earth Island Institute convinced consumers (ally) to protest the killing of dolphins by boycotting the largest U.S. tuna canner StarKist. As a consequence, the company put pressure on tuna fishermen to change their fishing methods (Hendry, 2005).

As stated above, influence strategies depend on the resource relation between the NGO and the firm. In situations where marginalized local communities have no opportunity to speak up against the operating practices of a corporate subsidiary, they engage in the strategy of

making linkages to other groups, e.g. transnational advocacy networks (TANs) (McAteer & Pulver, 2009). The TAN steps in and the subsidiary's parent firm becomes the target of the TAN. This pattern of influence can be described as the (corporate) boomerang model. Initially, the boomerang model was introduced by Keck and Sikkink (1998) to assess how isolated groups can assert their rights in a state through the creation of external linkages to TANs. Keck and Sikkink (1998) formulated four strategies from which TANs can choose in order to apply pressure on governments.

Given that the strategies used by TANs are communicative in nature, the tactics can be applied on the business context as well (Dempsey, 2011; McAteer & Pulver, 2009). NGOs may utilize four different tactics to apply pressure on their targets (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). The first tactic, engaging in (1) information politics, implies that NGOs have the competence to quickly generate and distribute credible information. It is widely known that NGOs use information to expose harmful corporate practices and to get the public's attention. Moreover, NGOs implement (2) symbolic tactics to frame issues "by identifying and providing convincing explanations for powerful symbolic events, which in turn become catalysts for the growth of networks" (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 22). For instance, labor-oriented NGOs publish campaigns showing children who work in factories (Dempsey, 2011). This kind of campaign typically generates publicity and comes with a reputational risk for firms who work with the alleged factories (Knight & Greenberg, 2002). Therefore, corporations are especially susceptible to this form of strategy. Next, NGOs exert (3) leverage politics by partnering up with other, more powerful institutions or with celebrities (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). For McAteer and Pulver (2009), leverage politics present the most direct form of "TAN-influence". NGOs can make use of corporations' annual reports or toxic release registries to exert leverage on firms. The last strategy, (4) accountability politics, relates to tactics aimed at holding firms accountable to their previous defined corporate policies and positions on CSR (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

Now that we live in a digital world where technology enables to spread information more rapidly than ever before, the traditional strategies and tactics described above have been intensified. As a challenger, the NGO or stakeholder identifies corporate irresponsibility (e.g., firm does not abide by the defined policies on CSR) and targets the firm for its irresponsible behavior. Saliency is a crucial factor here, since managers can easily ignore the challenge, if a stakeholder lacks saliency (Mitchell et al., 1997). In the contemporary communication landscape, social media are being seen as a turning point for NGO influence on CSR.

2.2.1. NGOs' usage of social media

Social Media can make the difference by increasing the salience of stakeholders and the visibility of the challenged behavior (firm behavior). Based on these assumptions, Coombs and Holladay (2015) created the Integrated Framework for Stakeholder Challenges that contains three elements of stakeholder-initiated challenge: the challenger, the challenge, and the challenged corporation. Once the NGO has identified a corporate irresponsibility, the organization makes use of social media to raise awareness about the actual challenge or concern. The power to influence corporations can be enhanced through the skillful use of various communication channels (e.g., social media, traditional media etc.), or the hiring of communication consultants. The urgency or legitimacy of the challenge is achieved by delivering actual evidence that supports the NGOs' claims. Finally, the challenged corporation, or the target of the challenge, has to decide how best to respond to the accusations, while keeping in mind its relative power over the challenger's power, and its prior CSR reputation. Chances are high that corporations with prior CSR efforts generate more expectations than organizations with no or little background in CSR. This framework is especially useful to outline the dynamics of NGO-led CSR challenges (influence on CSR), and contains information about possible challenges that can arise during this process, especially for the challenger (e.g., not enough visibility or salience, credibility issues etc.).

In recent years, social media has particularly been used to target oil firms such as BP or Shell. Research has proven that NGOs' use of social media tactics has had a strong impact on (oil) companies' CSR outlook (Hendry, 2005; McQueen, 2015). In the case of the Greenpeace Let's Go! Arctic campaign, the NGO opposed Shell's Arctic oil-drilling plans with the use of fake websites, social media and a documentary. Davis, Glantz and Novak (2015) detected three means by which Greenpeace worked to delegitimize Shell: humor, irony and corporate speak. In particular, an "Ad Generator" on the website allowed ordinary citizens to create parodies of Shell's real advertisements that could be shared via any social media platform. The Arctic Ready "memes" were full of irony, corporate speak (e.g., SOME SEE A FROZEN WASTELAND, WE SEE AN OCEAN OF POSSIBILITY. LET'S GO.) and humorous content (e.g., ONCE UPON A TIME, OUR HOME WAS CLEAN AND BEAUTIFUL. THEN SHELL SAID LET'S GO.). In the end, the campaign stopped Shell from continuing their 2013 drilling plans. Despite ethical questions, this example illustrates the effectiveness of social media campaigns and the usage of memes, especially through the inclusion of ordinary citizens. As pointed out by Hill (2012), sometimes it is "more effective to ram Shell online than it is to send Greenpeace boats out to protest or to handcuff themselves to drilling equipment in the snow".

As the Greenpeace campaign shows, “symbolic damages strategies” are applied to withhold the firm from its good reputation (Van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2010). Although this form of strategy proves to be successful, previous research revealed that cross-sector alliances, and hence, collaborative strategies are at least as effective as coercive strategies when it comes to influencing a corporation’s sustainability agenda (Frooman & Murrell, 2005; Skouloudis et al., 2015). Within the scope of this thesis, cross-sector alliances shall be defined as “partnerships between for-profit organizations and not-for-profit organizations such as local and international NGOs” (McAteer & Pulver, 2009, p. 214).

2.2.2. Collaboration instead of combat: Why and how?

Partnerships with corporate partners are one of the tactics used and are becoming increasingly important instruments for solving socioeconomic issues (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Hence, NGOs and corporations act as institutional entrepreneurs “to reinvent the firm and its position in society” (De Bakker, 2012, p. 214). During this process, NGOs and firms define and develop new practices and standards that reflect responsible firm behavior. According to Ählström and Sjöström (2005), NGOs that pursue a partnership strategy can be described as “preservers”. Preservers usually collaborate and partner with firms through traditional and non-coercive means.

It is well known that many corporations now enter partnerships with environmental NGOs and provide them with financial support (Stafford, Polonsky & Hartman, 2000). Rondinelli and London (2003) find that companies, their stakeholders and NGOs are increasingly concerned with corporate environmental responsibility. They identify three different forms of strategic alliances between corporations and environmental NGOs to effectively establish a platform for knowledge and expertise sharing, namely (1) arm’s-length relationships, (2) moderately intensive interactive collaborations and (3) intensive environmental management alliances. The first type refers to employee engagement in environmental activities, corporate (financial) contributions and the exchange of marketing knowledge. The second type of alliance marks a more intense relationship, e.g., certification schemes for corporate business activities or corporate engagement in specific NGO projects. At this stage, NGOs have a moderate impact on the CSR agenda of a corporation. In 1996, for instance, Unilever and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) established the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a certification program that ensures environmental friendly fishing (Fowler & Heap, 2000). Within the last type of alliance, NGOs are partnering up with corporations to tackle internal environmental management issues and to prevent environmental damage (e.g., pollution, overfishing etc.) before it happens.

Hence, NGOs are working more closely with companies to have a direct impact on their products and processes, which ultimately shapes their CSR or sustainability agenda. The selection of the right type of partnership depends on several strategic criteria (see 2.3).

Partnership strategies can have a big impact on a firm's CSR agenda (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007). This is evidenced by the fact that many firms have responded by endorsements of voluntary codes of conduct (e.g., Global Compact, SDGs), certification schemes (e.g., Forest Stewardship Council, see Domask, 2003) and other social standards, of which many are issued by or implemented in collaboration with NGOs. Kaptein and Tulder (2003) confirm the benefits behind the partnership approach by defining stakeholder dialogue as a "structured interactive and proactive process aimed at creating sustainable strategies" (p. 210). Hence, the firm's willingness to participate in a dialogue with external stakeholders portrays its efforts towards a more environment friendly working method. The success of cross-sector alliances can also be measured by the fact that an increasing number of multinational enterprises report on their social or environmental performance (e.g., CSR or sustainability reports) (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007).

No organization interested in sustainable development can be successful alone. Many NGOs have found that harnessing the power of multinationals, rather than constantly combating it, can lead to a more sustainable world. The initial battle over Fair Trade Coffee between advocacy NGOs and Starbucks, ending up in collaborative approaches, illustrates the advantages of working in unison (Argenti, 2004). Before cross-sector alliances were created, NGOs like Global Exchange threatened Starbucks' reputation by boycotting its annual shareholder meeting in 2000. Moreover, the NGO threatened a national boycott of Starbucks if the company refused to replace their range of goods with Fair Trade Coffee. Starbucks responded by agreeing to sell Fair Trade coffee in its domestically owned stores. Since this Fair Trade decision, the company has continued to expand its social responsibility programs through the collaboration with Conservation International, resulting in 99% of ethically sourced coffee (Horovitz, 2015).

The example demonstrates, that instead of adversarial or philanthropic engagements, NGOs can develop substantive partnerships with firms to achieve sustainable development. As pointed out before, cross-sector alliances result in benefits for both parties (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). The collaboration between Chiquita brands and the Rain Forest Alliance, an NGO certifier of agriculture and timber products, provides another example of how NGOs and firms can find common ground that results in a win-win situation for both parties (Wootliff & Deri, 2001). In 1996, Chiquita brands recognized shifting values and an increased demand in products that derive from ethical sources. Thus, the company decided to align with the Rainforest Alliance's

Better Banana Project (BBP) guidelines. In 2000, Chiquita achieved a certification rate of 100% of its owned banana farms in Latin America, making it the first global firm to have undertaken to meet the guidelines. This partnership has clearly created a win-win-situation: While the company benefits from competitive advantages (e.g., global competitor meeting guidelines), the NGO has reached its goal in making firms more sustainable. Moreover, the partnership has led to a spillover-effect, since many other independent banana producers followed into the footsteps of the big company.

This section provided an overview of the present state of NGO influence strategies. Depending on the resource relationship with the business, NGOs choose between coercive and collaborative approaches to effectively influence the CSR or sustainability agenda of a corporation.

2.3. Challenges related to NGO influence on business

As one of the key drivers for corporate reputation, CSR accounts for about 40% of a corporation's overall reputation (Reputation Institute, 2017). As indicated by a study on the most reputable Swiss firms, socially responsible corporations enjoy support in the form of recommendation, purchase, investments and employer of choice (Reputation Institute, 2015). At the same time, a company creates certain expectations when using CSR to build its reputation. Although CSR can yield in reputational benefits, a gap between actual and perceived CSR can result in reputational risks (Reputation Institute, 2017). Hence, NGOs expect organizations to behave in certain ways. Violating expectations with regards to sustainability can lead to a loss of support and/or stakeholder opposition (Coombs, 2010). According to Coombs and Holladay (2015), "a CSR-based challenge is more urgent because it poses a greater threat to reputation" (p. 93). In 2009, for instance, Greenpeace challenged Nestlé for its purchase of palm oil from Sinar Mas (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). Greenpeace produced a video that parodied a Kit Kat commercial, accusing Nestlé of destroying rainforests (of also primary orangutan habitats) for sole profit reasons. Thus, Greenpeace was declaring the palm oil practices of Nestlé as irresponsible. As a result of that pressure, Nestlé ended the contract with Sinar Mas and established a sustainable palm oil purchasing program together with the Forest Trust.

As the above outlined CSR crisis shows, NGOs have the power to challenge corporations for its irresponsible behavior and pose serious threats to their legitimacy and their reputation. When confronted with a stakeholder challenge, corporations can respond in four different ways to a challenge, namely through accommodation, adaptation, rejection or redemption (Coombs, 2010). Accommodation and adaptation occur when the response to a

challenge can yield in organizational benefits. In order to derive the full benefits from the sustainability efforts, the company has to make sure that the accuser (i.e., NGO) is aware of the changes made. The organization rejects the challenge or maintains the status quo when the accusation lacks likelihood or is not viable (strategy of rejection). Since rejections can result in an even bigger crisis, the company must offer an explanation of why the management decided to rebuff the challenge. The strategy of redemption is applied in situations where the sustainability challenge has an expose origin. Expose describes sustainability challenges that are self-inflicted and/or that are created by the corporation's own messages. To demonstrate an actual commitment to sustainability, a company has to apologize for the deception caused and provide actual proof that it can redeem future sustainability promises. Consequently, the nature of the crisis and the assessment of the possible threat (e.g., likelihood, impact, and viability) influence the choice of strategic response.

