

**Number 3**  
**December 2007**



## **UNPOP moving forward**

This newsletter reports about the achievements of our programme in 2007. We have come a long way since the start of our programme at the beginning of 2005. Our analysis and evaluation of partnerships for sustainable development is delivering interesting results. On top of that we are increasingly communicating and interacting with others involved in partnerships and partnership research.

In the updates elsewhere in this newsletter you will find the results until today of the different research projects. On that basis we can conclude that partnerships are making a difference in sustainable development. Remember, UNPOP focuses her research on intersectoral partnerships (Project I and II): strategic alliances of actors from different societal domains (government, market, and/or civil society), and more broadly, business-NGO interactions (Project III). All research projects show, however, that the contributions of partnerships to sustainable development generally remain limited. One of the major causes is that partnerships, just like all other initiatives, are often constrained by the pre-existing power relationships, and by dominant discourses and rules in the issue arena, the governance system or the commodity chain that they are trying to improve. However, a few partnerships are able to change these traditions and impact the manner in which sustainable development is taking place. The challenge is of course to understand the reasons for this difference between incremental and fundamental impact of different partnerships.

Next to publications in social scientific journals, we have been happy to receive quite some attention for our research in other arenas. Prof. dr. Pieter Glasbergen was invited for a [key note address](#) at the London School of Economics on May 24. Mariette van Huijstee and Ingrid Visseren were asked to contribute to the [book by Herman Verhagen](#) on 20 years of sustainable development. The article "Partnerships in forest governance" by Ingrid Visseren and Pieter Glasbergen has been summarized and quoted on [two websites on the Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#). Ingrid Visseren was also co-author of a letter in the [Dutch national newspaper NRC](#).

We hope you enjoy reading our newsletter. We specifically would like to invite you to contact us, to share your ideas, and to cooperate on new and viable initiatives for sustainable development.

For further information you can always visit our website, [www.unpop.nl](http://www.unpop.nl).

## **News: Publications**

The [edited book "Partnerships, Governance and Sustainable development"](#) explores process, extent and circumstances under which partnerships can improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance for sustainable development. Pieter Glasbergen, chair of our research programme, edited the book together with Frank Biermann and Arthur Mol, and he introduces the book with the first chapter "Setting the scene: the partnership paradigm in the making". In each of the three parts of the book, the "partnership paradigm" is discussed from a distinct perspective, with contributions from leading experts in the field. The first perspective examines partnerships as single collaborative arrangements, focusing on how they are created, how they operate, and their determinants. The second perspective turns attention to the external effects of partnerships and the ways in which they can contribute to deliberate societal change. Chapter 7: "Partnership as governance mechanism in development cooperation: intersectoral North-South partnerships for marine biodiversity", by our team members Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers, Bas Arts and Pieter Glasbergen, fits in this second perspective. The third perspective adopts a broader view on the governance system and the changes that partnerships can produce in the configuration of political decision-making structures.

Apart from a chapter in this edited Partnership book, research project I has resulted in another publication. The paper "[Partnerships in forest governance](#)" by team members Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers,

and Pieter Glasbergen has been published online in *Global Environmental Change* (2007, doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2006.11.003), and will be published in print later this year. In this article, characteristics of intersectoral forest partnerships and their contributions to the forest biodiversity governance system are assessed. Furthermore, public-private interplay in the forest biodiversity governance system and the implications thereof for the improvement of this system are analyzed. The most important conclusions: most partnership focus on a single threat to forest biodiversity. This private regulation has had a limited positive impact. The most valuable contribution has been filling the gap of lack of implementation by governments. The forest governance system can become more effective if "metagovernance" is strengthened.

Last but not least, a review article titled "[Partnerships for sustainable development: a review of current literature](#)", written by our team members Mariëtte van Huijstee and Pieter Leroy and former team member Mara Francken, has been published in the latest issue of *Environmental Sciences* (volume 4, issue 2, pages 75 to 89). This article reviews the currently available academic knowledge on partnerships for sustainable development. Two major perspectives are observed in the partnership literature - the institutional and the actor perspective- focusing on different aspects of the partnership phenomenon and addressing distinct questions. Important conclusions are, firstly, that research on partnerships has delivered many insights in their functioning and their role in contemporary society. Secondly, the concepts of partnerships and sustainable development are more clearly linked discursively than empirically. The current knowledge base mostly lacks clear definitions of success and therefore criteria for the evaluation of partnerships. Therefore, future research should, on empirical instead of reasoned grounds, pay more attention to the link between intersectoral partnerships and sustainable development.

Check our website [www.unpop.nl](http://www.unpop.nl) and click on "publications" to download some of our publications. Some other publications are currently in review, our website keeps you informed!

