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Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: The Significant Role Played by Agri-Food Cooperatives

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**Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals:
What Role for Social and Solidarity Economy?**

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Abstract

Many of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) are relevant to the food system. Agricultural and food cooperatives, as part of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), are considering reinforcing and achieving SDGs. This paper focuses on their concrete sustainability behavior. Our methodology uses an original French database covering all the 186 agricultural cooperatives engaged in sustainable processes, including the 16 certified in ISO 26000. The study analyzes their motivations for Corporate Social Responsibility, how they engage their cooperatives and producers, and how they measure their social and environmental impacts. The results show that (1) proximity with consumers is a major motivation in innovating and adopting sustainability practices, thereby rendering (2) local interactions essential in order to reconcile economic, environmental and social dimensions. We suggest that Sustainable Supply Chains could provide an effective measurement of positive impacts, combining global as well as local levels. Our findings consider the appropriate mechanisms for the relational structuring of supply chains, since the quality of close interactions between stakeholders is essential for their sustainability. By applying their cooperative principles, cooperatives will be able to ensure another economic model, one that is more democratic, equal and sustainable for society and the planet.

Keywords

Agricultural & Agri-food Cooperative, Corporate Social Responsibility, ISO 26000, Sustainability

Bio

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1. Introduction

At the heart of The 2030 Agenda, the 17 SDGs clearly set out the objectives for a better world. However, if the SDG Compass explains how the SDGs affect business, offering the tools and know-how to put sustainability at the core of organizations' strategy (SDGs, 2017), companies still need more detailed instructions. International referentials, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and ISO 26000, offer guidelines for voluntary progress in applying a global approach, but the respect of these commitments is merely declaratory. Even if « Companies that are more sustainable are more competitive » (OECD 2018), they still lag behind in changing their practices into good ones. The SDG Compass is a detailed step-by-step guide on how companies can align their actions with the SDGs to contribute to sustainable development. Its goal is to support companies in adapting their strategies as well as in measuring and managing their SDG contribution. How can we be sure that, without legal constraints, enterprises are truly engaged in exercising Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)?

Increasingly involved in enhancing sustainability and societal responsibility, enterprises are confronted with worldwide challenges, i.e. Climatic Change, Poverty, Food Security, Biodiversity (OCDE and FAO 2017; OECD 2018). Specifically “Many of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations are relevant to the food system... without fixing the food system, the SDGs simply cannot be achieved” (Poppe 2018, 7). Agricultural and food cooperatives, as part of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), are considering reinforcing and achieving SDGs in the agricultural and food sector. FAO has once again underlined the powerful role played by agricultural coops, giving members access to market, health services and education (FAO et al. 2017). If we explore the idea that Agricultural and Agri-food sectors are the main driver to end poverty, and ensure agri-ecological transition and prosperity for all, then why should coops be considered responsible by essence, and the main actors involved in providing a sustainable response to help achieve The 2030 Agenda?

This paper focuses on the concrete sustainability behavior of agricultural and agrifood cooperatives. “Co-operatives are a democratic business model based on the values of responsibility, solidarity and transparency. These are private companies whose primary purpose is to provide individual and collective services to their members” (ICA 1995). Our case study presents the French agrifood cooperatives involved in ISO 26000. These cooperatives are powerful actors of food supply chains and rural development, with 3 out of 4 producers, and 1 out of 3 food brands (Coop de France 2018). We use an original French database covering all 186 agricultural cooperatives engaged in sustainable processes, including the 16 certified in Afaq 26000 (Afnor 2018; ISO TC 34 2016). How do they enhance the economic, environmental and social sustainability of food and agriculture? Our hypothesis is that, in order to achieve The 2030 Agenda and ensure the real commitments of agriculture and food cooperatives, coops need to include and share, equally, the entire value chain to guarantee sincerity at both consumer and shareholder levels, thereby respecting Coop Principle 7. With CSR more of a voluntary than a coercive arrangement, enterprises must ensure the obligation of means, not of performance results. The background mobilized here adopts the shared value approach (Porter and Kramer 2011).

