



Royal Tropical Institute

## Building North-South Partnerships for a better world

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Partnerships between parties from the 'rich' North and the 'poor' South are the name of the game in the world of development cooperation. In this article we distinguish a number of characteristics that influence the process of building partnerships within the context of development cooperation. These include ideology and values; politically-loaded relationships; unilateral financial dependence; cultural and physical distances; and fragile social trust. Through two cases of public-private partnerships – organic cotton and responsible soya – we discuss how activists, funders, process facilitators or development workers confront these specific characteristics and how they are addressed.

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Partnership in development cooperation comes in all shapes and sizes. In this article we focus on partnerships initiated by development organizations to promote public-private cooperation with parties from both the 'rich' North and the 'poor' South. It is expected that these will contribute to sustainable development by generating innovation and entrepreneurial development. In their operation, these partnerships are confronted with a number of questions that in our opinion are particular to the development cooperation context. The central questions for this article are:

*What are the distinguishing characteristics of North-South partnership dynamics? And what insights and lessons can we draw from the management of these partnerships? What recommendations or advice can we offer to those facilitating such partnerships?*

We start with a short overview of the development cooperation sector, the nature of partnerships and their most important features. Through two cases concerning the international trade of organic cotton –set up with support of Agri-ProFocus- and responsible soya, we identify key characteristics, explore ways in which they emerge,

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as well as possible ways in which process facilitators can address them. We then present some conclusions.

## 1. Development cooperation: high ambitions and many partnerships

The field of development cooperation (hereafter referred to as DC) is a sector that has a lot of money circulating through it. Hundreds of civil society organizations are active in this sector, with very different origins: some are religious-based, others charity, while some have their roots in different kinds of freedom struggles. Trade unions, municipalities, farmers' organizations and political parties are also engaged in development cooperation and set up twinning relationships<sup>3</sup>. More recently, associations made up of immigrants are setting up activities in their countries of origin with the support of DC funding. Finally, environmental organizations such as *Greenpeace* are very active in North-South questions.

The scale of organisational diversity found within the sector is broad, relating to the origins of the organisation, its size, degree of professionalization, as well as sources of funding. Some are partly subsidized by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by means of a joint financing scheme, almost sixty civil society organizations are supported by an overall budget of more than two billion Euro for 2007-2010 (Schulpen and Ruben, 2006)<sup>4</sup>. This is in addition to, for example, the one billion Euro for the 2007-2015 period that the Ministry has earmarked for the Dutch development organization SNV, and the hundreds of millions of Euro going to the South through private sector support programmes (FMO, PSOM, ex-ORET). Moreover there are special funding opportunities for the numerous small foundations that are active in developing countries.

Civil society organizations also mobilize their own resources. Organizations such as *Doctors without Borders*, *Oxfam-Novib*, *Plan* and *Greenpeace* are amongst the largest member organizations in the Netherlands. They are funded in various ways including membership support, grants, bequeathals, lotteries, and increasingly also through ethical or green investment funds. Funding availability is very sensitive to changing trends, which abound in the world of development cooperation: 'hot topics' come and go. Nowadays HIV-Aids, value chain development and social responsibility are 'in'; and other topics such as micro-credit, education and health care, and gender for example, seem to be making a comeback.

The DC sector is an example also of *bricolage*: it is a dynamic, fluid construction of organizations, alliances and networks that strengthens and renews itself through an interplay of new insights and topics (Weick, 2001). Actors seize opportunities based on circumstance and the possibilities they see before them. They act in complex, ambiguous contexts. Outcomes cannot be planned or predicted and at best, it is only afterwards that analysis of how certain developments have come about can be undertaken (Wilson-Grau and Nuñez, 2007).

Development and cooperation are inextricably linked. Cooperation with partners in the South is at the heart of DC organizations. A number of deeply rooted values are at the foundation of these partnerships. For many Northern organisations solidarity and fair cooperation with Southern partners are duties, as is effective participation, and above all, avoiding paternalistic relationships. The principle in the DC world is that the needs of "target" group guide the work undertaken: the "target" group should sit in the driver's seat

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<sup>3</sup> Twinning refers to one-to one relationships where in a municipality, a farmers' union etc. from the Netherlands collaborate directly with a municipality, farmers' union in Africa

<sup>4</sup> Of this figure, 80% is channelled to the four largest development organizations in the Netherlands (*ICCO*, *Oxfam-Novib*, *Cordaid* and *HIVOS*).

and should be autonomous. These values are carefully protected. Northern organizations are well aware of the potential for ambiguities and even conflict of interest when they act as both a partner and a funder of organizations in the South.

