

LINKING TO LEARN & LEARNING FROM LINKING

Lessons from eight years of DPRN

Development Policy  Review Network

Colophon

'Linking to Learn & Learning from Linking' has been published to mark the conclusion of the Development Policy Review Network as of 1 March 2011, after eight years of organising informed debate and stimulating synergy between development experts from science, policy, practice and business. DPRN was initiated by the Research School for Resource Studies for Development (CERES) in 2003, and funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2004 onwards (first by the Cultural Cooperation, Education and Research Department (DCO) and since September 2009 by the Effectiveness and Coherence Department (DEC)). In DPRN's second phase (2008–2011), the grant was channelled through NWO–WOTRO Science for Development.

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Photos

Private collections and as specified in the captures.

Printing

MultiCopy, Amsterdam

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Acronyms

AISSR	Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research
ASC	African Studies Centre
CDC	Civic driven change
CERES	Research School for Resource Studies for Development
CIDIN	Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen, Radboud University
CMS	Content management system
DCO	Cultural Cooperation, Education and Research Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DEC	Effectiveness and Coherence Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
DPRN	Development Policy Review Network
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ICCO	Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
KIT	Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen / Royal Tropical Institute
L4D	Learning for Development
LNV	Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NCDO	National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NWO-WOTRO	Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research – WOTRO Science for Development
NWP	Netherlands Water Partnership
OST	Open Space Technology
PME	Planning, monitoring & evaluation
PROVO	Programme of requirements for the organisation of Dutch international /development cooperation
SANPAD	South Africa – Netherlands research Programme on Alternatives in Development
SAVUSA	South Africa – VU University – Strategic Alliances
SID NL	Society for International Development Netherlands Chapter
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SOMO	Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations
UvA	University of Amsterdam
VROM	Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment
WUR	Wageningen University and Research Centre
WRR	Scientific Council for Government Policy

Preface by the Chair

The activities of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) are coming to an end. While this is a sad moment for some, it is also a moment to cherish, all the more so because the DPRN Task Force feels that DPRN has accomplished what it set out to do and that relatively little extra can be achieved by prolonging the existence of the network. DPRN is not ending with a sense of failure, or due to a lack of funds or motivation on the part of its fervent supporters.

There is some modest sense of satisfaction when DPRN looks back at where we came from and where we stand now. DPRN set out to build bridges between four communities active in the field of international and development cooperation – policymakers, practitioners, academia and the business community. It was also intended to build bridges between those communities in both the Netherlands and Flanders. There is now an increased awareness and sensitivity towards the interdependence of these communities. In several ways, DPRN managed to bring to-

gether professionals from different backgrounds, to link their expertise and to enhance their collaboration. DPRN has shown that changes are possible.

DPRN has remained a virtual organisation throughout its existence. With very limited resources, it has had to depend on volunteers for most of its core activities. The human resources that DPRN was able to count on most were Mirjam Ros and Kim de Vries, with ICT support being provided by Thijs Turèl and later Joska Landré. DPRN owes much of its success to their motivation, dedication, inspiration and tirelessness. The DPRN Task Force was able to provide the required leadership thanks to a small band of reliable volunteers and supporters. The only actual reward for these professional volunteers was the very enjoyable annual dinner, which is going to be sorely missed in years to come.

What is to become of the DPRN heritage? That heritage consists of our web portal www.global-connections.nl which is going to remain operational for some time to guarantee continued public ac-

cess to interesting and relevant results. Another element of DPRN's heritage is the website www.search4dev.nl, which we hope, subject to financial feasibility, will be preserved and maintained by the Royal Tropical Institute in the years ahead. DPRN's heritage also consists of innovative processes, procedures, good practices and many lessons learned. We hope and trust that this heritage can and will be preserved by NWO-WOTRO on an institutional basis. However, that is not all. Many people have participated in DPRN activities over the last eight years and many have enjoyed those activities and we hope will remember them fondly. Policy documents that were produced as a result of DPRN's efforts will not be easily forgotten, nor will the friendship and professionalism. We hope that ceasing our activities does not mean the DPRN legacy will be quickly erased from the memory of our many stakeholders. That would be our most relevant achievement!