The results show that (1) proximity with consumers is a major motivation in innovating and adopting sustainability practices, thereby rendering (2) local interactions essential in order to reconcile economic, environmental and social dimensions. Companies can use the SDGs as a source of inspiration for sustainable business models, product innovation, ... within their corporate sustainability reporting (The SDG Compass). We address the question of whether

CSR is a part of coops' DNA and, if not, how CSR could be improved. Coops are not responsible by definition. We suggest that Sustainable Supply Chains could provide an effective measurement of positive impacts, combining global as well as local levels, developing a territorial eco-system (Filippi 2014). Our findings consider the appropriate mechanisms for the relational structuring of supply chains, since the quality of close interactions between stakeholders is essential for their sustainability (SDG Compass 2017; UNCG 2017). Being a coop is not enough for sustainable responsibility. ISO 26000 provides guidance to help achieve SDGs in the food sector. By applying their cooperative principles (ICA, 2016), cooperatives will be able to ensure another economic model, one that is more democratic, equal and sustainable for society and the planet.

2. What does being a responsible enterprise mean?

In 1987, the Brundtland Report underlined three essential dimensions of Sustainable Development: economic, social and environmental (GRI and UN Global Compact 2017 2018; Peeters 2003; Besse and Dufourcq 2004). Being responsible is not limited by such legal injunctions, but depends more on concrete engagements. At the international level, in the absence of legal constraints, different referentials exist to help enterprises engage in and implement a more responsible approach, with ISO 26000, and its application to food chains, ISO 26030, representing the sole international norm.

2.1. CSR is not a legal obligation

CSR is part of Soft Law: "Doing well by doing good". As their CSR commitment constrains firms to be more transparent regarding their social contract with stakeholders, the risk for their reputation has increased (UE 2018). Companies need to demonstrate their performance on the triple bottom line (People, Planet, Profit). "In less than 10 years, the integration of CSR criteria into the variable remuneration policies of companies has become widespread: the number of CAC 40 companies (French stock market index benchmark) integrating CSR criteria has increased continuously, from 10 % in 2006 to more than 70 % to end 2015" (ORSE 2018, 1). The question is, then, how to measure companies' progress.

Concerning agricultural coops, many scholars point out that coops become animated by a business-orientation rather than a societal spirit toward their associates and, ICA Principle 7 (i.e. commitment to the community) is abandoned in favor of the creation and sharing of more business-oriented values (Barraud-Didier et al. 2012; World Co-operative Monitor 2017). However, managerial literature indicates that CSR is an increasingly attractive form of behavior and could prove a way to reconcile coop principles and business strategy. Sacconi and Degli Antoni (2008) introduce a clear distinction between types of CSR: (1) Friedman (1962, 1970), with the principle of maximization of shareholder's value; (2) Baron (2005), with a type of philanthropy; and (3) Freeman (1984), with the interests of all the stakeholders. In the contractarian approach, the firm is an institution that arises in order to solve the incompleteness of contracts and bounded rationality. Acquier and Aggerri (2008) distinguish three CSR schools: Business Ethics, Business and Society and Social Issue Management. CSR could offer a solution, not only to resolve market failures but also to allow enterprises to reconcile economic, social and environmental goals. Since the economic impacts of CSR are not easy to demonstrate (Porter and Kramer 2006), it is interesting to try to explain CSR development. How does CSR develop into a tool of performance and competitiveness for enterprises?

2.2. ISO 26000: leading up to CSR

As guidelines are needed to encourage enterprises to ensure their CSR behavior, referentials are provided in order to attest to responsible commitments. The most well-known of these include Global Reporting Initiative (GRI and UN Global Compact 2018), or more sectorial referentials such as Global Good Agriculture Practices for Fruit and Vegetables in France. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) provides guidelines for economic, social and environmental performances (directives of G4 GRI and ISO 26000 in GRI 2014). This is a Sustainable Development Report that indicates the potential impact of enterprise good practices. The Global Deal initiative for Global Gap transforms CSR into a Responsible Business model to ensure sustainability. A sustainable report should provide a comprehensive representation of an organization's performance, positive or negative (ICA 2016).