Collaboration is also at issue in relationships amongst these Northern organizations. The DC world is network-based in character with many interconnections and bonds between both individuals and organisations. Some networks are composed of civil society organisations that are based on religious affiliations, which used to structure Dutch society. Other networks come together around a particular country, region or a specific topic. Some are hybrids such as when businesses or environmental organisations join forces with DC organizations. Reasons for increased collaboration include a drive for innovation, economies of scale, reducing inefficiency and improving service delivery, or concerted lobbying activities.

Another reason for collaboration is to obtain access to Dutch or European subsidy channels. For example, the condition for subsidy eligibility set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is that 25% of the budget must come from an organization's own resources. This conditionality has led to the formation of alliances in order to meet the criteria. However, DC organizations are partners and competitors at the same time. On the one hand, they are colleagues sharing values and having comparable missions and complementary services and roles. On the other hand, they compete for funds from generous donors or the public and must distinguish themselves in order to be recognizable to their specific support base, which requires visibility and the maintenance of a unique profile, but may hinder the formation of alliances.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

A relatively new branch of development cooperation is the formation of public-private partnerships. An important reason for this is the ever higher ambitions of DC, such as the Millennium Development Goals set in 2000 by the United Nations, which include: reducing world poverty by half by 2015, increasing access to health care, clean water and education, reinforcing the position of women, and fighting AIDS and malaria. These goals are not intended to be the responsibility and work of one single organization<sup>5</sup>. In recent years, the number of *global partnerships* has risen dramatically. They cover topics such as HIV-AIDS, malaria, water, sustainable fisheries and forest use.

Development challenges are complex, for example, the impact of interventions on issues like climate change, protection of the world's rainforests or 'fair' trade tend to be very difficult to predict. Global concerns such as climate change or poverty are subjects of both DC and formal diplomacy, though this channel has its own limits. When in 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development's official delegation could not reach agreement and the summit threatened to fail, partnerships between public and private sector actors were then formally acknowledged as an important vehicle for reaching sustainable development goals (Andova and Levy, 2004).

These public-private partnerships also mesh with recent developments in corporate social responsibility (CSR). Participation in public-private partnerships offers many opportunities for companies to improve their reputations by making social contributions and by promoting sustainable development (Tulder and De Zwart, 2003). However, these types of partnerships also pose a challenge for the DC world. Until as recently as about a decade ago, cooperation with the business world was

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<sup>5</sup> In the literature on network management, inter-organisational cooperation and alliance making, interdependency is central. This means that in order to realize their ambitions, actors are mutually dependent because no single actor has sufficient resources on their own (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997).

considered 'inappropriate' for development organizations, who now find themselves competing for the graces of big companies, for example, in the Netherlands, Douwe Egberts, Albert Heijn and Hema. New opportunities are emerging through steps taken by ASN-Novib investment funds and other comparable initiatives. The successful Oké-banana initiative operates through a private venture (Agrofair Ltd) with the support of NGOs such as Solidaridad and ICCO. These alliances are not always easy to set up, nor are they always successful, and it is often hard work to maintain them.

## **2. Case studies: the Cotton Alliance and the Soya Coalition**

The two case studies were chosen because we had good insights into the problems and dynamics of the two partnerships involved.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, both case studies involve public and private parties who are grappling with the 'ins and outs' of collaboration with Southern partners, within the ambitious domain of "fair" and "responsible" international commodity chain development.

This section offers insights into the history and development of both case studies. It is a summary of more in-depth descriptions (thick descriptions) on which our study was based. In the subsequent section these case studies are used to analyze the specific characteristics of DC partnerships in more detail.