Dr Jan Donner
Chair of the DPRN Task Force

Preface by the first Chair

Paul Hoebink, Ton Dietz, Henk Molenaar and I met in Nijmegen in 2002 to discuss setting up DPRN. Henk and I represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and we were both excited about setting up this new link between research and policy. No doubt Paul and Ton were somewhat uncertain about whether the ministry was really committed to opening up to a new dialogue with academia and I was manoeuvred into accepting the chair position for the new network, thus ensuring that the ministry was a committed partner right from the start.

The initiative was welcomed almost universally. In the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the research community, private sector and practitioners seemed to have been cut off from any healthy debate about development cooperation, in which political and ideological viewpoints would be challenged and informed by scientific insights. Old instruments for engagement, such as the Dutch National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation, had disappeared and had been replaced by

less inclusive advisory mechanisms. Development cooperation shifted towards greater ownership by partners in the South, and while this was happening, the ministry was operating more or less with its back towards its Dutch constituency and adopting an attitude of 'don't call us, we will call you'. It was highly necessary to reformulate its relationship with science and knowledge. The situation was perhaps best characterised a 'dark age' in policy debates. But there was light at the end of the tunnel and DPRN was one of the initiatives enabling the train to move forward.

It was exciting to chair the first sessions of DPRN, where the ideas for its work programme were born. In the summer of 2004 I left for another challenge at the Global Environment Facility in Washington DC, and was happy that I could hand over the baton to Jan Donner. Whenever I came back to the Netherlands or followed policy discussions, it was great to see that DPRN had found a place and that it was a crucial element in a hot mix of discussions stimulated by Vice Versa, the Broker and other initiatives.

The interaction between science, policy, the private sector and practitioners has become completely accepted once again. Scientists have put climate change and its effects on developing countries on the development agenda. Scientists have developed new tools and methods to judge the effectiveness of interventions. The financial crisis and budget deficits led to discussions on new avenues to explore. Hot debates take place – nothing is taken for granted nor should it be. If we were in a tunnel, we are now certainly back in the light. I am glad to see that DPRN has played an important role in ensuring that in the Netherlands and Flanders there are now plenty of channels to communicate and discuss. This is no doubt also due to the great institutional and personal continuity in DPRN, both in its Task Force and in the work that was done to realise the meetings and discussions. My sincere congratulations to DPRN. On 1 March 2001 I will raise a glass, somewhere in the world, to toast its achievements!

Rob van den Berg
DPRN Chair 2003–2004

Prologue by the authors: Facilitating on the verge of content and process management

This booklet is intended to be a legacy of eight years of DPRN. During these years, DPRN stimulated informed debate, bridged knowledge divides and created synergy between development experts from different domains. As DPRN staff, we wrote this booklet with the aim of making the tacit knowledge explicit that we and other actors in the network acquired. In this prologue, we give our personal impression of what DPRN is and what it takes to steer such a network. We also highlight the reasons for writing this booklet and how it was done, which evidently brings us to a few words of thanks.

Subsidy window or network?

The last external evaluation report described DPRN as a low-threshold subsidy window that enabled dedicated individuals from the research, NGO and corporate communities to set in motion processes that trigger evidence-based thinking on important policy issues. This

surely was how many process organisers viewed it. This usually changed once they met the DPRN staff, who emphasised that DPRN was a network, were keen on corporate branding and monitored the quality of process reports. A first meeting between us and new beneficiaries of DPRN funds typically started with an explanation of DPRN's aims. We stressed the need to seek common ground between actors from different sectors as a basis for creating synergy. We usually dealt with individuals who were committed to the DPRN cause, but

sometimes a little steering was needed to direct attention more towards particular target groups such as policymakers or business people. The second message conveyed to process organisers was that DPRN was *not* primarily a subsidy window, but a network of which we hoped they would soon feel a part. Several process organisers indeed soon spoke internally and externally about 'our DPRN process'. However, for others DPRN remained primarily a donor whose support was warmly acknowledged. Although all adhered to the DPRN