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) recognizes the ISO 26000 as the only international standard aimed at providing organizations with social responsibility (SR) guidelines (Afnor 2018). This document describes the principles and themes covered by the SR, and proposes a method and implementation for an organization, whatever its size and areas of action. To define their SR perimeter, the ISO 26000 standard invites organizations to articulate their approach around seven central questions: (1) the governance of the organization, (2) human rights, (3) the relations and conditions of work, (4) the environment, (5) the loyalty of practices, (6) consumer issues and, finally, (7) the Communities and local development. The SR, as described by ISO 26000, constitutes a progress initiative that is part of a search for improving overall organization performances.

Historically, at the global level, the creation of ISO 26000 is in line with the Brundtland Report (1987). Published in 2010, this has since been adopted in more than 80 countries. The norms have certain common characteristics: to be self-declarative, to provide a global figure on the basis of a set of criteria chosen from within the frame of reference, to indicate the march of progress, and not to have an obligation of results. This allows the company to be situated within a set. To be recognized ISO 26000 involves obtaining a mark out of 1000, which attests to commitment to the approach. When awarded, the label is valid for 3 years, renewable (Afnor 2018). Agreement AC X30-030 (ISO TC 34 2016) is dedicated to the specific needs of the food industry. It provides an application in the agriculture and food context for each of the 7 core issues of ISO 26000. It helps companies in collecting, storing, processing and shipping-selling agricultural products and foodstuffs, achieving sustainable development through a socially responsible approach.

We submit that, to become an engine of enterprise strategy, CSR needs to be at the heart of an enterprise's organization.

3. Case study: Responsibility in French agricultural coops

The 2,400 French agricultural coops, with 93 % of Small and Medium enterprises for 195,000 employees and 85.9 billion euros in turnover (Coop de France 2018b) have improved various sustainable practices¹. We use original data, Valorise Platform, based on all French agricultural

¹ In environmental matters, AgriConfiance® is based on the implementation of a certification (standard Afnor NF V01-007: "management system for the quality and the environment of agricultural production"). 3D is the diagnostic tool based on the ISO 26000 standard, and its

coops engaged in CSR, in order to analyze their motivations. In our case study, the interest is less that of providing an account of all good practices than it is an effort to understand the motivations and modalities for engaging an ISO 26000 commitment. We then proceeded to identify various results based on “The ISO 26000 Club”.

3.1. CSR Commitment of French agricultural and agro-food coops: an original database

Our case study uses an original French database covering all 186 agricultural cooperatives engaged in sustainable processes, including the 16 certified in Afaq 26000 (Afnor 2018; ISO TC 34 2016). As CSR is more of a voluntary than a coercive arrangement, the study analyzes their motivations, how they engage their coops and producers, and how they measure their social and environmental impacts. We then identify the factors encouraging farmers to adopt sustainable management practices.

Valorise Platform², a specific tool dedicated to sectorial-labeled ISO auto-evaluation, allows the process of sharing CSR information between coops and retailer clients to be simplified. Created in 2017, it brings together 4 professional federations, its goal being to simplify the whole process by grouping information from suppliers to their distributor customers within a single form.

Our case study identifies 96 agricultural coops, 76 food coops, 8 Commercial Law subsidiaries, and 6 other companies that have engaged a 3D Diagnostic since 2008³. We interviewed the leading experts (Afnor certification, Plateforme RSE, AgriConfiance® advisory and standardization consultants) and Managers (including Commercial law companies’ CEOs and coop suppliers). We enjoyed the benefit of various ISO 26000 meetings for the project ISO/TS 26030 "Sustainable development and social responsibility — Guide for using ISO 26000: 2010 in the food chain" by Afnor. We participated in AgriConfiance® meetings to complete the panel of discussants. We interviewed the leading cooperative managers in order to better understand how they impulse CSR in their coops, whether for cereals, dairy or Fruit and Vegetables.

