



Frans Bieckmann
Editor in Chief
editor@thebrokeronline.eu

Daydream

I am one of those terrible people who never have enough time, always busy, with too many urgent things to do or meetings to attend. I am constantly zapping and scanning and sniffing around, to get an idea of what is going on in the many fields of science, policy and politics. I am probably like many readers of *The Broker* who need not only to keep up to date in their specific area of expertise, but also to be aware of issues emerging in a broad range of fields related to global development. Yet there is never enough time to read the hundreds of journals, magazines, websites and other media that are now available.

Nor is there time to visit all the seminars, workshops and conferences in these fields. I attend two or three every month, and I have to admit that occasionally I struggle to stay awake. Sometimes I have to force my eyes open, but that usually has something to do with the night before. And when I look around, I see people who have fallen asleep, mouths open or with chins on their chest, and others waking up with a sudden jerk of the head.

I recently attended a meeting in Leiden, about the 'security-development nexus', whose ostensible goal was to promote exchanges between academics and policy makers and practitioners in the field of development. I was in a hurry and could only attend the morning sessions. Speakers presented interesting case studies and overviews of security issues in East Africa. During these long talks my impatience grew. I felt like the one or two 'policy makers' I saw sitting in the hall. They, like me, have many meetings and conferences to choose from, and a lot of issues to cover.

What they, like me, are looking for is concise information – spoken or written – highlighting what's new, summarizing conclusions, and outlining the consequences for policy and practice. But this was not the case in Leiden: the speakers were elaborating on methodologies and details, which are of course important from a scientific point of view; but what was the difference between this meeting and a 'normal' academic conference or workshop? Wasn't this meeting meant to 'bridge the gap' between academics and policy makers? The academic counter-argument will, of course, be that knowledge is acquired only through reflection. But even academic researchers need to ask themselves how much time they can afford to spend on issues that are not part of their 'core business', but which are still useful in providing an overview.

My mind wandered, as it often does on such occasions. It is easy to criticize how others present information, I thought. Sometimes I fall asleep reading my own articles, so who am I to judge? But with *The Broker* I face similar problems. What is the best way to attract the attention of professionals in the field? To present academic information in such a way that it can be easily absorbed? To balance depth, nuance and complexity, with accessibility and easy reading? An ideal workshop is like an ideal article in *The Broker*: short, concise,

every sentence reflecting a balanced and well founded argument. No ballast, only the essentials. If readers want to know more about a specific aspect, they can visit the website and follow the links or references. For either a workshop presentation or a magazine article, thorough preparation is crucial. Once the academic quality and foundation of the research have been checked, the information can be presented much more efficiently, without bothering listeners or readers with endless details about methodology, for example.

Not all good scientists are good communicators. I cannot judge myself to be a good journalist, but I am aware that I need an editor to revise my texts. An editor is like a workshop chairperson who will only allow essential and precise comments, thus ensuring the effective exchange of information and insights. Such workshops, like articles in *The Broker*, need to be chaired and prepared by people who are well informed, with a broad view of both how policy makers are reasoning, and of the ongoing debates in various disciplines. From my experience with *The Broker* I know that there is always a shortage of such people. But the challenge is clear: articles, or workshop presentations, need to be sharp and to the point. Readers and listeners, all busy people, should not be given the chance to let their thoughts wander. Ideally, they should be bombarded with new insights and ideas that keep them on the edge of their seat, so that after one or two hours emerge in confusion and excitement about how they can use them.

Suddenly I awoke from my daydream. I decided to leave because there was work to do. This fifth issue of *The Broker* features a summary of the emerging debate on who should pay the rising costs of climate change, and according to which legal philosophical principles. It shows that a global political space is urgently needed, as such issues can no longer be decided and resolved at the (inter)state level. There is a report on the latest developments in the field of malaria research – preventive medicines, diagnostic tests and vaccines. We also examine the ways non-governmental organizations are learning to manage the knowledge they need to operate effectively in an increasingly complex world. And, in a piece on the relationship between India and Pakistan, new research reveals that the more these two countries engage in international trade (with other countries) the less inclined they are likely to be to go to war with each other.

Sleep well. ■



Gamma / Hollandse Hoogte

Letters to the editor can be submitted online at www.thebrokeronline.eu/letters. Please include your full name and email address. We reserve the right to edit letters, and to use any submissions sent to the letters column of *The Broker* in any other format.