Further, Coombs and Holladay (2015) argue that the response of challenged organizations is constrained by at least four factors: (1) strategy, (2) cost, (3) feasibility and (4) prior CSR efforts. This implies that management is not willing to accept the challenge if the acceptance of the challenge requires a considerable shift in the core strategy. Likewise, the challenge will be ignored if the required risk reduction efforts are too costly or they lack feasibility. Since risk reduction is associated with costs, management has to perceive the required efforts as being effective (Coombs, 2012). Finally, CSR promises create expectations for future corporate actions. Therefore, companies have to make sure to be consistent with their CSR claims and to live up to stakeholders' expectations.

Given these constraints in responding to a challenge, NGOs also have to find ways to elicit positive responses from corporations to their CSR requests. Hence, NGOs have to make sure that their claims are backed up with evidence, showing that they are true, urgent, and legitimate. As outlined previously, if a challenger (e.g., NGO) manages to put a claim or challenge on the corporate agenda, also depends on their institutional surroundings (e.g., How NGOs are perceived by the institutional setting). Although NGOs are predominantly seen as key drivers in CSR, in Spain, for instance, their role in CSR is still regarded as controversial (Arenas et al., 2009).

When challenging corporate behavior, NGOs often make use of coercive strategies. However, NGOs are increasingly drawing on collaborative strategies to impact the sustainability agenda of firms (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Although conversations around NGO-business partnerships have become mainstream and are seen as "magic bullet" for sustainable development, even these are fraught with challenges (Parker, 2003). It is clear that the mission of NGOs is to focus on the weak and needy, while the core interest of the for-profit-sector is of a

financial nature. Therefore, the question arises whether it is possible to acknowledge the different and perhaps even opposing goals, to the point of being able to establish joint efforts. Hence, a major problem NGOs face when engaging in partnerships with corporations is related to their core identity. Their claim of representing the needy class of population can be undermined through the fact of accepting funding. Furthermore, this can create a “charity alone relationship”, resulting in a clear hierarchy between the two actors. Thus, NGOs may perceive themselves as the weaker link when partnering up with corporations. Despite all these possible challenges and fears, to NGOs, partnerships are the expression of solidarity with respect to a common vision and shared goals. In order to overcome fears associated with being the subservient partner, both NGOs and corporations have to acknowledge “the space where there is mutual need with different and perhaps even opposing goals” (Parker, 2003, p. 93).

Cross-sector alliances can result in risks for both parties. Both parties may be viewed as failing to meet their duties to their own stakeholders (Shumate & O’Connor, 2010). Corporations can be accused of not meeting their obligations toward shareholders by laying too much focus on the potential reputational rewards of collaborations with NGOs (Mitchell et al., 1997). Second, NGOs may be perceived as selling out their core identity due to financial considerations. For instance, Greenpeace was accused of “abandoning boats for suits” (Hartman & Stafford, 2006, p. 56), when working together with Foron, a German refrigeration company, to replace Freon, a ozone-damaging gas or liquid with a more environmental friendly Greenfreeze refrigeration technology (Stafford et al., 2000). In order to reap the benefits of the partnership and to create a win-win-situation, both parties must attach great importance to their independence, while engaging symbiotically (Shumate & O’Connor, 2010). As the partnership between the Rainforest Alliance and Chiquita Banana illustrates, once viable stakeholders approve the partnership, the alliance will result in acceptance and sustainability. The Rainforest Alliance gained recognition, while Chiquita was acknowledged as a sustainable company, especially in contrast to its main competitors.

Before a new partnership is built, perceived organizational differences and the inherent distrust in dealing with each other can be seen as inhibitors of creating joint efforts with regard to CSR (Rondinelli & London, 2003). When trying to influence a firm’s CSR agenda, NGOs tend to focus on their own goals, instead of considering whether corporations can actually make the necessary changes. Lack of knowledge of the business world can lead to demands that are not based on reality and often times seem utopian (Arenas et al., 2009). Consequently, firms can accuse NGOs of pursuing a “hidden agenda” (e.g., obtain a seat in a firm’s organ and get more power), while NGOs can blame corporations for their negative societal and environmental impact (Arenas, 2009). This leads to the question of how these two distinct actors can even trust each

other and work together in unison, with regards to a coherent CSR agenda? In order to overcome trust issues and to find joint solutions regarding CSR, it is essential that both actors acknowledge each other's competencies and disadvantages. This is especially important for the NGO sector, as NGOs tend to have a preconceived opinion on firms' behavior: "(...) for corporations and NGOs to work together cooperatively there needs to be a respect and understanding of the role of corporations in society in providing basic goods and services, and an appreciation that this contribution can, in itself, be a socially-responsible one" (Adams, 2003, p. 200).

Even when a partnership has been established, there is no guarantee for a seamless continuity of the alliance. In 2001, for example, the advocacy NGO PETA decided to collaborate with KFC, which is owned by Yum! (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Only two years after establishing this alliance, the NGO announced its discontentment with KFC's efforts to raise the bar in animal welfare. Rondinelli & London (2003) argue that to manage cross-sector alliances effectively, both parties have "to understand what types of alliances work best, how to use existing expertise in building and maintaining alliances, and what new skills are needed to pursue collaborations across sectors" (p. 63). To elude possible pitfalls, Rondinelli and London (2003) offer a set of strategic criteria to help executives examine the feasibility of potential partnerships between corporations and environmental NGOs. They urge executives to identify specific projects for collaboration and to give the "culture" of the potential partner's organizations a fair chance. Moreover, companies should carefully think about which NGOs possess the essential characteristics in finding feasible solutions to a problem (e.g., potential CSR threat), while NGOs shall make no secret of the fact that they are looking for influential and financially well-off companies (e.g., the more purchasing power a company has, the greater the change in the supply chain). Further, they suggest defining problems clearly and establishing mutually acceptable procedures for collaboration. All of these strategic criteria represent precautionary measures that will increase the probability of a successful, long-term cross-sector alliance.

Even when formulating certain strategic criteria to avoid mistakes before partnering up, NGOs may still be exploited as a tool in a competition for comparative advantages (Baur & Schmitz, 2012). While such an approach can provide companies with short-term gains in legitimacy, it can pose serious threats to the legitimacy of NGOs. As NGOs have emerged as prominent players in global affairs, they are already facing increasing scrutiny for their activities, especially when partnering up with corporations that are pursuing CSR for strategic reasons (Baur & Schmitz, 2012). Baur and Schmitz (2012) argue that certain forms of relationships (e.g., sponsoring, labeling agreements etc.) can lead to co-optation, i.e. the process of aligning NGO objectives with those of businesses. In particular, this applies when NGOs get distracted from

pursuing their real mission and stop using protest and other disruptive tactics, even if such tactics would have a bigger impact on their goal achievement. Since both actors deal with increased pressure and corporations clearly benefit out of the collaboration with legitimate NGOs that are perceived as independent, they should actively support NGOs' critical capacity.

Given the pressures NGOs face to be non-political and to be accountable "upward" to donors (e.g., corporate and government funding) rather than "downward" to beneficiaries (e.g., marginalized people), NGOs' role to strengthen civil society is constrained (Banks, Hulme & Edwards, 2015). This raises questions about the ability of NGOs to achieve long-term goals of social justice and transformation. New pressures of aligning with restrictive national regulations and the dependency on external funding hamper the "transformative potential" of NGOs (Banks et al., 2015, p. 710). By aligning more closely with corporations and governments, NGOs risk to lose sight of their intended beneficiaries. AbouAssi (2012) examines the responses of environmental NGOs in Lebanon to changing donor priorities. NGOs that have some level of voice vis-à-vis donors are more likely to address concerns with their donors and to convince them to create a more balanced contract that takes into account the NGOs' interests. Other strategies refer to exit (e.g., exit relationship and stop receiving funds) or adjustment (e.g., align with the donor's emerging interests). According to AbouAssi (2012), partnerships with corporations represent simultaneous responses of exit, voice and adjustment. In other words, an NGO decides to work with a consortium of NGOs on a certain project funded by the same donor, while negotiating the terms and targets that correspond with the NGO's mission. Hence, finding ways to continue accessing funding without risking a change in organizational identity can be a real challenge for NGOs that are undergoing a new level of professionalization.

To sum up, it can be said that NGOs are more exposed to criticism due to their growing prominence on the national and international stage. The main issue concerns NGOs' ambivalent role when partnering up with business: On the one hand, NGOs declare firms as their targets, and on the other hand, they receive funds from them (Arenas et al., 2009). Accordingly, NGOs are confronted with new pressures for greater accountability regarding their long-term impact (Abouassi & Trent, 2016). As a result of donor funding, NGOs tend to focus more on functional short-term impact rather than on strategic long-term goals of social justice and transformation (Kilby, 2006). Moreover, especially powerful corporations can just refuse to answer to claims. Hence, if NGOs want to have an impact on the CSR or sustainability agenda of corporations, they have to send strong messages out and apply the right influence strategies.

Following the three research questions, namely how Swiss NGOs perceive their role(s) in influencing the CSR agenda of companies, which types of influence strategies they apply and what kind of challenges they can face during this process, the overview on existing academic

work discussed previous impacts of NGO impact on sustainability agendas. Moreover, the usefulness of both coercive and collaborative strategies in impacting the CSR agenda of corporations was highlighted, by acknowledging both strategies as equally important. Lastly, several challenges that can occur during this process were outlined, stressing the need for NGO autonomy (especially when partnerships are formed).

3. Research design and rationale

This chapter introduces the chosen methodology to research the multifaceted ways in which Swiss NGOs are influencing the CSR or sustainability agenda of firms. The first section discusses why qualitative methodology as a research method and Switzerland as research context were selected. Secondly, the sample recruitment procedure is discussed, followed by a detailed overview of the participants. Thirdly, the structure and content of the semi-structured interview guide are presented, since the interview guide serves as the research instrument in this study. Subsequently, the method of data analysis, namely thematic analysis is explained.

3.1. Methodology & research context

Since the main goal of this research was to gain more insight into a nascent area of enquiry, namely how NGOs perceive their role(s) in influencing the CSR or sustainability agenda of corporations, what kind of strategies of influence they use and what kind of challenges can occur, a qualitative approach was chosen (Dempsey, 2011; Doh & Guay, 2004). According to Magnusson and Mareck (2015), qualitative interviews are best suited to “elicit full, rich, and personalized stories from participants, and encourage them to volunteer their reflections on their experiences” (p. 52). Thus, given the purpose of this study, this research uses semi-structured in-depth expert interviews to obtain knowledge about the meaning-making processes from particular people representing the Swiss NGO sector who are involved in the direct or indirect exchange with corporations (e.g., Head of corporate partnerships, campaigning, etc.).

The Swiss NGO landscape is particularly interesting for this research topic, as many international NGOs are headquartered in Switzerland (e.g. International Committee of the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, Geneva Call etc.), of which many are located in the internationally oriented cities Geneva, Zurich and Basel. In addition, Switzerland is home to a high number of multinational companies that can easily become targets of NGOs when behaving irresponsible (e.g., violation of human rights, causing environmental damage etc.) (Public Eye, 2015). The increasing demand of authentic CSR from companies by Swiss NGOs is further underlined by recent political developments such as the launch of the Responsible Business Initiative, aiming at introducing a binding framework for companies based in Switzerland to protect human rights and the environment abroad (Swiss Coalition for Corporate Justice, n.d.). The initiative is supported by 80 organizations (e.g., NGOs, churches, shareholders' associations), most of which are Swiss-based NGOs. Furthermore, the focus on the Swiss context contributes to a better understanding of how country-specific factors may affect NGOs' ability to effectively influence CSR (Arenas et al., 2009).

3.2. Sampling criteria and procedure

Participants in this study were representatives from various NGOs (i.e., social and environmental NGOs), responsible for business partnerships, communications and/or fundraising. Due to the fact that participants were selected who “fit the parameters of the project’s research questions, goals, and purposes”, a purposeful sampling logic was applied (Magnusson & Mareck, 2015, p. 134). In order to recruit participants fitting the purpose of this study, an online search of Swiss NGOs was carried out first. The online search revealed significant information on organizational structures (e.g., marketing and/or corporate partnerships division) and on professionals who fit the target group for this study. In a next step, an invitation e-mail was sent to NGO professionals, indicating the study focus and the academic value of their participation in this study (e.g., the NGO perspective has yet been limited in this study area). The e-mail invited them to participate in an in-depth interview at a date and place of their choice. Potential participants received a reminder e-mail with a summary of the same information, if no response was obtained within ten days after the first email. In total, 82 emails were sent to NGOs professionals, out of which thirteen professionals confirmed their participation. Next to the invitation via email, the snowballing system was applied, because it is especially useful when reaching out to “difficult to access” persons (Tracy, 2013, p. 136). In the end, one additional participant was recruited via the snowballing method (recommendation by NGO colleague), resulting in a total sample of fourteen individuals from fourteen different non-profit organizations in Switzerland (N=14).

In line with the ESHCC (2015) methodological guidelines, a sufficient amount of people for conducting the expert interviews was recruited. Also in agreement with the methodological guidelines, an informed consent was sent to the interviewees, informing them in more detail about the purpose of the study and the possibilities of withdrawing from the study or of refusing to answer particular questions at any given point of time. Participants were asked to read the document before the actual face-to-face meeting, where a hard-copy to sign was provided by the interviewer. Furthermore, participants could choose whether their name or their organization’s name may be used or if they elected to remain anonymous (full anonymity requested by two participants, while one interviewee demanded name anonymity). With the signing of the consent form, participants gave consent to be audio-recorded.