Sectorial representation reveals a domination of coops in Wine, Fruit & Vegetables, Meat, followed by Cereals, Prepared Food, Pastry and Dairy. Geographical distribution is related to sectorial activity: all regions are concerned, but at different levels. New Aquitaine is a pioneer region in introducing these sustainable commitments. This is due, first, to the implication of local professionals in defining sustainable labels and, second, to the fact that local policy makers have financed diagnostics and engagement in 3D diagnostics. The Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrenees Regions have also accompanied their enterprises in sectorial sustainability. It

food sectorial variation in agreement AC X30-030, *recognized by policy makers*, is based on the G.R.I. (Global Reporting Initiative) and the Global Compact (Coop de France, 2018a). This diagnostic tool was "specially developed to make CSR accessible to agribusiness companies, especially SMEs. It allows the intervention of external 3D experts, to identify a maximum of practices developed in companies to position them in a social responsibility approach.

² Special thanks to Benjamin Perdreau, in charge of CSR and Valorise Plateforme at Coop de France for data and comments. The interpretation is mine alone.

³ The choice of those in 3D is motivated by the quality of information. 11 companies in 2008, 8 in 2009, 33 in 2010, 9 in 2011, 23 in 2012, 26 in 2013, 17 in 2014, 28 in 2015, 20 in 2016 and 7 in 2017; 4 are unaffected. (Coop de France 2018a).

should be borne in mind that as regard AgriConfiance® certification⁴, the 123 coops engaged in 14 supply chains represent 32,440 farmers, around 10 % of all French exploitations (Website Agriconfiance Data 2016, consulted in 2018). The medium enterprises (PME) engaged in 3D expressed their desire to find a differentiation strategy, a way to reconcile economic performance with community sustainability. So, as medium coops, they orient their commitment for a better valorization of their territorial anchorage.

If this database considers all those French agricultural and food coops which had engaged voluntary sustainable commitment, as regard the total population of 186 enterprises with a 3D Diagnostic, we have all the French coops engaged in ISO 26000: 16 coops (Coop de France 2018). They are part of the “ISO 26000 Club”, with 16 coops certified in 2018: Wine 9; Cereals: 2; Fruit and Vegetables: 1; only one is a large group. This number may seem low when compared with the 2,400 coops, but it is significant of the agricultural and food sectors. We note that all these coops seek high quality product positioning on market differentiation with food brands, including territorial labels, with most having combined other environmental signs with private or public consumer specifications (Valorise 2018). For all the 16 ISO normalized (“The ISO 26000 Club”), 75% are confirmed, 17% are in progress, and 17% are exemplary in terms of the 581/1000 points references based on AFNOR indications (Coop de France 2018). However, as the ISO 26000 is costly in terms of normalization (8,000 €), five have not reengaged this normalization, although they still pursue good practices.

3.2 What do we learn with « The ISO 26000 Club »?

Analysis of The ISO 26000 Club is not easy, due to the limited number of enterprises engaged, but even to establishing a global profile is difficult, we can, nevertheless, observe certain patterns.

The ISO 26000 Club is dominated by the Wine and Fruit & Vegetables sectors; the enterprises are of medium size, and their strategic driver seems to be product differentiation. Most of the 16 coops are medium size (PME and ETI); only one is a large coop group, but with ISO 26000 normalization for the total group (coops and their subsidiaries).

The declarations of the managers, CEOs and Chairmen, enable a number of key factors to be identified, with commitment to ISO 26000 being fully incorporated in their global strategy. All those consulted stress that ISO normalization is the result of a path-dependent trajectory with multi-commitments (ISO 9001, ISO 1400...), so long-term commitment is essential. For example, Scara, a medium cereal coop in the East of France, started its sustainable progress engagement in 2009. Since 2011, it has developed a sustainable commitment combining three main referential basis: GRI, ISO and The Global Compact for good practice enhancement. In 2015, the Board and Management committee decided to promote “SCARA 2015” project, including six priority actions, based on ISO 26000. This commitment is related to SCARA’s acceptance of its role in the supply chain and territory for better added-value.