## **Update research project I "Partnerships for biodiversity"**

**Researcher: Drs. Ingrid Visseren-Hamakers**

This project researches the role of international intersectoral partnerships in the biodiversity governance system. The focus of the research is the interrelationship between partnerships and (inter)national government policy. In the [first UNPOP newsletter](#), the work on partnerships in forest biodiversity was summarized. Therefore this update will focus on the second publication of this project:

Visseren-Hamakers, I.J., B. Arts and P. Glasbergen, "Partnership as governance mechanism in development cooperation: intersectoral North-South partnerships for marine biodiversity." In: Glasbergen, P., F. Biermann and A. Mol (eds.) (2007), *Partnerships, Governance and Sustainable Development: Reflections on Theory and Practice*, Edward Elgar Publishing (expected in November).

In this research we focused on a very specific type of partnership, intersectoral North-South partnerships, in which governments, businesses and NGOs in a producing (often Southern) and a consuming (often Northern) country of a specific product try to solve the sustainability problems associated with this product in a bilateral partnership. We studied a partnership between Indonesian, Malaysian and Dutch partners focused on shrimp aquaculture and a partnership between Dutch and Peruvian actors focused on Peruvian anchoveta fisheries. Anchoveta is mainly used to produce fish feed for the aquaculture industry. Through this research we discovered the following trends.

It is often assumed that partnerships are an effective instrument for emancipating and strengthening civil society in the South. In practice, this effect is very difficult to realize. Existing relationships and power inequalities are so strongly institutionalized that they are extremely difficult to change.

Also, in order for partners to be able to work together in partnership, a basic consensus among them on the strategies for sustainable development is necessary. In practice this often means that only NGOs with more pragmatic strategies towards sustainability become partners; NGOs with more stringent views on sustainability often do not become involved in partnerships or leave due to perceived lack of progress.

The observation that often only the more pragmatic NGOs are involved in partnerships could, combined with the current popularity of the partnership instrument, have large consequences for the extent to which more fundamental sustainability problems receive the attention of the international biodiversity governance system. It seems the power of the more stringent NGOs, who usually ask attention for more structural sustainability problems, may be declining.

## **Update research project II**

### **"Intersectoral partnerships in global commodity chains"**

**Researcher: Verena Bitzer MSc**

We have recently submitted our study of intersectoral partnerships in the global coffee chain which we have explored on the basis of a systematic empirical analysis and with the help of Global Commodity Chain (GCC) analysis and Convention Theory. We have discovered that partnerships have changed the terms of the discourse on sustainable coffee and are able to influence sustainability challenges at production level by means of production standards.

However, the partnerships show an imbalance in actor involvement, compete with each other and mainly create a parallel production integrated into the conventional chain. This creates a restricted frame and hinders partnerships to address the systemic conditions underlying the unsustainability of the coffee chain. Thus, while being important initiators of change, partnerships are unable to turn the coffee chain into a sustainable chain.

Since this work is completed, we are now planning the next project on partnerships in commodity chains. This time we will move from an *institutional* to an *actor* perspective and analyze partnerships in terms of three main modalities, distinguishing between partnerships initiated by governments as potential extensions of government policy, partnerships initiated by private parties in which governments participate amongst many actors and purely private arrangements between businesses and nongovernmental organizations. Again, we will focus on the coffee chain and study the different partnership modalities with respect to their structure and approach taking an actor-centered perspective.

## **Update research project III**

### **"Business-NGO Interactions"**

**Researcher: Mariëtte van Huijstee MSc**

In this research project business-NGO interactions, be it partnerships or dialogue processes, are the central focus. In the

[previous UNPOP newsletter](#) the first research phase focusing on the dialogue practice of multinationals with NGOs was summarized. We report here on the research activities undertaken since.

After we gathered a general picture of the dialogue practice between multinationals and NGOs, we have drafted an analytical framework to be used in our case studies. With this framework we identify three layers of organizational reality that are of influence for business-NGO interactions: the organizational context, characteristics of the participating organizations and of individual dialogue participants. These "layers" can be described by using a power as well as a learning perspective.

Guided by this framework we are currently studying two distinct but related interaction processes: the interaction between an international bank and a pragmatic and "constructive" NGO on the one hand, and between the same bank and a more stringent and "campaigning" NGO on the other. Although the study is still ongoing and conclusions can not be drawn yet, we can already reveal some results.

The bank and the pragmatic NGO have established a partnership that has resulted in a sustainable banking product available for consumers. The bank's interaction with the campaigning NGO can best be described as an ongoing long term dialogue, and has induced the development of more sustainable investment policies by the bank. Power relations and dynamics seem to explain the course and outcomes of the interactions to a greater extent than do learning experiences.

Further analysis will reveal the relative importance of the different layers of organizational reality (e.g. context, characteristics of the participating organizations and of individual dialogue participants) and will hopefully generate propositions that can be tested more widely.