The participants represent NGOs with various organizational missions, ranging from humanitarian relief, development assistance to environmental protection. The sample includes service NGOs (e.g., Swiss Red Cross) as well as advocacy groups (e.g., Multiwatch). Moreover, some of the NGOs engage in both sets simultaneously and can therefore be characterized as hybrid NGOs (e.g., Solidar Suisse, WWF) (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Bread for All (BFA), for instance,

is active on the ground, but also lobbies for more binding CSR regulations and codes of conduct in the legislative arenas. While most of the organizations focus on specific target groups (e.g., deprived children, indigenous groups, farmers, animals etc.), two of them specifically target businesses.

Compared to mediated interviews as via Skype, face-to-face interviews provide rich information in terms of verbal and nonverbal data (Tracy, 2013). For this reason, it was decided to conduct the interviews in Switzerland. The face-to-face interviews (N=13) were carried out between March 28th and April 20th, 2017 in Basel, Berne and Zurich, while the last interview was conducted via Skype (N=1). The interviews were held in English (N=13) as well as in German (N=1). In sum, the interviews lasted between 40 and 62 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim resulting in 230 pages (1.5 spacing) of data. Table 3.2 presents an overview of the NGO professionals. It is essential to note that eight out of fourteen interviewees reported working experience in the business sector before entering a career in the NGO sector. Furthermore, three out of the four participants who indicated tenure with the organization of less than one year, can still look back at an extensive career within the NGO domain (i.e., working experience in other not-for-profit organizations). Only one interviewee only recently made the transition from the private to the not-for-profit sector.

Table 3.2. Participant Profile

	Name (a)¹	Current Role	Organization	Mission/Purpose	Focus area(s)
P1	Matthias Leisinger (-1)	Advisor Corporate Engagement Unicef Switzerland	Unicef Switzerland	Promoting Children's Rights & special protection for the most disadvantaged children globally	Children's rights, empowerment, (gender) equality, education, health, child protection & child labor
P2	Isabelle Roos (8)	Head of Corporate Partnerships	Swiss Red Cross	Promoting humanity & protecting health, life & human dignity nationally and internationally	Helping vulnerable people, ranging from health, educating people in first aid to voluntary work
P3	Anonymous (-1)	Head of Fundraising & Communications	Vivamos Mejor	Supporting socioeconomically deprived people in Latin America	Vocational training; sustainable farming practices
P4	Simone Wasmann (1)	Campaign Decent Work Asia	Solidar Suisse	Envisioning world with decent work, social justice, sustainable livelihoods & one free of poverty	Democratic participation & human rights next to disaster relief & humanitarian aid

¹ Note. (a) indicates tenure with the organization, -1 = less than one year

P5	Sibylle Schuppli (4)	Communications Officer	ADRA	Working with people in poverty to create positive change through empowering partnerships & responsible action	Disaster relief & supporting people in need, ranging from food security to education
P6	Anonymous (5)	Head of Corporate Relations	Anonymous	Working with the poor & oppressed to promote human transformation & justice	Children's rights & child protection; water; health; education
P7	Samuel Wille (4)	Head of Corporate Relations	World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)	Stopping the worldwide destruction of the environment & future in which human beings & animals live together in harmony	Biodiversity, sustainable use of natural resources; reduction of emissions
P8	Michael Bergöö (4)	Head of Program Switzerland & Policy Advisor Agenda 2030	Biovision	Enough food for everyone, produced by healthy people in a healthy environment	sustainable policy frameworks; human, environmental and animal health; 2030 Agenda
P9	Yvan Maillard (7)	Program Officer Business & Human Rights	Bread for All	Need for a transition (e.g., new ways of food production, renewable energy etc.) is imminent	Development aid topics ranging from fighting land grabbing, ensuring human rights in business to sustainable agriculture
P10	Ueli Gähler (3)	Member & Author <i>March Against Syngenta – Revealing Monsanto's Twin from Switzerland</i>	Multiwatch	Discovering human rights violations of Swiss companies & informing public	Monitoring multinationals (e.g., Syngenta) due to lack of binding international guidelines
P11	Andreas Freimüller (-1)	Co-Founder & President	Campax	Advancing open democracy within Switzerland & campaigning for both green economy & solidary society	Campaigns regarding selected subjects
P12	Anonymous (3)	Head of Corporate Partnerships	Anonymous	A world that respects the rights of children & where children can live healthily & safely	Supporting children ranging from health & nutrition, education to emergency aid
P13	Markus Siegfried (6)	Head of Corporate Partnerships	SOS Children's Villages	Every child is being raised in a family where it feels safe & loved	Supporting children with focus on care, prevention, education, health & emergency

					relief
P14	Annina Aeberli (5)	Manager Campaigns	Bruno Manser Fonds	Conservation of the threatened tropical rainforests & respect of the rights of the rainforest dwellers	Human rights; conservation of the forests; anti-corruption; documenting indigenous cultures in Malaysia & Switzerland

3.3. Research Instrument: Interview Guide

As mentioned above, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to collect data. The interview guide is crucial because it enables the interviewer to cover all the topics and to receive the information needed (Magnusson & Mareck, 2015). In the end, the aim of interpretative researchers and thus semi-structured interviews is to obtain “rich talk”, namely stories, reflections and opinions (Magnusson & Mareck, 2015, p. 48).

A pilot test of the interview guide was first conducted to identify flaws in the wording, order of questions and the content of the formulated questions. Although the data from the pilot interviews were not treated as units of analysis, the pilot-test conducted with two NGO professionals prior to the actual face-to-face interviews proved to be helpful in formulating a first set of questions, and in gaining first findings regarding the interaction between NGOs and businesses.

The final interview guide (see Appendix A) builds upon the conducted literature review and the three research questions. Moreover, the interview guide entails generative questions in order to ensure open-ended answers and to avoid Yes-/No-answers (Tracy, 2013). The first part of the interview guide consists of general questions that are meant to break the ice and get the interviewee talking (e.g., professional role within current organization; past experiences within the NGO sector; perceived changes within the NGO world etc.). *RQ1* was addressed after the icebreaker and broken down into the three topics of Swiss context, CSR impact, and CSR topics and understanding of CSR. After assessing the interest of Swiss companies to pursue more sustainable business practices, interviewees were asked to evaluate their own impact on the CSR or sustainability agenda of companies. The respective set of questions proved to elicit valuable insights with regard to *RQ1*.

In order to answer *RQ2*, interviewees were first asked to describe their approach toward working with or against businesses. Through probing and follow-up questions, the influence strategies could be explored in more depth. This section also included questions regarding the importance of cross-sector partnerships, the relationship with businesses and the effect of digitalization on the way of targeting or working with companies. In addition, some of the

questions encouraged critical thinking, for instance, when asked to reflect upon the benefits that companies can get out of working with NGOs.

Thirdly, several problems can occur in the process of influencing CSR, such as issues related to loosing the critical lens when partnering up with companies or companies' low interest in pursuing sustainable development. Hence, RQ3 was evaluated by asking NGOs about concrete obstacles in the process of influencing companies and other risks that emerge while working against or with companies. In this section, some interviewees also provided insights into how they manage potential risks related to identity and independence issues. Finally, interviewees were asked for any additional remarks or statements.

3.4. Analysis

The English verbatim transcriptions of the face-to-face interviews served as units of analysis for the qualitative data analysis. More precisely, an indicative thematic analysis was used to analyze the units of analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis provides a flexible research tool that identifies, analyses and reports patterns or themes within a given set of data. Moreover, an inductive approach was chosen because existing research on NGOs as CSR actors, NGO strategies to influence the CSR or sustainability agenda of companies and possible challenges that arise during these attempts remain limited (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). This approach of thematic analysis is data-driven, since the process of coding the data does not build upon pre-existing coding frames or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the development of categories derives from the data, the process can also be characterized as a "coding-up" approach (Fielding, 2016).

Although praised for its flexibility, clear and concise guidelines on how to conduct a thematic analysis are missing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, this thesis applies a coding technique that was developed on the basis of the grounded theory approach. Unlike quantitative analysis that is based on preconceived theory and hypotheses, grounded theory allows the researcher to generate the theory from the obtained data.

According to Boeije (2010), this coding technique is composed of three stages, namely open, axial and selective coding. All the coding steps were performed with the help of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Before conducting the open coding process, an initial list of codes was developed based on the interview guide, which is driven by the three research questions and the literature review. Although this represents a more deductive approach, the initial list can be helpful in identifying the first set of codes, while additional codes will emerge throughout the open coding process (Boeije, 2010). Thus, the data-driven or inductive approach

can be still regarded as the main method of reasoning. During the open coding process, the data was broken down and resulting pieces of text were assigned to groups that have the same theme in common. This process can also be classified as a thematic approach because it aims to break up the data into smaller pieces. The open coding resulted in a list of codes or a coding scheme.

In a next step, axial coding was performed, whereby data was put together in new ways (Boeije, 2010). More specifically, the salient codes were raised to categories and the relationship between salient categories, or axes, and subcategories was generated, modified and sometimes rejected throughout the process. After removing redundant codes and crossing out synonyms, this process resulted in a list of categories and subcategories, consisting of important themes in the data.

Selective coding represents the final stage of the coding and looks at the connections between the categories. During this process, certain categories can be adopted as theoretical concepts, serving to back up the theoretical model. The procedure results in the formulation of a core category or core concept. Following Strauss (1987), Boeije (2010) defines several characteristics of the core category (e.g., appears frequently in the data, represents heart of the analysis, etc.).

When applying a method like thematic analysis, questions around reliability and validity need to be considered as well. Within qualitative research, reliability asks whether the methods used are sound, and whether future researchers could perform the same steps and end up with the same results (Silverman, 2011). Reliability can be ensured in two ways: First, the research process is carefully documented, and therefore transparent. Second, main theoretical concepts are presented in order to achieve theoretical transparency. While reliability refers to the soundness of methods, internal validity reflects the soundness of results. External validity is concerned with the generalizability of the research findings. It is important to report whether the research findings can be applied to a larger population, or just to the studied sub-group.

4. Results

This study sought to illuminate how NGOs perceive their role(s) in influencing the CSR or sustainability agenda of firms, what kind of influence strategies they apply and what kind of challenges they can face during this process. Based on the themes that were found through conducting a thematic analysis, this chapter discusses the results of the qualitative in-depth interviews.

First, the findings reveal that NGOs are not a homogenous group, as they are fragmented in attitudes toward CSR, activities and type of impact on the CSR agendas. NGOs' perception of their role as CSR actors is primarily driven by their attitudes toward CSR and the assessment of their impact.

Second, the results indicate that the attitude toward CSR and the selection of an influence strategy (collaborative vs. coercive tactics) are correlated. More precisely, coercive strategies (e.g., criticizing firms in public, online petitions) are mainly employed in situations where NGOs are more critical of CSR and where no cross-sector alliances have been established, while collaborative strategies (e.g., cross-sector alliances) are used by NGOs that have a positive attitude toward CSR.

Thirdly, the findings show that being an NGO, especially a partnership NGO is not easy and that it comes with a full baggage of problems. As NGOs may be co-opted when entering in cross-sector alliances, they have to find ways to mitigate the risks, i.e., finding a balance between being independent and having an impact on the CSR agenda. This means that NGOs have to stay aware of potential greenwashing activities by firms.

Lastly, contextual and organizational constraints can impact NGOs' ability to influence the sustainability agenda. Interestingly, contextual constraints were mainly expressed by NGOs that are more critical of CSR and demand for legally binding CSR regulations (e.g., Responsible Business Initiative). NGOs that have cross-sector alliances in place are less critical of the Swiss or foreign contexts and do not refer to them as inhibitors.

4.1. 'The NGO countryside is quite dense': Swiss NGOs as a heterogeneous group

NGOs' perception of their roles as CSR drivers is determined by their attitudes they have toward CSR and their assessment of impact on the CSR agenda. As the ways in which NGOs assess the value of CSR with regards to true sustainable corporate behavior differ across organizations, this sub-chapter first sheds light on the different attitudes toward CSR. In a second step, NGOs' assessment of their own ability to influence change and have an impact on

the sustainability agenda of firms is depicted, and how this drives their perception of their role as CSR actors.

4.1.1. Attitudes towards CSR

The findings of this research show that there are two completely opposing views toward the value of CSR when it comes to fostering sustainable business practices. While one camp finds it difficult to acknowledge the value of CSR with regards to sustainable development and the actual commitment of companies toward more sustainable business practices, the opposing camp recognizes “a big change happening in the private sector” (P1), meaning that companies are increasingly interested in being more sustainable.