In this perspective, for the managers, CSR commitment is very much linked to coop governance. Employees need to work closely with coop owner-members in order to impulse the process of normalization. ISO 26000 is a source for the better commitment of employees to

⁴ Agricultural coops have been pioneers in terms of environmental practices, quality process and product differentiation. The first one was AgriConfiance® Certification, followed by the 3D diagnostic, in order to guide farmers in improving their sustainable practices. As well as product certifications, customer specifications and other forms of quality control imposed by clients or product (e.g. organic or red label), their concrete sustainable commitments are declined into a specific certification.

serve their coop, and for better market differentiation, but also to take into account the risk to coops' reputation. CSR commitment is an increasingly useful differentiation criterion for shareholders. For example, ISO 26000 is an accepted signal for banks, attesting to the real commitment of coops to good practices. Even though the norm is voluntary, this label influences the perception of clients and distributors, playing a role in developing a sustainable business model.

For managers, it offers a way to mobilize employees in the global project and to develop innovations. CSR enhances the relationships with producers, because most of these good practices are generated by consumer pressures concerning the environment (pesticides, biocontrol, water, etc). In this perspective, CSR provides a means for reinforcing interactions between the production side, while paying attention to consumer demand.

The fact that the wine sector predominates is due to the anteriority of good practice commitments (3D and ISO 9001, ISO 14001...) and also to environmental impact sensitivity, since IFT indices for pesticide uses are highest in the Wine and Fruit & Vegetable sectors. Sanitary prevention policies, as well as enterprise reputation for consumers, have acted as early incitation drivers, with Technical advisory (for 3D) and financial regional supports proving essential to accomplish the switch to good commitment. As for meat and dairy, ISO 26000 is less used, because coops had other certifications and brands, as dairy coop quality manager interviews confirm.

“Vignerons de Buzet”, the pioneer coop in developing environmental strategy, now recognized by ISO 26000, had their initial commitment based on the research of differentiation product strategy. The proximity of the coop to Bordeaux and its ensuing Wine Appellation, triggered research on finding a way to innovate and differentiate their wine. The coop then proceeded to associate its CSR engagement with the aim of entirely refocusing its enterprise project. The ISO 26000 normalization was obtained after a long standardization process, other additional environmental commitments, and customer specifications. In 2005, thanks to their previous collaboration with an external advisor for ISO 9001 and ISO 14001, the coop participated in the creation of “collective 3D” for the definition of Diagnostic 3D (Interview of P. Philippe⁵ 2018). Their project management organization revolves around environmental issues, reconciling employees and owner-members, encouraging them to work together for new solutions. The dynamic thereby created includes both economic and social dimensions. “CSR is like a source of inspirations and motivations” (Interview of P. Philippe 2018). Initially, as mentioned, this medium size coop experienced certain economic difficulties due to its Bordeaux area proximity. Since the localization of French coop owner-members is constrained, the coop needed to develop local projects, including a local employment strategy (Filippi 2013).

ISO is a collective involvement organization project. The decision to enhance CSR behavior was taken by the Directory Board, comprising four producers, which had the management mandate. “We started with the environmental dimension, which was more natural for them” (Interview of P. Philippe 2018). Without specifically assigned employees, as is the case in larger companies, the whole worker-force was mobilized. “The client specifications came afterward to guide the practices and to justify the interest of the strategy” (Interview of P. Philippe 2018). If governance is considered as the determining asset needed to implement the strategy, follow-up is essential (Interview of A. Duwer⁶ 2018). “CSR will become a powerful tool for giving sense and motivation to both employees and producers. Setting up a path is more important than the

⁵ Pierre Philippe is the CEO of Vignerons de Buzet and Chairman of ISO 26030 Commission. The role of “Vignerons de Buzet” was corroborated by AgriConfiance® consultants on the creation of “collective 3D”.

⁶ Agrès Duwer is the CEO of Scara.

result objective” (Interview P. Philippe 2018). As explained by the CEO, CSR initiatives today are increasingly focused on bonds needed to obtain bank loans, and on contracting with distributors to "prevent risks". That is also the motivation expressed by the CEO of France Boissons, which is engaged in good practices. For its CEO, ISO is a way to secure access to good products in a similar business spirit. ISO 26000 does not just come about by chance! More than a mere strategy, it is a goal and work in progress, a trajectory and not the end.