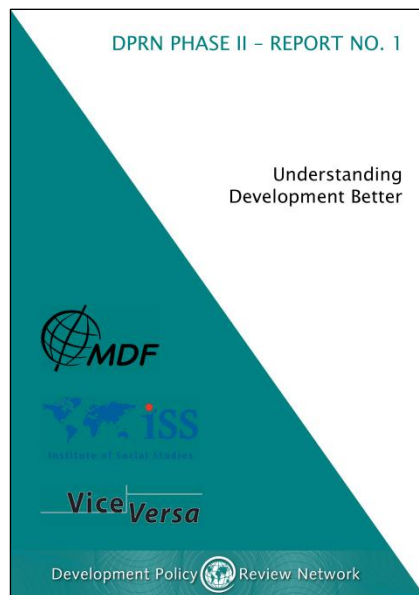
DPRN, a low-threshold subsidy window? (Source: www.kleinezeitung.at).

mission of stimulating informed debate and synergy between different sectors, it appeared more difficult for DPRN to create a sense of being part of a network among the actors involved. This had primarily to do with DPRN's set-up in which DPRN processes were not linked through overarching themes. The organisers of individual processes carried out their activities relatively independent of the others. We tried to establish a few relations between processes that dealt with related themes (such as commercial land pressure and agrofuels), but more substantial efforts in this direction were unfeasible within the staff time available for network facilitation.

Setting the DPRN standard

Our wish to create a network feeling and promote the DPRN identity of everything organised under its banner, were the main reasons to insist on branding the activities and output under a DPRN flag. This included the use of the DPRN banner and logo in addition to the organisations' own logos and the use of DPRN house style in invitations, reports and other output. John Foster

designed the DPRN logo and banner, whereas Joska Landré creatively developed banners for the individual processes and their websites on DPRN's web portal Global-Connections.nl.



Example of a DPRN house style report.

The DPRN 'feel' was also fostered by making sure that there was a representative of DPRN staff or the Task Force at every DPRN event for a brief opening speech that explained the context in which the event was organised. Developing a standard format for progress and end reports was also important to

monitor whether DPRN ends had been met, and guaranteed that we obtained the data needed to report to our back donor, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later NWO-WOTRO. The formulation of 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) indicators to assess, for example, the policy impact of DPRN activities, was a learning process in itself, in which we were guided by the Task Force and evaluators.

Our commitment to quality also implied a rigorous quality check of output, including editing, asking for clarifications where we felt this was needed and revision by a native speaker. This, too, is not what people expect from a 'subsidy window' and it occasionally (but surprisingly rarely) created tensions. We learned that it is important to be clear and make proper arrangements about this from the start.

Content versus process

In addition, we learned - relatively late - that it was better to separate content from process output. As facilitators of a network that aimed to generate debates that were rele-

vant to policy and practice we acted on the verge of content and process management. Probably for this reason we were inclined to integrate the two. Learning from process organisers and the last external evaluation, we realised that in this way a lot of interesting information got lost in process reports. To do more justice to the interesting results and insights generated by the various DPRN activities and make them more visible, our final step in network facilitation was to redesign the websites and draw up infosheets for each process with a focus on content rather than process.

Value for money

The way in which we facilitated DPRN called for an intensive working style. Some find it hard to believe that DPRN had no more than two fulltime equivalents of staff time available for network steering, administration, dissemination of information and ICT support. The same applied to the process organisers, who generally put more time in the DPRN process than could be compensated for through the subsidy. This raises the question

whether a follow-up to DPRN is feasible with the same budget.

Tacit knowledge made explicit

We learned a lot of lessons with regard to network steering, knowledge brokering and advocacy in the years that we were involved in

DPRN. This was also triggered by the fact that Kim de Vries decided to take the Advanced Master course in International Development at CIDIN. That allowed her to stay with DPRN as a trainee and all of us to learn from her MSc research on 'Bridging knowledge divides', the

GM Soy Debate

How to manage risks and benefits of genetic modification in processes intended to improve the performance and practices of the soy sector?