### **The Cotton Alliance**

The Cotton Alliance is an initiative of the Agri-ProFocus partnership (see box). Many Agri-ProFocus members were active in terms of supporting West African cotton farmers as well as in developing alternative market chains. With recent WTO disputes between the large subsidized cotton farmers in the United States and the millions of poor farmers in West Africa, cotton is now high on the DC agenda. An SNV practitioner commented: *"These days, you find a cotton project behind every termite hill in the West African savanna."*

At the request of Solidaridad, in May 2006, one of the Agri-ProFocus partnership managers explored the possibility for Agri-ProFocus members to work on the development of alternative cotton value chains in West Africa. The cotton was to be produced in an ecologically responsible manner that was profitable for small-scale farmers and did not use child labour. However, only a strong and extensive network of DC organizations working together with West-African farmers' organizations would be able to both stimulate consumer demand, and engage large cotton ginning companies and clothing brands with stated CSR ambitions.

A number of Agri-ProFocus members reacted positively. They felt that better coordination of activities in this sector could be useful. After several meetings, the partnership gained momentum when SNV West Africa expressed interest in setting up a sustainable cotton programme. In addition one of the Dutch embassies in West Africa also began working on sustainable cotton. Solidaridad, the founder of Max Havelaar coffee, which has significant in-house expertise concerning sustainable trade, and capacity to work on cotton joined the effort. And KIT, an organisation with a long history in cotton development in West Africa also participated. The cotton alliance was born.

Later that same year, a workshop in Burkina Faso was organized by SNV and APROCA, a federation of West African farmers' organizations. KIT provided the

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facilitation for the workshop and Agri-ProFocus partnership manager and Solidaridad also participated. The aim of the meeting was to assess if these farmers' organizations were interested in developing organic or fair trade cotton chains. Many leaders of farmers' organisations attended. While they were interested in getting to know more about alternative cotton chain options, enthusiasm to proceed with a concrete project was limited.

Several weeks later, Agri-ProFocus was approached by a Turkish-Dutch company that produces and trades organic cotton, with an ambitious proposal for collaboration. The company wanted to join forces with DC organizations to set up large scale West African production of certified organic cotton, and were prepared to pay farmers a premium above the world market price. Several members of the Agri-ProFocus partnership considered this to be an excellent opportunity to achieve their mission to promote environmentally friendly production and poverty reduction.

### **Agri-ProFocus**

Agri-ProFocus is a partnership of twenty-two Dutch development organizations, including donor agencies, credit institutions, fair trade organizations, and training and knowledge institutions. The aim of the partnership is to increase and improve the support to producer organizations in the South, through more cooperation between the partnership members. Agri-ProFocus' approach is based on three focal areas: value chain development, access to rural finance and capacity building of producer organizations.

The idea of the Agri-ProFocus partnership was developed in 2004, when the then Minister for Development Cooperation established the "Doornbos Commission". The commission's task was to investigate the possibility of setting up a partnership that could effectively and specifically address the needs and opportunities of producer organizations. This resulted in nineteen organizations signing a cooperation agreement in 2005, with which Agri-ProFocus became a fact. To facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation between Agri-ProFocus member organizations a supporting bureau with process facilitators was initiated in 2006.

### **Responsible Soya**

The Dutch Soya Coalition was created in 2000, at the initiative of four NGOs – Both Ends, Solidaridad, Agriterro and ICCO. These organizations were concerned about the expansion of large scale soya cultivation in Brazil, which tends to exclude small farmers and accelerate deforestation. The initiative was a response to their Southern partners who had pointed out that the Netherlands is one of the largest importers of Brazilian soya, which is commonly used for producing animal feed, and argued that Dutch development organizations should take responsibility and act. The responsible soya initiative has since developed into a coalition of nine development and environment organizations. For members, activities of the soya coalition have become part of their regular programs. This alliance of environmental activists and development workers has succeeded in getting issues related to responsible soya production firmly onto the CSR agenda of the animal feed industry. Recently, the first freighter with responsible soya ordered by Campina, arrived at the port in Rotterdam.

The short history of the soya coalition can be read as an intriguing novel. The first years were pioneering and focused on building networks, developing knowledge of the sector and refining points of view, as well as lobbying to get relevant issues onto the business agenda. Despite that the coalition was set up at the request of some Southern partners there was tension with other more radical Brazilian environment and civil society organizations. The latter were not pleased with the involvement of Dutch development organizations in the *International Roundtable on Responsible Soy*,

in which both Brazilian and international businesses and a Brazilian organization of large farmers participated. From their perspective, cooperation with big landowners and international capital was not an option and they forcefully voiced their concerns. Trust between Dutch development organizations and their Brazilian partners was put to the test. The Brazilian soya coalition accepts that Northern NGOs take on the role of putting pressure on companies in the global North. But they are not convinced that entering in dialogue and even partnership with these companies will improve the situation. This clash as to goals and strategies, combined with the conviction that in principle Southern partners should set the agenda, undermined the confidence of the Northern DC organisations.