The **first camp** agrees on the fact that CSR is not a business priority, since many firms still mainly focus on the production of shareholder value. The following statement illustrates the concerns some NGOs have regarding CSR:

Uh, yes, I do see an interest, I rather often have doubts whether it's genuine or it's just like an outside requirement, you ought to have it. For example if you want to compete for government contracts, you have to fulfill certain things and so you, I think often those, or societal expectations or NGO pressure, and so it's like a rather involuntary [sic] behavior in many cases. I think there is some genuine examples, but it's not as a rule. (P11)

This leads to the assumption that P11 takes a critical view of CSR, because companies often feel forced to comply with certain CSR standards (e.g., NGO pressure). Similarly, P4 is struggling with acknowledging the effectiveness of CSR and firms' actual commitment to behave in a socially responsible manner: “Even if you take CSR seriously, as a company you still have other goals first, such as profit or quality” (P4).

NGOs who express concerns over CSR tend to emphasize the need for more binding regulations that enforce compliance with certain sustainability standards. As pointed out by P10, the idea to introduce voluntary standards originally emerged from the business sector in order to prevent legally binding laws: “We believe there needs to be international laws and there needs to be a democratic authority and the CSR ideas, also the UN Global Compact, was developed by international companies like Nestlé, because they didn't want binding laws, (...)” (P10). Thus, instead of fostering sustainable development, the non-binding character of CSR only enforces existing corporate malpractices. To counteract this, a coalition of Swiss NGOs launched the Responsible Business Initiative, with the aim of introducing binding policy frameworks. As a

result of spontaneous talk (no specific question posed), three out of fourteen interviewees express their support of this initiative, as it presents “a historic chance for Switzerland” (P9) to implement binding regulations for firms regarding human rights due diligence. Although the popular vote has not yet been accepted, P9 is convinced of the impact that the acceptance of the initiative will have on the CSR agenda of businesses: “(...), through the fact that we are 80 organizations from the civil society, (...) I think we really have the possibility to influence the agenda with this”. (P9)

NGOs’ perception of their role as CSR actors is related to the extent that they see CSR as having an impact on sustainable development. Following this assumption, NGOs with a critical attitude towards CSR would not describe themselves as CSR actors. Nevertheless, NGOs’ perception of their role as CSR drivers is also influenced by their assessment of their own ability to impact CSR (see 4.1.2.). Thus, it is difficult to define NGOs’ roles as CSR actors only in terms of their attitudes towards CSR (e.g., critical or non-critical of CSR).

In contrast to the more critical group, the **second camp** reports about how businesses are interested in CSR and in becoming more sustainable. More interestingly, they refer to companies as the real drivers of change and acknowledge their importance in pursuing sustainable development. As P7 states, thinking of companies as the “evils” is just simply wrong, because “companies are part of the problem, but also part of the solution” (P7). In this sense, if NGOs want to have an influence on a firm’s CSR agenda, they have to understand the potential positive impact a company can have on the environment and the society: “Companies probably make a bigger impact than NGOs. If a company like [retail company] or [retail company] sells bio products, the impact can be much bigger than if three NGOs arrive and tell them what to do” (P2). Evidently, the task of NGOs should be to drive the real drivers of CSR in the right direction.

As a result, many NGOs work or wish to work more closely with businesses in order to have a direct impact on their CSR or sustainability agenda. It is essential that NGOs do not perceive companies as tools for fundraising, but rather as equal partners in finding joint solutions for global challenges and in ensuring greater social value (Austin, 2000). Consequently, many NGOs observe an increase in cross-sector alliances:

But I also think that NGOs have changed in the last, probably, decade, you see more and more NGOs that are actually engaging more actively with the private sector, because they believe that actually working with the private sector has more impact on the purpose of an NGO, than just this naming and shaming approach. (P1)

Hence, this group of interviewees reports a more positive attitude towards CSR or agrees upon the fact that firms attach growing importance to sustainability issues. Nevertheless, some interviewees, who initially highlighted the positive aspects, are also aware of potential problems related to CSR:

I think bigger ones, companies who are working either on an international level, eh, or generally big brands, they even have their own CSR departments, they're aware 'we have to do something'. But smaller companies, who just think about maybe a Christmas action or campaign, these, or medium sized ones, these you have to bring to this level that they are aware 'We have a partnership with an NGO, if possible for several years', that brings for both of them something. (P13)

Therefore, interviewees who have a positive attitude toward CSR and perceive firms as increasingly social responsible actors, are acquainted with the fact that firms may pursue CSR for strategic, i.e., reputational reasons. If NGOs know that some corporations are using CSR for marketing reasons, especially when collaborating with them, how do they resist co-optation (4.3.1.)? Being able to answer this question is crucial, as NGOs need to avoid losing the critical lens towards companies, "because the watchdog cannot be the consultant in the same time" (P11). Staying aware of potential greenwashing activities and being independent is essential, if NGOs do not want to be declared as betrayers of their own mission (Argenti, 2004).

4.1.2. NGOs as 'early adopters of acknowledging a problem': Assessing NGOs' ability to induce change

Having a direct or indirect impact on the CSR or the sustainability agenda of companies influences Swiss NGOs' perception of being CSR actors or not. Several interviewees report on having had a direct or indirect impact on the CSR agenda of firms. The direct way of influence refers to occasions where companies developed or adopted codes of conduct and/or CSR policies as a result of the exchange (be it in a collaborative or coercive manner) with NGOs. Raising awareness amongst companies regarding possible issues in the supply chain or convincing the managerial department of investing more time and money into CSR related issues, in contrast, can be seen as indirect impacts on a firm's CSR agenda.

As NGOs aim to persuade firms to adopt voluntary codes of conduct that further business practices with respect to social issues and the environment, three out of fourteen NGOs (P1, P9 & P12) have developed own policy frameworks to reach this goal. Together with the Global Compact, P1 and P12 developed the Children's Rights and Business principles that give

companies guidance in implementing children's rights as part of their CSR agenda. This tool is frequently applied by P12 to make firms aware of potential problems within their supply chain. Through its numerous cross-sector alliances, the NGO has had **direct impact** on the CSR agenda of several firms. Although P1 applies the same Children's Rights and Business principles in its daily work, the impact on the CSR level of firms can be assessed as less pronounced. According to the interviewee, this can be traced back to the low interest of some firms in topics such as child protection and human rights:

The challenges, now for Unicef, is that we can bring our knowledge to the organizations and we have to make it relevant to the organizations, you know. Again, when you look into the German study saying that 45% of the businesses do not acknowledge any problems regarding to child's rights, this shows that there is a huge lack of understanding what potential impacts can be. (P1)

Hence, a solution to this challenge is to make companies more aware of existing issues within their supply chains. But how can it be explained that both organizations apply the same set of strategies (i.e., collaborative strategies) and have the principles in common, but still report about different levels of impact on CSR? A possible explanation lies in the type of cross-sector alliances both actors have created with firms. While P12 focuses on long-term partnerships, P1 emphasizes funding as the primary reason for partnering up with corporations. The two distinct reasons behind a cross-sector alliance might explain the different levels of impact and highlight that partnerships for financial reasons only result in a limited impact on the CSR of businesses.

Compared to P1 and P12, P9 belongs to the group that is critical towards CSR. P9 started developing voluntary codes of conduct and Fair Trade labels such as Label Step (Fair Trade label for handmade carpets) long before the Global Compact started encouraging firms to adopt sustainable and socially responsible standards. The labels apply to Swiss-based and multinational companies and ensure that certain standards are maintained within the supply chain. The interviewee reports about success stories to demonstrate the effectiveness of such Fair Trade labels when it comes to impacting the CSR agenda of firms:

And of course, if you think about the Fair Trade labels and all the companies who are working with those labels, like [enumeration of companies] – they are all working with Fair Trade labels and promoting Fair Trade. And if you look at the textile sector, through the Fair Wear Foundation, we could have a positive impact on Swiss textile companies like [retail company], (...). (P9)

As the examples above show, the definition of own policy frameworks can facilitate the process of influencing the CSR agenda of firms and drive both groups' (positive and critical attitudes) perception of their role as CSR actors. Nevertheless, the existence of a predefined set of CSR policy frameworks is not a compulsory precondition to effectively impact sustainability agendas. P13, for instance, has no pre-established policy framework, and reports about success stories of CSR impact:

The original idea actually came from [telecommunications company], but then we were always included in the process of developing it further. And this is for me the readiness to make a long-term partnership and the readiness to develop further, that means I understand the company better and the company understands me better. And we, as example, we made from [telecommunications company] mobile aid, private persons can donate phones and the money out of the resale goes to the projects of us. (P13)

The fact that NGOs with no predefined set of policy frameworks can drive the improvement of a company's CSR agenda is also confirmed by NGOs that take a critical stance toward CSR. BMF applied a coercive approach when criticizing a Swiss insurance company for partnering up with a logging company in Malaysia that was already known for its noncompliance with human rights. After initial starting difficulties, the NGO convinced the Swiss insurance company to develop their own forest policy, which lists a set of criteria to evaluate the sustainability aspects of potential partners within the logging industry. In future, the firm will conduct a thorough pre-screening, before financing the activities of certain logging businesses.

The findings indicate that both camps of NGOs (i.e., critical of CSR vs. in favor of CSR) can have a direct impact and therefore drive the CSR agendas of companies. Relatively speaking, however, the NGOs that are more critical of CSR seem to have a bigger impact on the CSR agendas of businesses. In total, three out of four interviewees from the first camp (i.e., critical attitude) reflect upon past direct impacts on the CSR agendas of corporations, while only four out of nine NGOs from the second camp (i.e., positive attitude) can think of similar success stories (for more examples see table 4.1.2.).

Next to having a direct impact on the CSR agendas, NGOs can have an **indirect impact** on the mind-set of companies by highlighting existing issues and the need for changes within specific sectors. In addition, the impact on the policy level can also be viewed as a way to influence CSR, as NGOs confirm the influential role governments can have in fostering or setting the direction for CSR. This is in contrast to the assumption that governments' involvement in the

shaping of CSR is decreasing (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). Hence, the indirect impact on the CSR agenda of corporations can influence NGOs' perception of their role as CSR drivers.

NGOs that report less positive attitudes toward the voluntary character of CSR standards refer to governments as crucial actors that can introduce legally binding regulations: "You can't do it without politics, otherwise it's just a single combat" (P6). This is also exemplified through a case shared by P14, as national authorities can sometimes exert greater leverage over businesses than NGOs. The NGO accused a Swiss bank of offering financial services to a former Malaysian chief minister who was known for being involved in unfair commercial practices (e.g., selling out logging concessions). Only after engaging Swiss authorities in the process of targeting the Swiss bank for its mistake, the bank is now feeling the increased pressure to react upon the demands:

(...) and so we now, we made a complaint and Swiss authorities are investigating that. And you can really see now that [bank] is responding in a different way now. So basically now, it's like with lawyers and it's the higher-level people because it is a really serious issue for them. It is, it, yeah, so this really affects their business and that's why really people who actually can take decisions are now involved in whole issue, while before the CSR people, usually, are really people who kind of wanna improve something within the company, but are often kind of in a minority position within their company and do not have a lot of decision making power [sic]. (P14)

Another NGO that views governments as essential actors in placing checks on market power is P8: "And of course, that's why we also target governments mainly, because they can change the rules of the game, (...)" (P8). For this reason, P8 has established policy dialogues with national authorities, with the aim of supporting the Swiss government in the implementation of the SDGs. As a result, P8 advocates for the uptake of the SDGs on a global policy level, with the aim of furthering sustainable agriculture and food systems (Biovision, n.d.):

We have policy dialogues at international but also national level, and for example the national level, I mean we are in constant exchange with the Swiss authorities. I would say of course, there we do have some impact in their thinking and how, also for example, how they should look at the Agenda 2030, that it's not just a numeration of goals and targets, but it's actually an integrated set of goals and if you're performing one goal, it has win-wins in other goals or if you fail in one goal you have trade offs in others. (P8)

Table 4.1.2. offers an overview of direct and indirect NGO impact on the CSR agenda of corporations, broken down by the specific attitudes towards CSR. In general, NGOs with a critical attitude towards CSR are especially successful in creating dialogues, developing policy tools (e.g., SDG implementation) and in raising awareness among politicians and other national authorities about sustainability issues and misconducts of companies. Thus, the organizations play an influential role in imposing checks on the CSR activities of businesses, that is to say, even when the impact is described as an indirect one. As noted by P4, just because an NGO has no direct impact on the CSR or sustainability agenda of a firm, it does not mean that indirect impacts (e.g., raising awareness regarding certain issues) are ineffective: “So obviously, even if it seems there is nothing, I think we do have an impact”. In conclusion, it can be said that the first group’s perception of their role as CSR influencers is driven by their assessment of direct and/or indirect impact, while the second group’s perception is guided by their ability to influence the sustainability agendas in a direct way.