• **Opposing insights impede debate**

A polarised debate has evolved around genetically modified (GM) soy production. Triggered by increasing world demand for vegetable proteins and biofuels, soy production has been expanding rapidly during the past decade, especially in North and South America. A large and increasing part of this production is genetically modified. Soy is currently one of the most widespread GM crops, together with corn, cotton and rice.

Genetic modification is highly controversial. Opponents emphasise the unknown long-term environmental and health risks of GM crops. They also claim that GM soy boosts further expansion and other negative impacts of soy and that farmers are increasingly dependent on a handful of companies when it comes to obtaining seeds and crop protection. Proponents of GM crops argue that GM technology poses no threat to human or environmental wellbeing. Instead, they contend that it reduces the need for pesticides and increases yields. Due to their often radical positions, there has been little constructive dialogue between proponents and opponents of GM soy.

• **Unbiased knowledge and constructive dialogue**

Plant Research International (PRI) at Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) and AidEnvironment initiated the GM Soy Debate in response to the highly polarised debate on the pros and cons of GM soy production.

The first objective of the process was to perform research and then create a common and unbiased knowledge base as a response to

Organisations

The GM Soy Debate was facilitated by the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN). The following organisations collaborated in the project:

- Plant Research International (PRI) of Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) made an inventory and analysis of scientific data on the social and environmental effects of GM soy.
- AidEnvironment was responsible for managing project communication and organising the Stakeholder Conference.
- An independent Steering Committee, consisting of professionals from the North and South with diverging views on GM soy provided advice to WUR and AidEnvironment.

Additional funding for the project came from Solidaridad, WWF Netherlands, and the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.

PLANT RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL WAGENINGEN UR

aidenvironment

Solidaridad


VROM

WWF

key stakeholder concerns. This knowledge base provided a basis for constructive stakeholder dialogue about the possible impacts of GM soy and the promotion of responsible decision-making. Finally, the process delivered consensus-based recommendations on how to manage the risks and benefits of GM soy.

<http://gmsoydebate.global-connections.nl/>

Example of an infosheet.



results of which we later summarised in the 2010 Netherlands Yearbook of International Development Cooperation, edited by Paul Hoebink. Some of the insights from the interviews held for this research have been used in this booklet, with permission of the interviewees.

The insights of Fons van der Velden and Chris Eijkemans (Context, international cooperation) and Heinz Greijn (Learning for Development, L4D) who did the external midterm and end evaluations enriched this booklet tremendously.

We also learned a lot from the organisers' reflections in the process reports and their responses to an online survey on their experience with DPRN. We set that survey up in the months preceding our final event 'Linking to learn & Learn from linking' on 18 February 2011. These reflections, too, provided input for this booklet.

Koen Kusters (Wereld in Woorden) helped by conducting telephone interviews, which enabled us to enliven this document with quotes from various stakeholders.

Last, but not least, we learned a lot from the DPRN Task Force members. Working with them was a pleasure, and we are grateful for the trust they placed in us to carry out our duties relatively independently, while being there when we needed it. Without doing injustice to the others, a special word of thanks goes to Ton Dietz, who was often the first contact because we worked in the same building until he moved to the African Studies Centre in May 2010.

A big 'thank you' to all who shared their ideas and provided inputs. You enabled us to make at least some tacit knowledge explicit in this booklet.

Mirjam Ros (DPRN Coordinator)
Kim de Vries (Programme assistant)

DPRN in a bird's eye view

The year 2002 marked a change in the spirit of the times. Scientists began to learn from policymakers and practitioners whose world until then was largely unknown to most of them. Likewise, policymakers became more open to the Dutch scientific community. It signalled the start of various initiatives that aimed to bridge the science–policy gap in a more structured way.