Members of the Dutch soya coalition sometimes lobbied in the name of the coalition, but also had their own campaigns and activities. Internal cooperation became more cumbersome as the lobby phase was so successful that they were able to proceed into concrete collaboration with businesses and the signing of agreements. However, this success created new challenges and divergence over strategies widened amongst the Dutch members of the soya coalition. The coalition was entering unknown territory and had to adjust its ways of working. At that point, it developed internal guidelines so as to avoid companies playing one member against the other. Moreover, information on dealings with companies had to be handled very carefully, which tested trust within the partnership. Eventually, Greenpeace, with its more confrontational approach, was not pleased with another coalition member's deal with Campina around the import of responsible soya. Consequently they decided to leave the coalition in order to have more freedom to follow their own campaign strategy.

### **3. Specific Characteristics of Alliances**

In this section we discuss in more detail a number of aspects encountered by process facilitators of these partnerships that seem to be specific to the world of the development cooperation. These characteristics have been selected through a deductive research process on the basis of *thick descriptions*, followed by reflection (Erlandson et al, 1993). The material from the two cases was made more complete by drawing on other experiences and relevant literature. The characteristics and associated questions that emerged had to satisfy the test of *fit* (are they readily applicable to the data?) and *work* (are they meaningful?) (c.f. Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The characteristics creating challenges for North-South partnerships are the following:

- Ideology and values;
- Politically-loaded relationships ;
- Unilateral financial dependence;
- Cultural and physical distance; and
- Fragile social trust.

#### **Ideology and values**

In DC sector people do not work (only) to make money. They are driven often by values and conviction, seeking to contribute to questions that matter, as is expressed in the words of a soya coalition member: "*Every tree cut down in the Amazon goes to my heart.*". Often, DC practitioners have lived and worked abroad and after returning to the Netherlands remain 'connected' to that particular region. The work is happily done from the heart with commitment and in solidarity with Southern partners and their problems. It is this passion and engagement that allows DC partnerships to progress despite the tough and often overwhelming character of the questions they

seek to address. This also might explain why the soya coalition managed to achieved so much, despite limited resources.

In the case of the cotton coalition, passion and perseverance also made a difference. The SNV staff involved had worked in West Africa for many years and had patiently built up the capacities of local farmers' organizations. Over time they established a wide network of contacts with farmer organisations, cotton companies and other experts. The Agri-ProFocus cotton alliance benefited considerably from these contacts during the consultations on the organic cotton sub-sector.

The flip-side of conviction and passion is that it may generate strong opinions and perceptions, which can make cooperation cumbersome. Moreover, that NGOs now work more closely with businesses does not mean that the preconceptions held by both sides no longer exist. DC organizations wondered how the cotton company's drive for profit meshed with poverty reduction goals and how proposed contract farming could be combined with farmer empowerment. The cotton company for its part, was concerned that DC organizations would think on too small a scale, would be too slow to take decisions, and would be unwilling to take any risks. Relationships within the partnership improved during the first joint mission to Africa, undertaken by the cotton company and DC organisation. Reciprocal respect for each other's knowledge and skills started to build. Moreover, the local farmers' organizations reacted with cautious enthusiasm to the market opportunity on offer.

At the international level, contrasting convictions can be obstacles to close cooperation, as happened in the soya case. A number of the Brazilian counterpart organizations stood for land reform and were rallying to stop the export of soya altogether. Moreover, they considered the environmental focus of their colleagues in Brazil and the Dutch organizations to be elitist; the consultation with multinationals led them to be labelled as 'traitors'.