Table 4.1.2. Overview of direct and indirect NGO impact on CSR

	Examples of NGO impact	Type of impact (specification of impact)
Negative attitude toward CSR	<p>And it was not really successful because they did not back off, but because of our campaign, afterwards they really followed the, they developed a policy on how to deal, or like a forest policy, basically, like they developed guidelines on how, or what kind of criteria companies have to fulfill in order to get investment by [multinational bank]. So this really was a clear change, so they developed these guidelines because of our camp... (...), so this shows that you can have an impact, at least they had this afterwards. (P14)</p>	<p><i>Direct impact</i> (development of sector-specific forest policy)</p>
	<p>Well, actually, I would mention [retail company] furniture, who worked with Label Step to improve its supply chain in the carpet, for handmade carpets and I think this is one of...I can have this example here. (P9)</p>	<p><i>Direct impact</i> (Definition of own policy frameworks)</p>
	<p>So in Basel, politics discusses about those multinational companies. So that’s what we’ve achieved and it’s clear that [multinational company], eh, has to take this into account. (P10)</p>	<p><i>Indirect impact</i> (Increased awareness among politicians)</p>

	<p>The petition is just to the boss of [multinational bank] and so I would expect corporate policies to be affected that in the future, when they, when they do due diligence on projects' financing, that they will actually live up to their CSR documents in a more appropriate way, (...). (P11)</p>	<p><i>Indirect impact</i> (Holding companies accountable / raising awareness about certain sustainability issues)</p>
	<p>Another example is with Senegal, where we support them in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and we are working with concrete tools and instruments to support for integrated policy planning (...). (P8)</p>	<p><i>Indirect impact</i> (Support in (CSR) policy planning)</p>
Positive attitude toward CSR	<p>(...) together with [retail company] we changed their or parts of their supply chain heavily. (...). And so at the beginning of this process was an analysis of the child rights and business principles of their supply chain to understand where they had to improve and how they could improve their whole manufacturing processes. (P12)</p>	<p><i>Direct impact</i> (Changes within supply chain)</p>
	<p>(...), I don't know if you know the Childs Rights and Business Principles, that [Anonymous] and Unicef and Global Compact have developed, this is a tool for instance which we apply very frequently in order to, together with a company, change their supply chains and their rules, so that they can become more sustainable. (P12)</p>	<p><i>Direct impact</i> (Definition of own policy frameworks)</p>
	<p>The direct impact is with them reducing their CO2 emissions and all the rest, the indirect impact is them paying us money for our work and for our brand which we can the again invest in our field projects, political work and so on. So I like to speak about direct and indirect impact. (P7)</p>	<p><i>Direct impact</i></p>

4.2. From attitude to action: How attitudes towards CSR affect the choice of influence strategy

So far, the results demonstrate that the Swiss NGO landscape is broadly diversified, inhibiting NGOs with both positive and critical attitudes towards CSR and with distinct impact assessments (i.e., direct and indirect influence). Supporting the assumption that Swiss NGOs are not a homogenous group, the results indicate that the attitude toward CSR and the selection of an influence strategy (collaborative vs. coercive tactics) are correlated. More precisely, coercive strategies (e.g., criticizing firms in public, online petitions) are mainly employed in situations where NGOs are more critical of CSR and where no cross-sector alliances have been

established, while collaborative strategies are used by NGOs that have positive attitudes towards CSR or establish cross-sector alliances with the business sector.

Building upon the following table, this sub-chapter provides a discussion on the different influence strategies applied by NGOs and how attitudes toward CSR determine the ultimate choice of an influence strategy.

Table 4.2. Determinants of influence strategies based on attitudes toward CSR & existence of cross-sector alliances

		Attitude toward CSR	
		Positive	Negative
Cross-sector alliance in place?	Yes	Direct collaboration (high interdependence)	Reserve one's right to be critical
	No	Influence through dialogue	Direct coercion & Pathway strategies

4.2.1. Direct coercion: Defeating the 'Goliath' with 'David' Strategies

Coercive influence strategies are used in various ways and allow Swiss NGOs to put pressure on companies in order to tackle corporate misconducts. The evidence indicates that there is a correlation between the usage of coercive strategies and a more critical attitude towards CSR. Moreover, coercive tactics are especially applied in situations in which companies are already behaving socially irresponsible and where no cross-sector alliances have been created. The organization Bruno Manser Fonds (BMF), for instance, is mainly operating in Malaysia and therefore focuses on firms that behave badly within this specific context. In addition to this, the organization does not enter into cross-sector alliances:

(...), we come across the company, because in this specific context where we work, this company kind of shows up and we see that they do something bad. And then, from there, we try to show, we try to tell them to do better and this depends then on, maybe they can react kind of like openly and be interested in the issue, but it can also happen then that they are really like not interested at all and just try to ignore us basically. (P14)

Consequently, in case of a corporate misconduct, the NGO first employs a more careful approach by initiating a dialogue with the business. If, however, the company is not willing to respond and work on a joint solution, the NGO launches a campaign. When conducting a campaign, the NGO makes use of a combination of information and symbolic tactics to expose the harmful behavior of a company: "(...), you need to make a story, and this you can make then

in different ways, you just try to find points and show how, what is going wrong, basically, what the company is doing wrongly” (P14).

As highlighted by the same interviewee, the voluntary character of CSR makes it easier for companies to neglect certain humanitarian and environmental standards, referring to it as an “inhibitor” in transforming them into more sustainable actors: “(...), I would say maybe all these voluntary CSR and all these voluntary standards are kind of inhibitors, sometimes, (...)” (P14). Hence, the negative attitude towards CSR explains the choice of coercive strategies that are manifested in campaigns.

Similarly, P4 criticizes the non-mandatory character of CSR and stresses the need for more binding CSR regulations. The organization has no cross-sector alliances in place and makes use of coercive strategies, which ultimately supports the assumption that the attitude toward CSR predicts the choice of strategy. When a corporate wrongdoing can be identified, the NGO conducts classical campaigns and denounces a firm in public. Unlike P14, P4 first criticizes a company in public before leading a discussion with them. After detecting several issues within the supply chains of kitchenware producers in China, the organization launched a global campaign in tackling this problem. At first, however, kitchenware manufacturers did not take the allegations seriously enough: “They just always sent us letters written by a juridical person and they didn’t really respond” (P4). In order to increase the chances of impacting the CSR agendas of kitchenware manufacturers, the NGO decided to include the public as an ally, convincing citizens of the corporate misbehavior with a mixture of symbolic and information tactics (Keck & Sikkink, 1998):

We are telling the public ‘Hey, those guys are obviously not interested’. In the end, that’s what we can do. In the end, what you can do, you just communicate on that matter, you say like ‘Look, they don’t even respond, they are just not interested’. (P4)

Hence, through the inclusion of the broad public, the NGO has had a direct impact on the CSR agenda of multiple kitchenware producers. Although Chinese manufacturers responded with re-audits or improved CSR procedures, the interviewee makes clear that the NGO is not yet satisfied with the outcome:

We always say, like, the problem is, they already did that before. They went and audited the companies, and they still couldn’t see what we found. So, I don’t say that we are completely right and they’re completely wrong, but for sure somewhere in the middle,

there was a problem. And they go in with the same measurements again, try to find it and obviously, they don't. (P4)

This shows the opposing views of the NGO and the businesses within the kitchenware sector when it comes to the proper implementation of auditing procedures. The ongoing exchange, however, proved to be effective in convincing the manufacturers to look more carefully into existing issues: "So you see that if you put pressure on them they really, nowadays, if they take it seriously, they actually go back and they go to the company and they talk to the manufacturer and they re-audit the thing" (P4).

Like the two previous mentioned organizations, P10 distances itself from CSR, because it is not binding enough. Since the mission of the NGO is to "be the voice" (P10) of victims or partner movements from the Global South (TAN), the organization publically fights against Swiss multinational corporations. Correspondingly, the NGO has no interest in partnering up with firms, confirming the overarching argument of this sub-chapter (e.g., no cross-sector alliances and critical attitude towards CSR as determinants of usage of coercive strategies). The organization uses coercive strategies whenever a firm acts irresponsibly or violates certain CSR standards. As such, the interviewee reports about an incident where an agribusiness infringed principles of the Fair Labor Association by not re-hiring a previously dismissed employer: "So [multinational company] tries to enforce temporary work, so that people don't have the same rights in those countries, but on the other side, they say 'We are member of the Fair Labor Association'" (P10).

Such cases may explain the organization's critical attitude towards regulations that are on a voluntary basis. Since joining the Fair Labor Association is not mandatory and the adaption of the codes of conduct is voluntary, companies may be tempted to neglect certain standards (Fair Labor Association, 2012).

In general, P10 applies a pathway strategy by inviting victims or members of other anti-globalization movements to Switzerland and giving them the stage to speak in public, e.g. during shareholder assemblies of the multinationals. Since the NGO possesses shares of targeted companies, P10 is entitled to regularly attend shareholder assemblies. This tactic allows them to communicate their concerns in public and it raises the chances of being heard.

Therefore, P10 primarily utilizes information politics to challenge corporate misbehavior and combines various influence chains simultaneously (e.g., information sharing, speaking in public, manifestations etc.), which increases their power and legitimacy to change a company's CSR policy (Zietsma & Winn, 2008). So far, the efforts of the NGO have resulted in a general mind-shift within Swiss politics, making national authorities more aware of existing inequalities.

Pathways strategies seem to be a common approach among NGOs who are targeting companies in a coercive way. P11 uses the Internet to mobilize ordinary citizens as allies, but also to increase the salience of their demands toward corporations. Additionally, the NGO tries to put issues on the agenda of media outlets. Thus, the NGO has realized that a skillful use of different communication channels and the inclusion of allies can increase the power to influence the CSR agenda of firms (Coombs & Holladay, 2015; Zietsma & Winn, 2008).

While the previous mentioned organizations use coercive strategies to impact companies who are behaving socially irresponsible, BFA describe its approach in targeting or influencing the CSR of firms as a two-fold approach, i.e. as a mixture of collaborative and coercive elements. Coercive strategies are mainly used against multinationals with an existing bad reputation or against companies who are not willing to collaborate with the NGO:

So we have differentiate approaches, depending on the willingness of companies or their sectors to collaborate with NGOs. For instance, last year we tried to collaborate with [multinational company], on child labor in Uganda, but they rejected our offer or ehm, and denied having had child labor in their supply chain, now we are publishing a report on them. But if the company would have collaborated with us, then we would not have published any report on them. (P9)

Finally, NGOs that take a more coercive approach in targeting companies describe the Internet and the media as facilitators in the process of raising awareness of corporate misbehaviors and of putting pressure on companies. The Internet is especially useful when it comes to contacting people who are directly affected by the misconducts of a company and finding like-minded people for support. Furthermore, the usage of various online communication channels, such as social media, e-mails, online petitions etc., can enhance a company's willingness to align with certain CSR standards (Coombs & Holladay, 2015):

So we, we try to encourage the company to change its behavior by exercising a public pressure on it with media reports, media releases, media conferences and so on. And then we also work with, eh, sometimes we use petitions or emails, you know on the Internet you can just send a letter on email, by just clicking on a platform and then you can send an email to the CEO of [retail company], asking him to stop funding land grabbing companies, for instance. (P9)

To sum up, NGOs have developed a rich repertoire of coercive tactics to influence the CSR or sustainability agendas of businesses, ranging from information tactics (e.g., exposing malpractices online or in public) to pathway strategies (e.g., working with allies, such as victims or more powerful institutions). The examples indicate that coercive tactics are especially employed in situations in which companies are behaving socially irresponsible and where no cross-sector alliances have been established. At the same time, these strategies are mainly applied by NGOs who are not convinced of the effectiveness of the CSR concept in furthering sustainable development. Underlying co-optation mechanisms (see BFA), however, can hold NGOs back from using coercive tactics in situations where such tactics would have a bigger impact on their mission achievement.

4.2.2. Collaborative Strategies: 'It's only together that we can achieve the sustainable development goals'

The second camp of NGOs utilizes collaborative strategies that can range from established cross-sector partnerships to roundtables where NGOs and corporations sit together and discuss certain issues in a non-coercive manner. The results not only confirm that collaborative strategies are mainly put in action by NGOs who have a more positive attitude towards CSR and characterize firms as the main drivers of change, but also provide evidence how NGOs justify cross-sector alliances from a CSR perspective. It needs to be noted, however, that Biovision presents an exception: Although the organization is more critical of the non-binding character of CSR, the usage of collaborative tactics is predominant:

I mean it's, yeah, I would say just writing a CSR report, that's, eh, yesterday's story, but now with the Agenda 2030 you have to walk the talk and really bring sustainability into your value chains, into the providers, into clients and so on, and eh yeah, make it sustainable. (P8)

Hence, the NGO does not fit the overarching line of argument (e.g., being less critical of CSR leads to the application of collaborative strategies) of this chapter. Nevertheless, the interviewee highlights the importance of collaborative strategies when it comes to convincing firms to act more responsible and align with certain CSR guidelines, while denouncing the usefulness of coercive tactics:

That's obviously the approach of taking, you know, taking criticism to a public level and it has not worked in the past really, I mean those mergers are happening, business

practices are happening. So of course, once in a while it's good to criticize, but I think you can reach more with dialogue and through dialogue make a constructive criticism, saying, you know, 'In this particular case we think you're having a problem in human rights or you're having a problem with the environment, but we can help you to, you know, work on it and improve the business case or improve the particular project in a developing country', because very often they lack the expertise for that. Business people are not NGO workers, and NGO workers are not business people, so I think we can learn from each other and I also think NGOs can learn from the business sector. (P8)

According to this statement, the impetus for applying collaborative strategies emerges from the potential knowledge transfer. In this sense, the interviewee justifies the application of a collaborative approach by presenting the NGO as an expert in a specific area and thus as a CSR enabler. P12 explicitly mentions how specific NGO expertise can facilitate the CSR of a business and therefore foster sustainable development:

I think facilitators are the fact that we can provide expertise, that we can come in and kind of support, I mean ultimately it's the company that supports our cause, however, we can support the company in becoming, having a voice, ehm, also, improving certain aspects of how they work. We can also facilitate their CSR basically. (P12)

Hence, NGOs view cross-sector alliances as a viable way to influence the CSR or sustainability agendas of businesses through knowledge transfer. This is especially important because companies are "not experts on child protection, they are not experts on climate change or biodiversity" (P1).