This is the analysis of one of DPRN's founding fathers, Ton Dietz. To illustrate the change, he likes to remind us of the speech by former Minister of Development Cooperation Eveline Herfkens during the CERES Summer School around the turn of the century. She accused scientists of contacting her ministry only to secure research funds and reminded her audience that the ministry could do perfectly well without Dutch knowledge institutions. The academic community reacted furiously. This reciprocal animosity stood out in stark contrast to later initiatives like DPRN, the IS Academy and The Broker, which emerged from 2003 onwards with subsidies from the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs. Agnes van Ardenne's appointment as Minister for Development Cooperation in 2002 marked the start of renewed dialogue between policy and science. It proved to be a fertile breeding ground for the creation of DPRN. Talks between Ton Dietz and Paul Hoebink on behalf of the CERES Research School and Rob van den Berg and Henk Molenaar, then representing the ministry's IOB and DCO departments, resulted in a subsidy for the first phase of DPRN (2004–2007).

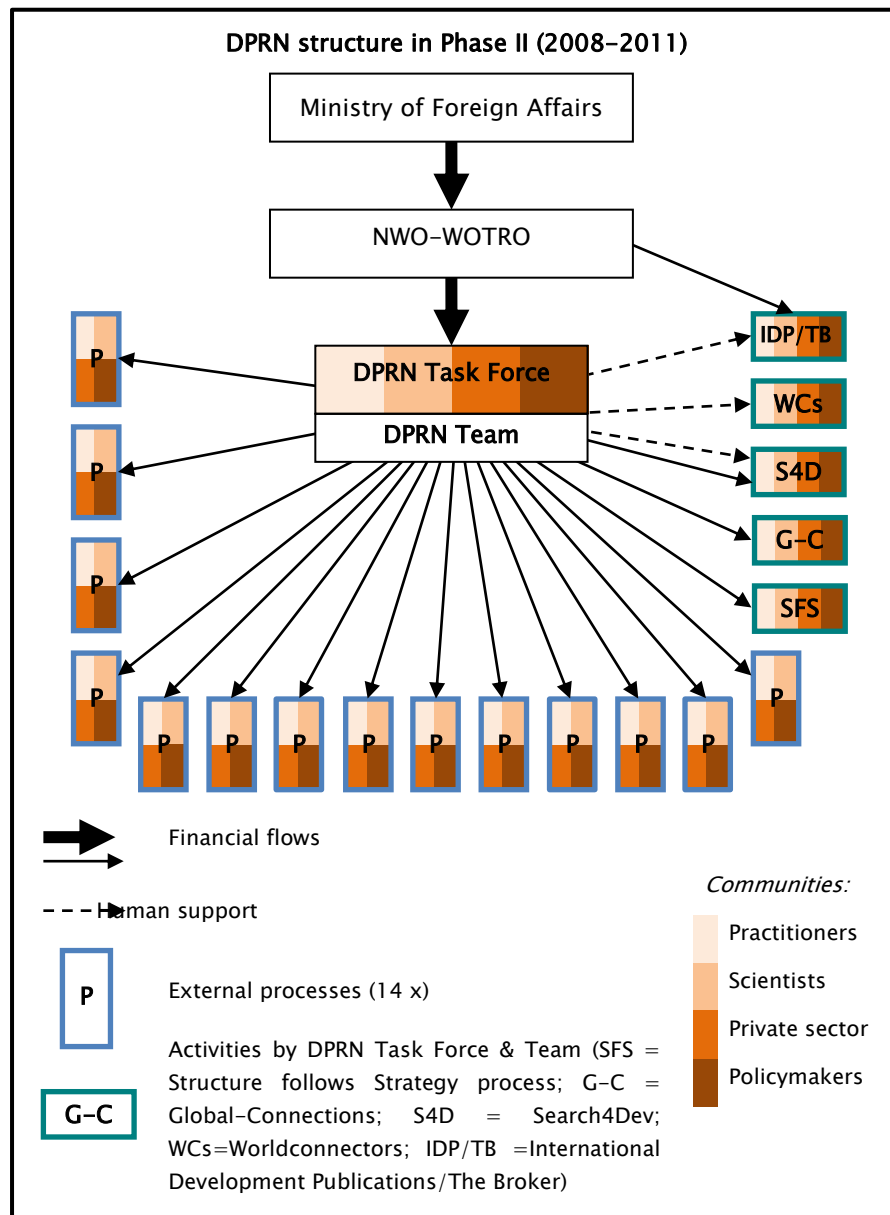
The DPRN approach

In this first phase, DPRN followed a regional approach. For 13 world regions, specialised scientific institutes organised annual regional expert meetings during three consecutive years. The primary aim was to bring scientists, policymakers and practitioners together to exchange experiences and explore common ground. With the help of the African Studies Centre, the Global–Connections database was set up to help them find each other. This all worked well in getting the DPRN idea on the agenda, but it was inadequate in enhancing