In forming partnerships, attention must be paid to the values, aims and drives of the people and organisations involved, and these viewpoints should be made explicit. Open dialogue and effective cooperation is possible only when all parties approach each other with respect. Without acceptance of each other's core values, equal cooperation is not possible. It is very important for partnership facilitators to be aware of the different values and ideologies at play. Moreover, such facilitators will only be accepted if they are able to express heartfelt commitment. They have to connect with each parties' interests and express "multiple loyalties", which is an attitude that goes far beyond neutrality.

The DC world has had a lot of experience with developing methods to make explicit and connect values. Examples are the soft systems methodology of Peter Checkland (1999) or the methodology used in building multi-stakeholder platforms (Milligan, Kenton and Ashley, 2005; Salomon and Engel, 1997). These methods are used to map stakeholder constellations in order to bring local parties together. That one's own actions and effectiveness within a partnership might benefit from investing more in understanding each other's values, is a topic that needs more attention.

### **Politically-loaded Relationships**

Relationships between Northern and Southern organizations are often ideologically and historically entrenched and can be confused by cultural misunderstandings. They are sensitive relationships and differences of opinion are quickly voiced in political terms. It is not unusual that Southern parties accuse Northern partners of paternalism or elitist viewpoints. These charges are often the result of deep feelings of indignation vis à vis the colonial past, international power imbalances and attitudes of condescension. Southern partners insist on sovereignty and refuse interventions by Northern partners in the agenda setting of their organizations.

The organic cotton case is a good example of how ideology influences programme proposals more than facts. Nowadays, consumers in the North want organic cotton t-shirts, but are not aware of the impact of this choice on tropical forests and in terms of the workload of African farmers. The conditions set for organic cotton forces farmers to not only abandon the use of heavily polluting pesticides, but also the use of industrially produced fertilisers. However, West African soils are poor and the yields of demanding crop like cotton will be very low without fertilization. The availability of manure and other organic fertilisers is low and difficult to increase. The consequence is that farmers must either gather and transport large quantities of cow manure from the surrounding areas to their fields using donkeys and carts, or they must clear new, more fertile fields by chopping down the last remaining forests. Farmers are well aware of this catch-22 situation. This creates a sensitive undertone to contract negotiations between local parties and companies in the North where the latter emphasise the need to improve the sustainability of production systems, but exclude the use of fertilisers.

In the case of the soya coalition, relationships are politically-loaded because the legitimacy of DC organization interventions with “Southern” problems is from time to time called into question. Local parties consider themselves to be the key stakeholder with respect to deforestation of the Amazon rainforest; they see this as their domain in the struggle for land and for development. However, environment activists see it quite differently and consider this struggle to be of global interest. Many people in the North consider the Amazon to be “the lungs” of their vulnerable world and thus also consider themselves to be stakeholders. With globalization the world is becoming smaller and the sense of ownership of poverty, development and sustainability is shifting.

These sensitivities make partnerships between the ‘North’ and ‘South’ complicated. Development workers do their best to avoid paternalism, aiming to approach Southern organizations as equal partners. In their way of working there is much attention for active consultation, understanding positions and allowing time for the process to take its due course. Some facilitators have become so careful that they “sit on their hands”. They dare not make proposals or act for fear of insulting other people or appearing paternalistic. Still, lack of sensitivity to these undercurrents may lead to a boomerang-like process of rebuttals. For potential partnership managers this is an important domain of attention. They can play a role in opening up discussion as to questions of legitimacy of involvement, and help the various sides understand and accept each other’s roles and responsibilities.

### **Unilateral Financial Dependence**

Financial relationships between Northern donors and Southern recipients turn development cooperation into a complicated game with many allegiance-related dilemmas. Since development cooperation pivots on helping others to help themselves, the relationship between a funder and a recipient cannot be limited to strict contractual agreements. The Southern organisation is a partner that must be given space to set its own agenda.

At the same time, the demand for more accountability is also reflected in the DC sector with growing requirements for showing what outputs and outcomes have been achieved. DC organizations are more and more bound to justify their policies towards their subsidy providers (Rogerson, Hewitt and Waldenberg, 2004). Thus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires detailed programs and work plans with measurable and transparent results.

Southern organizations may have double loyalties. They would prefer to focus firstly on the needs and desires of their constituents, but will nevertheless let themselves



be led by the expectations of donors because their organisational existence depends on it. Nevertheless, Southern organizations are not powerless. Northern DC organisations benefit greatly from working with capable Southern parties. This rare group of often somewhat larger civil society organizations is capable of setting their own agendas.