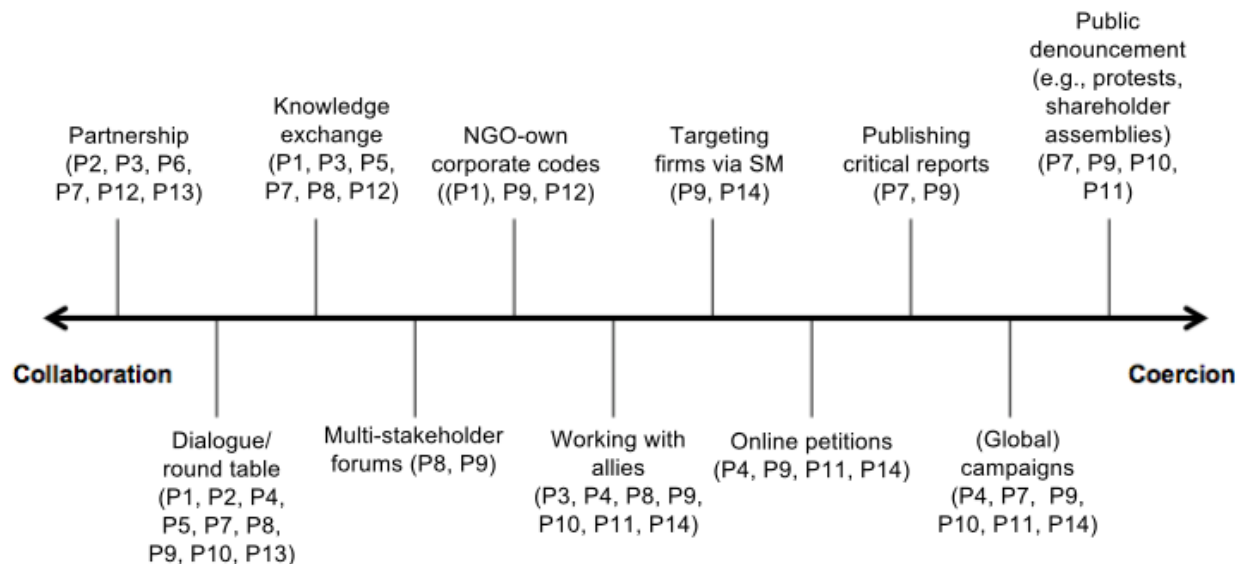
When employing a more collaborative approach, there needs to be willingness from both sides to sit together and find joint solutions. From an NGO perspective, this requires that they don't think of companies as "the evils" (P7) and believe in their efforts of becoming more sustainable. The willingness to find joint solutions regarding CSR, however, also depends on whether both actors would get a benefit out of it: "(...) if both partners see a win-win in a long-term partnership, then it's, it comes from both sides and from that point there is, on a long term, there is an advantage" (P13). Especially firms have to recognize that they can benefit from NGOs' competencies regarding CSR (Jonker & Nijhof, 2006). In the end, it all boils down to whether both actors perceive each other as trustworthy or not:

If you trust each other, you know if I know that this person, let's say, from [multinational company] or [retail company] has at least good intentions, but of course has institutional constraints and so on, I mean then at least you can start working with each other. I obviously hope the same vice versa, that the persons knows that I'm from an NGO, but I'm interested in finding pragmatic solutions to tackle the problems that we have in this world. (P8)

To conclude, the usage of collaborative strategies reflects the increased willingness of NGOs to work with the business sector. NGOs realize that working together with businesses can result in a win-win situation for both parties and facilitate their influence on CSR policies (Wootliff & Deri, 2011). Simultaneously, the fact that NGOs can offer certain benefits, such as a higher credibility or expertise in terms of CSR, increases the probability of a company agreeing to enter into a long-term partnership with an NGO, which allows NGOs to have a direct impact on the CSR agenda of a firm. The WWF, for instance, has established intense relationships with corporations (Rondinelli & London, 2003), meaning that the organization has a direct impact on their CSR by setting certain targets with them (e.g., reduction of CO2 emissions). Therefore, collaborative strategies allow NGOs to enter into more intense discussions with firms and increase the probability of influencing their CSR agendas.

Building on these findings, the influence strategies applied by Swiss NGOs can be conceptualized along a **collaboration-coercion continuum** that includes eleven influence tactics (see Figure 4.2.2.).

Figure 4.2.2. Continuum of influence strategies



The continuum shows overlaps, as some NGOs make use of both coercive and collaborative tactics. P9, for instance, establishes dialogues with firms, while also publishing critical reports if needed:

We also have dialogues with companies like with [company], even if we publish critical reports on [company], we several times try to dialogue with them and to negotiate improvement measures on the ground. So we have, and then if we see we can't have, eh, let's say, meaningful improvements, then we publish critical reports. (P9)

At first, this seems to contradict the argument that NGOs' attitudes towards CSR can be seen as the main explanation factor for the choice of either coercive or collaborative tactics. Nevertheless, in P9's case, coercive strategies were the most often mentioned tactics, whereas collaborative strategies are only used in situations where no corporate misbehavior can be identified and/or the business is willing to adapt to the NGO's demands.

4.3. Challenges for NGOs to work within CSR sector

During the process of influencing the CSR agenda of firms, Swiss NGOs are confronted with several challenges. First, partnership NGOs are facing increasing pressures regarding their own long-term impact, as they enter into direct alliances with businesses. Moreover, partnerships NGOs risk becoming subject to co-optation, especially when corporate partners perceive CSR as a sole strategic tool. As Swiss partnership NGOs are well aware of the potential challenges, they have created ways to mitigate those risks.

Second, contextual and organizational constraints affect NGOs' ability to impact the CSR agendas. The fact that Switzerland is a country with non-binding CSR regulations is specially criticized by the camp with a critical attitude towards CSR. Organizational constraints refer to firms' unwillingness to collaborate with an NGO or to the low priority given to CSR by companies. Those constraints can diminish opportunities for NGO influence and therefore affect NGOs' perception of being influential CSR actors.

4.3.1. 'It's a constant fight': Challenges for partnership NGOs

The usage of collaborative strategies reflects the increased willingness of NGOs to work in unison with the business sector. NGOs realize that working together with businesses can result in a win-win situation for both parties and facilitate their influence on CSR policies (Woolliff & Deri, 2011). At the same time, partnerships with firms can pose serious threats to NGOs'

legitimacy, especially when businesses are pursuing a strategic approach to CSR (Baur & Schmitz, 2012):

Well the value for the NGO is to get money from the company, this would be the value, but the danger is that you are bound to this company very closely, you can't criticize the company if you think that it behaves in a wrong manner, and there is the risk, that the reputation of the NGO is used for greenwashing purposes of the company. (P9)

Furthermore, collaborative strategies can lead to co-optation, as they are "meant to reduce the noise" (P11) and NGOs can lose sight of their real mission (Baur & Schmitz, 2012). This is especially problematic when NGOs such as P5 regard cross-sector alliances as a source of funding: "Ehm...we sought for collaborations, obviously mainly in the financial term ((laughs))" (P5). Moreover, this prevents the NGO from effectively influencing the CSR of the company. In support of this argument, P11 shares an example of a potential co-optation process that occurred during a collaboration attempt between Greenpeace and a Swiss business:

I remember, couple of years ago, there was a campaign about clean outdoor clothing production and Greenpeace attacked [retail company] over it, because they had too much toxics in there, and it was all over the media and this and that, and then [retail company] said 'Common, let's sit down and we do a round table'. But, you have to stop your public attacks and actions for that time being, and so they went for that and after 2, 3 weeks the whole momentum was gone, because the public interest, the public pressure wasn't maintained, because they were having meetings like you and I do, and basically that's something where I suggest to be quite careful, because you invest a lot in getting that momentum and then you go and meet for two weeks and you're dead again. (P11)

In general, concerns related to co-optation are mainly expressed by NGOs with a critical attitude, which is why this group of NGOs is against the creation of partnerships with corporations: "(...), there's the risk that you're just being, you would be abused as kind of fig leaf, so you would just help them to greenwash their, their practices and not really bring change" (P14). This does not mean, however, that the other camp (i.e., positive attitudes towards CSR and usage of collaborative strategies) is not aware of the potential challenges related to collaborative tactics, especially when entering partnerships. Seven NGOs that work with companies through partnerships or the establishment of a framework for dialogue know that businesses can gain reputational benefits out of communicating this collaboration. In other

words, there is a clear correlation between the usage of collaborative strategies and awareness of reputational gains that firms can acquire through that. P6, for example, points out competitive advantages that firms can get out of collaborating with an NGO as follows:

If companies organize activities for their customers and say 'We participate in a project for water supply, like well construction', for instance, then they can promote this in terms of 'We're showing the public that we are committed and that our customers are part of this'. So is there a better way for a company to distinguish itself from the competition than by saying 'Our products additionally support field projects'. (P6)

Similarly, P1 indicates the "huge credibility" firms can ensure when working with established and "trusted" NGOs. Although NGOs are well aware of the fact that some firms may use CSR for strategic reasons and that this may negatively affect their own reputation, they still enter into partnerships. This then poses the question, how they defend the creation of partnerships and how they **resist co-optation**? Being able to answer these questions is crucial, "because the watchdog cannot be the consultant in the same time" (P11). Staying aware of potential greenwashing activities and keeping a certain distance is crucial, if NGOs do not want to be declared as betrayers of their own mission (Argenti, 2004).

One way of overcoming potential pitfalls of partnerships is through the proper implementation of due diligence. The majority of the NGOs that create cross-sector alliances report about a due diligence process or the existence of a list with "risk sectors", excluding certain sectors (e.g., tobacco, weapons industry, alcohol etc.) as potential partners. Due diligence is an effective risk mitigation tool because it minimizes the probability of getting criticized for partnering up with specific corporate partners (e.g., firm that behaves irresponsible):

(...), we apply a very solid due diligence process when we work with corporates. So before we even start negotiations with a company, we know very well what a company does and who sits behind it, who owns it, how they have been in the media, so that we have a very clear picture, and then we search a transparent, an open dialogue right from the beginning. (P12)

Next to conducting due diligence, the formulation of mutually acceptable procedures or the definition of clear targets during a partnership (Rondinelli & London, 2003) can facilitate NGOs' ability to effectively impact CSR. WWF, for instance, sets clear goals with companies, leaving it up to them if they will be criticized or not. Consequently, this strategy does not deprive

the NGO of the right to criticize a corporate partner, which ultimately reduces the risk of being co-opted:

I mean, within the partnership, we try to achieve it with making our joint goals public, so saying 'Ok, we have agreed that [retail company] reduces their CO2 footprint by X percent within the next years', and if they're not living up to their commitments, then, again, we have the right to criticize them. (P7)

In general, NGOs highlight the value of cross-sector partnerships in furthering the CSR agenda of corporations by emphasizing how the positive aspects (e.g., direct impact on CSR) outweigh the potential negative outcomes (e.g., co-optation).

Although partnership NGOs are convinced of the value of cross-sector alliances in furthering sustainable development (e.g., direct exchange with corporate partners equals bigger impact on CSR), skeptics will always raise concerns: "I mean we're trying our best to mitigate that, ehm, but there will always be some levels of disapproval of people that think that WWF should not work with corporates [sic]" (P7). As stressed by one of the interviewees, the best way to keep the critics quiet is through a plausible explanation of why collaborating with the private sector is more effective than just criticizing them:

(...), I mean, there are always people who criticize you, so it's always a risk that you take, but I think if you choose your partners wisely and if you are able to explain to someone why you have chosen a certain partner and why you believe that a partnership is benefiting both parties, then I think you should be able to stand behind it. (P3)

Such explanations seem plausible at first glance, but they can also become subject to criticism, especially when considering that NGOs are increasingly facing public scrutiny for their activities (Baur & Schmitz, 2012): "I think, the public in general is more critical about the roles of NGOs and how the money is spent. The last couple of years has seen a rise of critics, especially development aid in Africa [sic]" (P5). By addressing partnerships as a "normal thing to do", NGOs' attempt of trying to solve the issue of potential criticism seems like an easy way out.