Close examination of “The ISO 26000 Club” indicates the rise of two types of coop. Pioneer coops engaged in CSR behavior that reflect their coop values. In such “Value Driven” coops, the engine corresponds to the motivation for shared collective action on a local basis. Their economic performances come from the reconciliation of the short- and long-term. In “Business-oriented coops” engaged in CSR behavior, mostly in terms of profits expected, CSR is more a tool for improving their economic activity by increasing their market shares, respecting client or supplier specifications, and securing their reputation. In such coops, the driving force is focused on the expectation of profits for a better redistribution to producers, with managers using CSR to exercise pressure on owner-member decisions. Coop values lead to establishing new relationships with their stakeholders and the local area. Is CSR, however, a real conviction or a bit of marketing cosmetics? So policy recommendations may then oriented supporting small and medium enterprises on their territory using (1) financial incitation as for labelling CSR behavior, (2) giving priority to sustainable purchasing, or (3) formalizing commitment with cooperatives that have engaged in good practices (like in the context of supplying school canteens).

We observed that when coops engaged sustainable behavior, they pursued their commitment even if they did not formally reengage, since the cost of normalization is a significant block for small and medium enterprises. Consequently, the creation of a significant added-value, even by sustainable commitments with their suppliers or consumers, could be a way to compensate for a visible immediate economic benefit. In terms of impacts, relative to the 7 core questions of ISO 26000, the environment is a classic starter for good practices.

4. How do agri-food coops be able to achieve SDGs?

Environment, social, economic goals need to be bound up with governance, which indicates the way used by coops to manage such changes. Even if all coops do combine the three dimensions, economic, social and environmental, their strategy can give rise to more complex combinations, without taking into consideration size, organizational structure, geographical localization and sectorial activities. As being a coop is not enough for sustainable responsibility, ISO 26030 could give guidance to pave the way in achieving SDGs in the food sector.

4.1. From shareholder maximization to stakeholder approach, *raison d'être*

To become an engine of enterprise strategy, CSR needs to be at the heart of their organizational capital. What is performance if it does not mean translating ethical values into good business to enhance resilience?

Faced with financierization, ILO (2008) suggests reinforcing CSR. Consequently, in what way can CSR help coops in trying to satisfy their *raison d'être*? CSR, particularly useful in involving all stakeholders and the community, aims to realign values and coop principles. In the absence of certification, the best guarantee is to secure the commitment associating customers and suppliers in order to create sustainable demand supply chains. Brand reputation, market shares

and stakeholder value depend on sustainable operations. Regarding the 7 core subjects of ISO 26000, coops engaged in good practices are sensitive to environmental as well as to consumer issues or fair operating practices. Green or social washing become more and more risky practices, according to their reputation effects on customers (Moreau 2017). But, increasingly, the idea that CSR should be considered a business strategy, is gaining ground (Roetlands 2013, 2014). In 2019, ISO 26000 will be published in order to be declined to food chains. Consequently, improved understanding of cooperative motivations and that of other companies will be important for a successful diffusion. Motivations for cooperatives are closely linked to a tinkering process for their strategic project with owner-members, employees and other stakeholders.

The economic impacts of CSR are, however, not easy to demonstrate (Porter and Kramer 2006, 2011). We need to take into account a multi-dimensional approach (SDG Compass 2017). This requires us to (1) enhance our understanding of the processes used in competing; (2) identify the indicators to help develop specific measures, propose new tools, measure commitments, solidarity, and performance. Farmers in cooperatives could organize Sustainable Supply Chains in order to better valorize their products but also to guarantee sustainable goals. We define SSC as a supply chain taking into account the interests of all stakeholders and consumers. In this perspective, coops need to change their corporate management, thereby reinforcing their collective action.

4.2. Coops engage in sustainability by animating their values

Coops need to think out new definitions of performance, including their impact on their local-territorial anchorage, as well as on consumers and loyalty practices. Creating an ecosystem is a good way to ensure CSR, which stresses the practices of the organizations engaged in it. If it is difficult to measure the impacts of such practices, it proves easier to identify the emergence of eco-systems combining supply chains and local development. "... Circular economy, digital transformation and especially big data and automation, new uses, fragmentation of markets, territorialization of governance ... All this leads to a new conception of performance that can no longer be only global, but enriched with local specificities. Therefore, cooperation is a lever of performance. This cooperation induces co-responsibility" (Oree 2017, 85). CSR needs a multidimensional approach. Creation and development of the eco-system imply that CSR should be a part of intangible capital. This means reconciling financial and extra-financial logics. Coops have models in which money is pre-allocated if farmers engage in sustainability, not only based on economic productivity, but also by combining an environmental dimension. The local level becomes the place for concrete development and innovations. Advisory, then, constitutes a key in order to review new solutions, a technical and economic support for farmers faced with price volatility.