DC organisations have used several approaches in attempting to proceed intelligently with this financial reality. First of all, DC organizations have learned that they should not go too far in terms of 'partner'-thinking. Their role is larger than that of a funder who acts out of solidarity. It is legitimate to set clear standards for the implementation of plans and discuss accountability. Moreover, some larger donors have separated the financial departments dealing with grant applications from those involved in advisory services and setting up partnerships.

The cotton alliance clearly demonstrates an awareness of the impact of financial dependence on a partnership. At the start of the trajectory, the Northern parties purposefully did not begin by offering opportunities to fund projects. The possibility of benefitting from a project may block substantive discussions concerning the benefits and need for alternative cotton markets. During further partnership development, attention was paid to clearly distinguish the roles of various actors. Thus, care is taken that commercial arrangements between private parties do not become entangled with DC organization relationships and responsibilities. With this in mind, SNV, being first and foremost a development organization, decided that they would work primarily as an advisor to the farmers' unions and not as an intermediary between these unions and the Turkish-Dutch cotton company.

### **Physical and Cultural Distance**

Distance is a common element needing to be addressed in DC sector partnerships: parties are located in different places, often far from each other; they do not see one another often; they often do not speak each other's language; and are not familiar with (or embedded in) each other's cultural contexts. However, globalization is diminishing this distance. Because North-South connections are becoming more explicit, it is logical for DC organizations to engage not only with problems overseas, but to also become active in their home country. This offers possibilities for strengthening the 'northern side' of these partnerships such as entering into negotiations with Campina concerning responsible soya and with the Bijenkorf department store regarding the sale of organic clothing. Being part of a global partnership enhances their legitimacy in business negotiations.

A practical implication of physical distance is that there are fewer opportunities for joint planning or consultation and there are fewer opportunities for addressing problems within the partnership face-to-face. Organizing meetings, for example, is cumbersome with complex logistics and considerable costs. Everything must happen in one workshop; building relationships and joint insight into problems needs to be purposely and efficiently planned.

The rapid rise of Internet connections internationally and the dramatic drop in the cost of telephone calls offers many good possibilities for developing partnerships at a distance. For example, Skype is also growing rapidly due both to the low costs involved and the possibility of communicating verbally while also seeing the other person via webcam. E-conferencing also appears to work well.

The Executive Boards of SNV in the Hague and Agriterre, also established in the Netherlands, explored the possibility for working more in partnership and rapidly reached the conclusion that long distance cooperation could be useful. However, the big question was whether or not professionals in the field agreed. The Agri-ProFocus office thus facilitated a six week long e-conference for thirty professionals from both

organizations. This was successful and provided a firm foundation to support the partnership. More than one hundred long e-mails were exchanged, in which visions and values were expressed, programmes and ways of working explained, and concrete possibilities for cooperation explored.

Engagement in these discussions was surprising given that many participants had never met. Success can be explained by the fact that the concrete benefits of more cooperation for each organisation's practice were clear. Moreover, the passion that many participants felt towards their work meant that they were quite prepared to spend extra time discussing perspectives and visions. However, it was striking that while most Dutch participants actively engaged, their non-Dutch colleagues were less active. The potential of modern communication should not be over-estimated. It may be necessary to begin laying the foundations through face-to-face encounters. Only afterwards can these contacts be successfully followed up using e-mail or Skype.

### **Fragile Social Trust**

Partnerships generally have no leader or "owner". This, an ingredient for successful partnerships is the strengthening of social capital. Literature concerning social capital shows that participation in social networks can lead to increasing mutual trust (Putnam, 1993). It is a reinforcing mechanism where building trust leads to good cooperation, which cooperation further reinforces (Breeman, 2006).

What is the basis of social capital in North-South relations where distance in both the literal and figurative sense, is a defining characteristic? The DC sector can be typified as a small world in which old boys' (and girls') networks play an important role. Many personal relationships were built during university study periods and when living and working together in the South where the lines between professional and personal tend to blur. Motivation and commitment also mean that people happily talk a lot about their work, which leads to shared analysis of problems and a sense of urgency (or cynicism). A shared experience in a particular country also creates bonds with Southern partners.