The results demonstrate that Swiss partnership NGOs are well aware of the risks that can arise when partnering up with firms that perceive CSR as a sole marketing tool. As NGOs have to cope with the increasing criticism, they found ways to mitigate potential risks and resist co-optation (e.g., due diligence, integrate partnerships into core mission statement etc.).

4.3.2. 'The environment doesn't send you an invoice': How contextual constraints impact NGOs' ability to impact CSR

As pointed out in the previous chapter, being an NGO in Switzerland, especially partnership NGO is fuelled with challenges (e.g., increasing critique, legitimacy threats etc.) that can negatively affect NGOs' ability to influence CSR. Next to challenges related to the usage of collaborative strategies, contextual constraints can keep NGOs from impacting the sustainability agendas. Since there are no binding CSR regulations in Switzerland, it is the camp with the critical attitude towards CRS that refers to the Swiss context as an inhibitor to further sustainable development. According to P9, the Swiss context does not offer the best conditions for NGOs to effectively impact companies (Arenas et al., 2009), because Swiss authorities are rather against the implementation of more binding CSR regulations:

Actually, we almost passed a law, it was in March in 2016, requesting companies to introduce human rights' due diligence and the law was passed, was accepted by the parliament, but then the parliament voted again a few hours later and rejected it. And this happened only one and a half month before we launched our Responsible Business Initiative. This was a sign that we could not go through the Swiss parliament and right now, we are trying to make the Swiss voters vote on this initiative. (P9)

Hence, before launching the Responsible Business Initiative, the NGO was dealing with several setbacks (e.g., rejection by the government). The interviewee does not provide a possible explanation for the rejection by the Swiss parliament, but points out the importance of the Swiss population in supporting the Responsible Business Initiative and ultimately in driving the CSR agendas of firms. This approach signalizes the NGO's low faith in the Swiss government's ability to create a favorable environment for sustainable development.

Next to the national context, interviewees describe that the context in foreign countries can become an inhibitor in impacting the CSR agenda. For example, when BMF was working in the Malaysian state of Sarawak to advocate against the building of new dams, the Malaysian government accused the NGO of using the hopelessness of the Malaysian people while pursuing a hidden agenda:

(...), we had to justify a lot what we do in the Malaysian context, because they really aggressively attacked us and that we have a hidden agenda, that we just wanna make money out of the [unintelligible] of people and things like that. I would say that's kind of

the most aggressive attacks that we have had, from the Malaysian or from the Sarawak government, more specifically, but also from the Malaysian government [sic]. (P14)

It is possible that NGOs are faced with accusations of having a hidden agenda, especially when being essentially “anti-business” (Arenas et al., 2009, p. 185). According to the interviewee, the trigger for these accusations was the unharmonious relationship with the government of Sarawak and the former chief minister’s lack of interest in sustainability issues. In this case, it seems that the government used the allegations as a political tactic to weaken the opponent, in this case the NGO.

To sum up, contextual factors can ideally favor or, as shown above, also inhibit the ability of NGOs to effectively impact the CSR agendas. Contextual constraints were mainly expressed by NGOs who are more critical of CSR and demand for legally binding CSR regulations (e.g., Responsible Business Initiative). NGOs that have cross-sector alliances in place, are less critical of the Swiss or foreign contexts and do not refer to them as inhibitors: “I think that the Swiss government has good relations to Swiss businesses and that the government does a lot with regards to awareness-raising” (P1). Therefore, there is a close correlation between the assessment of contextual constraints and attitude towards CSR.

4.3.2. CSR not ‘on the top of the agenda of a company’: Organizational constraints

Next to contextual constraints, organizational factors, e.g., companies’ unwillingness to partner up, organizational structure within firm, CSR not as a corporation’s primary goal etc., can affect NGOs’ ability to influence the CSR agendas. This chapter highlights the most salient organizational constraints.

The organizational structure (e.g., priority given to CSR within firm) can be decisive when intending to influence the CSR agenda of a business:

And also, then, CSR is generally a topic in larger corporations, so the people running the programs, trying to set that up, I think they genuinely want change, but in the power structure of their organization I think they’re generally not at a high level and so other market requirements and investor interests would often have more weight in decision making process. (P11)

As such, the CSR departments are still perceived as having little influence in corporate decision-making processes. Therefore, NGOs need to find the right contact persons in a

company that can transmit the importance of CSR to the management board. As reported by an interviewee, the “right” contact person, however, is also no guarantee for success, because a hierarchical structure can slow down or even stop the process of transmitting a demand to the management level entirely: “Once there was an employer who had an idea and this idea went up and up in the organization. Although this idea was pretty good, it got held back at a certain organizational level” (P6). Eventually, NGOs may perceive themselves as the weaker link when approaching firms in a collaborative or coercive manner (Parker, 2003). As a result of the failed attempt to get to the management board, P6 expresses concerns of NGOs “not being valued enough” (P6). Such perceived organizational differences could increase the distrust between both parties and inhibit the process of creating joint solutions for sustainable development (Rondinelli & London, 2003).

Another inhibiting factor relates to an NGO’s small size or missing brand awareness. The advocacy NGO P11, for example, attributes its low impact on the CSR agenda of firms to low brand recognition. Similarly, P1 suggests that NGO size and success rate in influencing the CSR of corporations that are behaving irresponsibly are correlated. More specifically, its small size keeps P1 from affecting the CSR agenda of bigger firms that are violating human rights:

(...) if we would be a bigger NGO, we might have some influence on the company and could work with them, but in our position we would simply prefer not working with someone who is not following human rights in countries where we are working. (P1)

Interestingly, many NGOs also refer to themselves as inhibitors to impact the CSR agenda, which is mainly due to a lack of knowledge of the business world and the failure in establishing a common non-technical language: “So, I think it’s mainly an NGO internal issue, they do not have the knowledge, they don’t know how to work with the private sector, they do not understand the private sector, (...)” (P1). This, however, is not a general accepted view among NGOs: „(...) then I have to say that the business world doesn’t understand the NGO world either. I mean the point is, they have to make money, yes, but we have to fight for our causes as well“ (P14). This could be interpreted as a self-defense mechanism, since many NGOs are increasingly facing pressures regarding their own long-term impact (Abouassi & Trent, 2016).

Furthermore, an inhibiting factor to influence the CSR agenda can be if companies are simply not concerned with CSR or do not refer to it as a key priority: “So first of all, their interest is in getting sustainable when it comes to income and if they have generated profit and if they have a profit, they may think about further engagement” (P2). Organizations like P4 or P2 understand that the business sector’s primary concern is profit maximization, but they do expect

firms to generate income in a responsible manner: “Of course it’s about profit, but it’s not only about your own profit, so you should generate profit without doing any harm, actually, that’s probably the main goal” (P2).

Additionally, costs can be a constraint for companies to invest in CSR and consequently in more sustainable business practices (Coombs & Holladay, 2015): “(...) the thing is, the more they invest here, they don’t have it somewhere else, and that can result in a competitive disadvantage. But they also have a competitive advantage by telling that they are doing something” (P4). The interviewee’s assumption that companies have to be aware of this competitive advantage in order to invest in CSR, is consistent with Coomb’s (2012) argumentation.

In the end, all these constraints related to organizational factors can either increase or hamper NGOs’ ability to impact the CSR of a firm. Both camps acknowledge that corporations might not treat CSR as a primary goal. It is especially interesting that NGOs who are actually in favor of CSR perceive firms’ low interest in CSR as an inhibitor: “Also the fact that CSR might not necessarily be on the top of the agenda of a company” (P12).

5. Conclusion

This Master thesis embarked from the assertion that both consumers and NGOs expect businesses to address social and environmental issues (Cone Communications, 2015) and that especially the not-for-profit sector plays a crucial role in driving the CSR or sustainability agenda of companies (Arenas et al., 2009; Dempsey, 2011; Thijssens et al., 2015). Although NGOs are increasingly being characterized as crucial actors within the CSR context and in promoting the maxim of “the business of business is everyone’s business” (Wootliff & Deri, 2001, p. 162), the process through which NGOs influence the formulation of CSR standards is understudied (Doh & Guay, 2004). Due to the growing impact of NGOs on corporate codes and the lack of existing literature on how the not-for-profit sector drives the CSR of firms, the qualitative research aimed to determine how NGOs perceive their roles(s) in influencing CSR, what kind of influence strategies they apply (e.g., collaborative vs. coercive strategies), and which challenges they face during this process.

The findings firstly demonstrate that NGOs have a clear understanding of their own limitations (e.g., limited impact on CSR, contextual constraints), which is why they possess a wide range of strategies to influence the CSR agenda of companies, ranging from collaborative strategies, such as cross-sector alliances or roundtables, to coercive tactics, such as manifestations and skillful implementation of (global) campaigns (Frooman & Murrell, 2005). Moreover, there is a clear correlation between the usage of influence strategies and NGOs’ attitudes toward CSR. The results show that coercive strategies are mainly applied by NGOs that are critical of CSR and therefore consider it as their duty to impose checks on the CSR activities of businesses. Simultaneously, coercive strategies are used in situations in which firms operate in a socially irresponsible manner and where no cross-sector alliances have been created. NGOs who take quite the opposite view, i.e., less critical attitude toward CSR, make use of collaborative strategies to impact the CSR of businesses. Thus, the connections found between the employed type of strategy and attitude toward CSR contribute to existing academic research on stakeholder influence strategies, as most research so far has put emphasis on the characterization of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Thijssens et al., 2015). The identified determinants of influence strategies based on attitudes towards CSR and the existence of cross-sector alliances provide a framework to predict how NGOs try to impact CSR agendas, and therefore extend Frooman’s (1999) typology of relationships and strategies (Table 2.2.).

All in all, the results indicate that both types of strategies can drive the CSR agendas of firms, underlying the increasing involvement of NGOs in the definition and shaping of CSR (Arenas et al., 2009). Nevertheless, differences between the two main camps (e.g., coercive vs. collaborative tactics) can be found in the usage of pathways strategies, i.e., the inclusion of allies

to impact the CSR (Frooman & Murrell, 2005). First, the research provides evidence that there is a correlation between a critical attitude toward CSR and/or coercive approach, and the inclusion of the wider public (e.g., in campaigning). The inclusion of ordinary citizens allows NGOs to exert greater pressure on companies (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This does not mean, however, that the other group of NGOs (i.e., collaborative approach) does not acknowledge the importance of the public in furthering the CSR of firms. The difference is that NGOs who make use of non-coercive tactics do not actively seek to include ordinary citizens. Second, NGOs that are more critical of the voluntary character of CSR standards refer to national authorities (e.g., government) as crucial allies in influencing the CSR of firms, which is in contrast to the assumption of a general decline of governmental involvement in the shaping of CSR (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). In general, the impact of NGOs on the national and international policy levels can be evaluated as quite high. Hence, next to having a direct impact on the CSR or sustainability agendas, NGOs are successful in creating policy dialogues and in raising awareness among national authorities about corporate malpractices or certain sustainability issues.

Even though the results indicate NGO influence on the sustainability agendas of corporations, it is essential to acknowledge that existing contextual and organizational constraints can inhibit NGOs' ability to effectively impact CSR (Arenas et al., 2009). Contextual constraints were mainly reported by NGOs that have a critical attitude toward CSR and request legally binding CSR standards, as opposed to NGOs that have cross-sector alliances in place and are less critical of the voluntary character of CSR. Since the Swiss government is rather against the implementation of more binding CSR regulations, the Swiss context presents a constraint for NGOs to effectively influence CSR (Arenas et al., 2009). Organizational constraints, such as firm's low interest in pursuing "real CSR" (P1), are still omnipresent, and can affect NGOs' ability to impact CSR and therefore NGOs' perception of being influential CSR actors. Aware of the fact that companies' response can be constrained by several organizational factors (Coombs & Holladay, 2015), NGOs employ strategies that enhance their chances of being perceived as salient enough (Mitchell et al., 1997).

When trying to act as CSR actors, NGOs can risk being co-opted, especially when they establish cross-sector alliances with businesses (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Parker, 2003). Interestingly, NGOs that apply collaborative strategies are well aware of the fact that businesses may pursue CSR for strategic reasons and still, they are entering into cross-sector alliances with them. Therefore the question arises, how certain NGOs justify cross-sector alliances from a CSR perspective. As partnership NGOs are fully aware of potential challenges and know that they may be co-opted, they have found ways to mitigate the risks, and to balance between being an influential CSR actor and remaining independent. NGOs describe the usage of collaborative

strategies as a viable way to impact CSR, as it allows them to get into direct exchange with corporations and provide them with specific CSR knowledge (e.g., how to align business activities with SDGs etc.). Hence, NGOs view firms as necessary partners to further sustainable development (Austin, 2000; Yaziji & Doh, 2009). This does not mean that the definition and shaping of CSR is solely a task of NGOs, but rather a shared responsibility between the private sector and NGOs (DeBakker, 2012). Certain types of relationships, however, such as partnering up for funding reasons, are hampering NGOs' ability to influence the CSR agenda of businesses (in line with Baur & Schmitz, 2012).