By taking into account resilience, market shares but also democracy and environmental efficiency corresponds to some of the criteria of SDG and ISO 26000 guidance for action. CSR and coop values are both closely entwined. ICA (2016) justified that coops engage in sustainability because it corresponds to Principle 7 (Concern for Community). The frameworks that can be used by coops to help them improve sustainability strategies are all voluntary (ICA 2016, 19). It seems difficult to define coercive regulation. In our case study, the results underline the fact that CSR represents progress in behavior more than it does a quantitative measurement. But certifications like HVE level 3 give concrete indications to help pave the way and measure the risk. "... It is this growing (*new social*) complexity which opens up new spaces for the creation of enterprises whose mission is to respond to the new needs of both the people and the community through activities performed by people within the community who wish to

be an active and participative part of this process” (Bianchi 2013, 31). This is not a question of merely creating new green enterprises in the energy or waste management sectors; rather, there is the opportunity to reshape the entire production structure, through actions which may be described as “greening the industry” (Bianchi 2013). It is more a win-win behavior as shown in the environment (Porter and van der Linde 1995). The transformation of the food system should make it more sustainable, resilient, responsible, diverse, competitive and inclusive (Poppe 2018).

By creating an auto-enforcement mechanism, CSR is at the heart of both coops innovation and governance. The interest resides, then, in the stabilization of the inter-relations between all stakeholders, thereby securing long-term investments.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the concrete sustainability behavior of agricultural and agri-food cooperatives, using an original case study: the French cooperatives involved in ISO 26000. The objective is to discuss the measures and incitations needed to enhance CSR in food chains. The results focus on the conditions of how coops combine competitiveness, member needs and respecting coop principles in the food chain, as well as in achieving the transition to sustainable agricultural development. The limited number of enterprises engaged does not allow more detailed incitation factors to be stressed; its interest lies in improving our understanding of some of the causal parameters at work. Coops are not “in essence” responsible. But their values encourage them to be responsible, by including social and environmental dimensions: their *raison d’être*. If coop DNA is close to CSR, it is because this is congruent with its ethical and coop values. CSR could prove a way to animate coop spirit inside coops. However, CSR needs to be supported by a true commitment of both members and employees in order to satisfy enlarged community needs. If CSR corresponds to coop principles, commitment to it requires a real implication of managers and owner-members. It is a path-dependent way (Dosi 2000). Respecting coop principles means exercising responsibility, but that it is not enough. Nevertheless, for coops, commitment to CSR contributes as an internal tool in making sense of the coop and external commitments, or by putting coop ethics at the service of customers, consumers and the community. Without legally-binding obligations, the coop sustainable ecosystem is an auto-enforcement mechanism. Even if ISO is a voluntary norm, it would prove fruitful for future study to measure the impacts of CSR on companies’ business as well as on territorial ecosystems. By applying their cooperative principles, cooperatives will be able to ensure another economic model, one that is more democratic, equal and sustainable achieving SDGs. In Agricultural and Agri-food sectors, the cooperatives, as enterprises owned by farmer-members, are main actors to end poverty, ensure agri-ecological transition and equitable prosperity for all.

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a powerful framework for business to engage in corporate social responsibility. We all know that achieving the desired impact of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require changes in attitudes and behaviors as well as innovation, education and clear leadership.

SDG reporting is becoming an important tool in CSR policy, as companies and their stakeholders seek to better understand CSR program impact. Although many of the SDGs won’t apply to every business, the SDGs will function as a set of guiding principles for any business wishing to drive their CSR policy forwards by contributing more to a sustainable society. This contribution shows how ISO 26030 could be the methodology behind the alignment of SDGs and CSR policy.

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