In both the cotton and soya partnerships, social capital built in earlier interchanges played an important role amongst the Netherlands-based partners. Some players had known one another for a long time and often already had a history of cooperating in all kinds of structures. This has facilitated cooperation between organizations. The cotton case is a good example. The relationships between several farmer leaders and SNV advisors, built up over a long period of time, explained the success of the first workshop. Since these farmers have confidence in SNV they gave the workshop on alternative cotton chains the benefit of the doubt and decided to attend in large numbers. Risk of losing that trust also explains why West African based SNV advisers sometimes operated more carefully and slowly than the cotton company wanted.

Social capital is not only interpersonal, but also institutional. Social capital can even apply to a whole country. The Dutch in West Africa have a good reputation for having supported both the cotton ginning companies and farmer organizations. By contrast, the French due largely to their colonial history and continuing strong political, policy, and economic interests in the cotton sector, are viewed with more suspicion.

The numerous close interpersonal and institutional links also complicate partnership building. Common history includes sensitivities and lingering conflicts from the past. For newcomers and for people from other fields it can be difficult to be accepted within such a core group. In turn, this can lead to disinterest or even generate opposition. Moreover, strong interpersonal and institutional configurations also present a danger of rigidity, meaning that it is difficult to generate new ideas or

incorporate the thinking of newcomers (Termeer, 2006). A 'third party' may have to be invited to open up the discussion (van Dongen et al, 1996).

Partnership facilitators need a good understanding of the range of actors that might be invited to participate and their relationships with other potential partners. In order to energise partnerships, help them to survive the "bumps in the road" and break through temporary stalemates, facilitators may have to intervene. When the facilitator decides to bring in a third party, this requires careful preparation. When partners suspect even a whisper of manipulation or fraud, trust built up over many years can be lost in no time at all. Facilitators may also decide not to involve all parts of the network, thus instigating a "selective activation" of parts of the network (c.f. Scharpf, 1978). If external facilitators decide to take such influential decisions independently, then it is very important that they operate with the utmost care to make sure that these choices will eventually be considered as legitimate by both the participants and 'those purposefully left out' (c.f.. Sharpf, 1978).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Partnerships in DC are becoming ever more important, and there is a need for more professionalization of this activity. In this article we provided insights into the world of development cooperation and discussed questions that facilitators working with North-South partnerships face. We want to end with a summary of what we have found to be essential operational guidelines for managing or advising partnerships in the world of development cooperation:

- *Recognizing and continuing to build on values and passion*

Commitment and passion mean that people are prepared to invest a lot of energy into DC partnerships. With few resources, much can be achieved. However, passion can also lead to rigidity. For partnership managers this means that time and attention is needed in order to unravel ideals, ethics and vision, so as to improve mutual understanding and respect of each other's core values, and strengthen the joint process of sense-making.

- *Energy directed towards concrete activities*

Paying attention to different values, motivations and sensitivities is important, but can also lead people to get stuck. The challenge is to recognize the opportune moment for anchoring shared values and to channel energy towards concrete activities; activities which subsequently rally the alliance to discuss and develop further actions.

- *Developing social capital in North-South relationships*

Social capital is an indispensable foundation for successful partnerships. Organizations working in the same space have multiple relationships and a lot of channels through which trust can be built up and decisions made. Possible conflicts in formal environment can sometimes be solved informally. In North-South relationships these kinds of resources and possibilities are much less prevalent. Extra time and attention is necessary to build common experiences and trust within such networks, so that inter-relationships can be mobilized to shape partnerships (Tascherau and Bolger, 2006).

- *Multiple commitments*

Formal and neutral people would be unsuitable to facilitate the type of partnerships discussed in this article. Partnership managers need to show commitment too. Not only to gain trust, but also to recognize and empathise with other people's passion. However, this is also a pitfall, especially when it creates blindness to other values. Managing partnerships demands a combination of engaged distance and multiple commitments.

Finally there remains one characteristic of the DC world that has not yet been addressed, namely the habit of professionals to discuss issues amongst themselves, developing their own language and methodologies. Of course, the same is true of the many advisors who are facilitating partnerships or processes in other fields. Between these two worlds exchange is still limited. We think that the DC sector works on issues that are also relevant in, for example, the Netherlands and vice versa. In short, more cross-sector interaction would be productive for all.

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