structural cooperation between different communities. Ambitions for the second phase therefore went a step further. First, the practice of occasional meetings was replaced with a process approach in which organisations from different sectors worked together from proposal writing to implementation. Second, instead of inviting specialised institutions to organise a meeting, DPRN began to issue open calls for proposals, to be submitted by organisations representing at least two different sectors. Third, a thematic approach substituted the regional approach, because it appeared to be easier to mobilise development experts on a thematic basis. Fourth, more deliberate efforts were made to include the business sector, where a lot of innovations are taking place that are relevant for development cooperation. Fifth, DPRN ventured to bridge

the gap between the Netherlands and Flanders. Despite speaking the same language, the two countries are institutionally very different and can learn a lot from each other. In particular DPRN's last year had a strong Flemish flavour. Sixth, DPRN made publications of non-academic organisations available online. So far, 28 development organisations have made their publications available via the widely applauded online library Search4Dev, set up by Information & Library Services at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), and interest is still growing. DPRN also joined initiatives with similar aims. On behalf of DPRN, Ton Dietz participated in the Steering Committee of the Worldconnectors, to which initially Karen Witsenburg and later Koen Kusters provided support on behalf of DPRN. Ton Dietz also sat on the Board of the Foundation for International Development Publications, which issues *The Broker*, in whose editorial committee Mirjam Ros represented DPRN. In this way, the related initiatives joined forces in promoting informed debate and evidence-based policymaking. ■

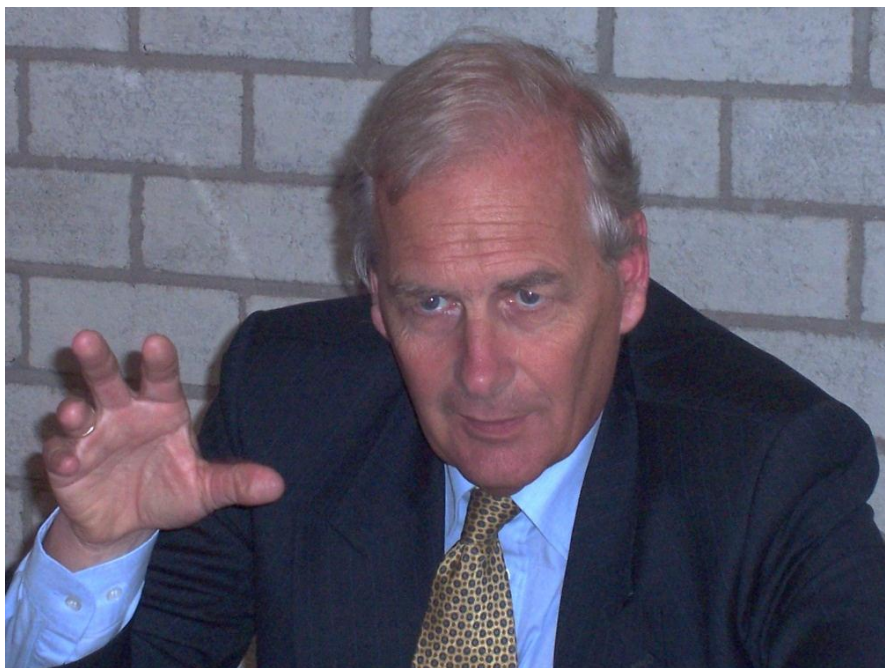


DPRN governance

It is not easy but nonetheless very relevant to identify the key aspects of DPRN governance and its success. Below, Jan Donner, Chairman of the DPRN Task Force, reflects on this issue.