5.1. Practical implications

Due to the growing contemporary complexities of corporate globalization as well as NGO impact on the CSR agenda of corporations, this research also aimed to offer insights for practitioners, especially for NGO professionals, on how to effectively influence sustainability agendas and on how to manage potential pitfalls that can occur when attempting to impact the CSR agenda of firms. Given the fact that NGOs face contextual constraints, these kinds of recommendations are becoming even more important.

Contrary to the assumption that cross-sector alliances are often viewed as magic bullet for sustainable development, the results indicate that both collaborative and coercive strategies can result in a direct impact on the CSR agendas of corporations. Hence, since NGOs do not represent a homogenous group, different influence strategies can lead to different success stories. It has to be noted, however, that collaborative strategies are increasingly fraught with challenges, leading to such questions as: Can cross-sector alliances or even CSR be seen as the final solution to the global challenges nowadays? How can an NGO manage to stay focused on its main mission, while accepting funding from corporates? All these questions require a clear response by the NGO sector, as it can determine the future role of NGOs as CSR actors in the transformation process (Parker, 2003). In this context, statements like "I doubt that NGOs per se are more sustainable than companies" (P2), can only reinforce existing criticism against the NGO sector. In the end, NGOs need to be aware of potential greenwashers and retain their right to criticize firms (especially when applying collaborative strategies), if they do not want to be accused of pursuing a hidden agenda.

Another recommendation that refers to the usage of collaborative strategies underlines the need for establishing cross-sector alliances that ensure long-term impact (e.g., impact on CSR). Partnerships or collaborative tactics that are based on financial considerations will only result in limited impact on the sustainability agendas.

Lastly, although the predefinition of NGO policy frameworks (e.g., Children's Rights and Business principles, Fair Trade labels etc.) can facilitate the process of influencing the CSR agenda of corporations, a predefined set of CSR policies is no precondition for actual NGO impact.

5.2. Limitations

In general, this research offered valuable insights, inter alia, in how Swiss NGOs assess certain influence strategies to impact the CSR or sustainability agendas of firms and potential challenges that can occur during this process (e.g., co-optation).

Although conducted with high accuracy, the research presents several limitations that need to be addressed. First, the subjective approach in qualitative research has to be noted as a constraint, as the interviewer can be seen as one of the main (next to the Interview Guide) research instruments. The problem of interviewer bias was avoided by having a semi-structured interview format and therefore asking similar questions to all participants. Nevertheless, given the personal interest in the topic as result of a former internship at the Swiss government, it proved to be difficult to keep a certain professional distance and to refrain from sharing personal opinions.

Second, the sample consisted of fourteen interviewees, which is in accordance with the ESHCC methodological guidelines, but can still be considered as a limitation. Ideally, the sample should include a higher number of participants, which is needed to ensure saturation. Next, even though the interviews were conducted with representatives from NGOs with various organizational missions (e.g., humanitarian relief, support of socioeconomically deprived people, environmental protection etc.), there were only two NGOs that specifically target the private sector. Therefore the question arises, if only NGOs that particularly focus in business should have been included in the research.

Moreover, the fact that professionals employed in corporations that collaborate with NGOs or that have been addressed during an NGO campaign were not part of the research, can also be named as a limitation. Consequently, insights referring to business' perception of NGOs (e.g., How would a company assess the benefits of working with your organization to further their CSR or sustainability ambitions? etc.) are based on NGO perception.

Lastly, great caution had to be taken not to include too many statements of the few "loud voices" or interviewees who seemed to have stronger opinions than other NGO professionals. The overrepresentation of certain interviewees was avoided by a well-balanced selection of statements.

5.3. Recommendations for future research

This research has illustrated the growing significance of NGOs as key CSR actors within efforts to shape and drive the CSR agenda of companies as well as to criticize businesses' non-compliance with certain social and environmental standards. The advent of social media and cheap communication has transformed the ways in which NGOs can operate and target companies. Social media, for instance, can increase the salience of NGOs and the visibility of a challenged corporate misbehavior (e.g., Detox campaign against manufacturers). Simultaneously, the business sector has become more adept at responding to NGO accusations, e.g., response through the use of accommodation, adaptation, rejection or redemption strategies (Coombs, 2010). Hence, in order to elicit a response by businesses, NGO campaigns have to be perceived by managers or corporate executives as relevant and urgent enough (Mitchell et al., 1997). As stated before, insights referring to firms' perception of NGOs are based on the opinion of NGO professionals. Thus, future research may incorporate the business perspective to understand how companies make sense of NGO campaigns. For example, when are NGO demands and/or campaigns perceived as salient enough? What kind of strategies are businesses using in responding or ignoring certain demands? These kinds of questions may reveal why some NGO campaigns have been successful in driving the CSR agenda of firms and others not.

A related concern refers to gaining a better understanding of how NGOs include ordinary citizens to exert greater leverage over companies and/or to increase the urgency, power and legitimacy of certain actions (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Mitchell et al., 1997). This research revealed that ordinary citizens are mainly involved in media campaigns that are conducted by advocacy NGOs or NGOs who apply coercive strategies. Moreover, the findings focus on NGOs with various organizational missions and different target groups (e.g., deprived children, animals, business sector etc.). Thus, future research may investigate how advocacy NGOs or NGOs that specifically target the business sector include the wider public to target irresponsible corporations or impact their sustainability agenda.

Furthermore, as the research focused on the Swiss context and the results highlighted that contextual constraints can inhibit NGOs' ability to effectively influence the CSR agenda of businesses (e.g., no binding CSR regulations implemented yet) (Arenas et al., 2009), further studies should consider incorporating a more diverse sample, e.g., NGOs located in Asian or African countries. Such a study would therefore offer new insights on possible differences that can be explained through contextual factors. On the other hand, the Swiss context could be explored in more depth by expanding the sample with NGOs that are more critical of the non-mandatory character of CSR and/or support the Responsible Business Initiative. This would

provide new insights into why Swiss NGOs perceive the Swiss context as an inhibitor in driving the CSR of firms and how the introduction of legally binding CSR regulations could foster sustainable development.

Although there is evidence that NGOs play a crucial role in driving the CSR agenda of businesses, there is little knowledge on how and whether the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as a framework in guiding corporations' CSR agendas. This is especially due to the fact that the 2030 Agenda was only recently launched in 2015, and that some companies are still struggling to define their roles in achieving the SDGs (e.g., Which goals to focus on?). Future studies on NGO influence on CSR, however, should take the 2030 Agenda into account, as it encourages the business and not-for-profit sector to work in unison when it comes to tackling global challenges.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Interviewee:

Organization:

Function:

Date and Time:

Location:

Welcoming; short introduction of who I am and what the purpose of this first interview is

My name is Elena Tankovski and I am a Master student at Erasmus University Rotterdam, studying Media and Business at the Erasmus School for History, Culture and Communication. My Master Thesis investigates the multifaceted ways in which Swiss NGOs are influencing the sustainability agenda of firms, which is why I would like to find out more about your organizations' strategies to influence firm behavior and challenges that can occur.

As I mentioned in the consent form I provided you with, I would like to audio record and transcribe this interview for the following analysis, if you do not mind. [Start recording if consent is given].

I would like to stress again the following points that you can find in your copy of the consent form I gave to you earlier:

- Please note that the interview will be anonymized and the interview and its results will only be used for the purpose of this thesis.
- I am going to ask you open questions on how Swiss NGOs as CSR actors perceive their role in influencing a corporations' sustainability agenda; what strategies of influence NGOs use to influence a firm's sustainability agenda; and what kind of challenges can occur during this process.

If you feel uncomfortable about answering a certain question, please feel free to deny the answer at any time during the interview.

Is there anything else you would like to know or do you have any questions for me before we begin with the interview?

➤ **Introduction (Icebreaker) & setting the sustainability context**

1. Please tell me about yourself and your role in [NGO's name].

- How long have you been working for this organization?
- How would you describe your role within the team?
- What made you join this organization (or work in the NGO sector)?

2. When you think about the role of NGOs in Swiss society, and your organization in particular, what have been the decisive developments in the last few years?

- How has your role(s) changed, if at all? Please share some examples in support of your answer.

➤ **CSR influencers**

Swiss Context

3. Do you see interest among Swiss corporations to pursuing sustainability or CSR?

- What do you believe to be the key motivation factors and drivers for corporations' interest in pursuing sustainability or CSR?

CSR impact

4. Do you see NGOs having an influential role in furthering the CSR or sustainability agenda?

How do you see your role in terms of furthering the CSR or sustainability agenda?

- Can you recall an experience in which your organization had an impact on a Swiss corporation's CSR or sustainability agenda?
- If case shared: Are u still monitoring or accompanying the corporations CSR efforts?
- How would you assess the impact of Swiss NGOs on the CSR or sustainability agenda of multinationals, headquartered in other contexts?
- More specifically, how would you assess the impact your organization has on multinationals that are situated abroad? Can you share an experience where your organization had an impact on the CSR or sustainability agenda of a multinational?

5. Can you share some experiences of yours where you have had an impact on the policy level?

- How would you assess the government's role in furthering CSR?

6. What would you say are facilitators and inhibitors for NGOs' effective functioning with regard to CSR? In other words, are there certain institutional factors that both help and impede your work?

- What has to change? (e.g., legislations, etc.)

CSR topics and understanding of concept

7. Are you proposing certain topics actively? And if yes, which ones (e.g. environmental, social etc.)?

- How do you decide what agenda (e.g. global, national framework) you want to focus on?

8. In your own words, how would you define CSR? What are the manifestations of CSR or sustainability for you?

- What is the value of CSR for wider society (for example, marginalized groups)?
- To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statement: "CSR is the answer to all of our problems"? Please elaborate.
- How would you define socially irresponsible behavior?

➤ NGO influence strategies

9. How would you describe your approach toward (working with or against) business? In what ways are you trying to influence a company's CSR agenda?

- How do you make sure that a company responds to your claims?
- Do you work together with other institutions (e.g., international organizations, governments etc.) during this process?
- Earlier, you mentioned a case (question 4) – can you explain in more detail how you targeted the company? (e.g., specific tactics used, social media etc.)
- What was your initial relationship with this company like?
- How does your relationship with this company look like now?

10. How do you usually target a corporation for its irresponsible behavior?

- Do you have certain guidelines/frameworks in place that state how you should approach a firm in case of an irresponsible behavior?
- To what extent are ordinary citizens involved in the process of addressing irresponsible behavior? Do you actively include them in your campaign?

11. How would you describe your relationship with business / corporate partners here in Switzerland?

- Has it always been this way?
- If not, what has changed?

12. How would a company assess the benefits of working with your organization to further their CSR or sustainability ambitions? How would the corporation define your role in furthering their sustainability agenda?

- What are the main competencies that you can offer to a corporation? To what extent do corporations (or your partners) benefit from your competencies?

13. Do you have corporate partnerships in place?

IF YES:

- What is the value of cross-sector partnerships regarding to CSR or sustainable development?
- How would you describe your relationships with your partners?
- Can you share examples of the work you have done in trying to influence a company's CSR agenda by partnering up?
- Why was this partnership successful?

IF NO:

- How do you assess the value of cross-sector partnerships regarding to CSR or sustainable development, when thinking about NGOs in Swiss society?
- Would you consider entering a partnership with a company?

14. What effect has digitalization had on your way of targeting companies?

- How would you assess the overall role of social media to address irresponsible behavior of corporations?
- Do you use social media to target corporations? If yes, can you give me an example of a social media campaign against a company?

15. How would you assess the overall influence you have on a company's CSR agenda (e.g. strong, weak)?

- How could you see that a corporation has responded to your demands?
- Are there any success factors in place?
- How do you monitor the implementation of corporations' CSR activities?

➤ **Challenges**

16. From your experience, what are the main obstacles when you are trying to influence a companies CSR agenda?

17. How does your organization respond if a corporation does not respond to your demands?

- Could you please give me an example of a corporation that was not responding to your claims?
- How did you solve this issue?
- Has there ever been a case where a corporation did not want to collaborate with your organization?

18. Do you face new pressures regarding the evaluation of your own impact?

- How do you evaluate the impact of your work?
- Which actors exert pressures?

19. There's a lot of criticism coming also from corporations that are trying to do good and they are saying that NGOs might be too critical or might not understand the business case good enough. In the end, businesses have to make profits, that's their core thing. How would you argue? Do you think the NGO sector needs to have a better understanding of the business world?

20. Do you think that there might be some benefits working with companies that actually have a bad image, like H&M or Zara? Would you consider working with a company that has a bad reputation, especially when considering the effect you can have on their CSR or sustainability agenda?

21. What may be the downsides of working closely with business? E.g., Many researchers argue that collaborations between NGOs and corporations are against the core values of a NGO and that NGOs are solely partnering up for financial reasons. How would you respond to such critique?

- How would you assess the overall benefit of working with corporations?
- What role does mutual trust play within this constellation?

➤ **Wrap-Up**

22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your participation in my study.

➤ **Right after Interview**

23. Could you think of another person who could give me more insights on this topic and who would be willing to do an interview (it can also be a person from your organization)?

24. Would you be willing to answer some follow-up questions, if necessary?