The Development Policy Review Network never had any formal structure. It has been a virtual organisation throughout its life, with many people involved. Some drifted in and out of the network, others joined DPRN never to leave it, or left due to changed circumstances such as employment overseas, which is a professional ‘inconvenience’ that faces all of us.

Much of the DPRN work was carried out by a few dedicated professionals, hired to do much of the thinking and most of the operational work. Consequently, Mirjam Ros and Kim de Vries, with ICT support provided by Thijs Turèl and later Joska Landré, really were at the heart of the DPRN organisation, making it tick and turning it into a success. They made sure that Task Force meetings were called, sufficiently attended and then duly rec-



orded in proceedings. They implemented all decisions taken by the Task Force and monitored all programmes and activities that benefited from the funding made available through DPRN.

Professional competence

There being no structure or hierarchy, the managerial tools available to the DPRN staff were limited. In some cases, the DPRN funds were sufficient to back up our decisions. Frequently, however, it was exper-

tise, professionalism and prestige that helped DPRN obtain the desired results. DPRN gradually developed into a respected platform that could call on a vast group of professionals in a broad range of disciplines and communities to achieve those results. Many, sometimes elusive, experts were willing to be interviewed for issue papers and other activities, including this booklet. Many were willing to participate actively in meetings, workshops and conferences, or to con-

tribute to publications. The professional competence of DPRN and its participants consequently became its most attractive, convincing and therefore relevant asset. It enabled each of the four domains (policy, practice, academia and the private sector) to transcend the scope for action that they possessed on their own.

DPRN gained access to, and a foothold in, each of those four domains and successfully involved interested colleagues from each of them. This was indeed no small feat, given that the sectors were hardly connected when we started in 2003. It is testimony to DPRN's approach that it successfully enlisted professionals from each of the four domains to contribute to activities. For we always insisted that there should be participation from more than one domain in each of the activities sponsored by DPRN.

Task Force guidance

The Task Force provided guidance – leadership would be too strong a word – to the DPRN staff. It acted as a sounding board and could occasionally help open doors. The

'It was the personal commitment of each of those professional stakeholders that kept the blood coursing through DPRN's veins and its heart ticking.'

Jan Donner, Chair DPRN Task Force

Task Force has had a rather fluid membership over the years. As Chairman of the Task Force I was steadfastly supported by Ton Dietz, who has been a pillar of strength throughout the entire existence of DPRN. However, others have made very relevant and crucial contributions too. The typical member of the Task Force was a professional from one of the four domains, knowledgeable and experienced in the field of international cooperation and with a vast network.

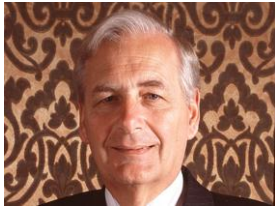
Commitment

Around this inner core of staff and Task Force were grouped the many interested stakeholders from the four corners of international cooperation. None of these stakeholders would have supported DPRN if they had not felt that they themselves and the wider field of international

cooperation would probably benefit from their participation. Many have contributed by chairing meetings, contributing texts and attending events. Yet again, it was the personal commitment of each of those professional stakeholders that kept the blood coursing through DPRN's veins and its heart ticking. What it boils down to is that personal chemistry and professionalism are the ingredients that have made DPRN work. That has made it very satisfying.■

Who's who

Current DPRN Task Force members



Jan Donner is President of the Royal Tropical Institute and Chair of the DPRN Task Force.



Ton Dietz is Director of the African Studies Centre and Professor in African Development at Leiden University and Professor in Human Geography at the UvA.



Dieneke de Groot is Coordinator Policy, Monitoring and Evaluation at the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO).



Paul Hoebink is Extraordinary Professor in Development Cooperation and Director of the Centre for International Development Studies (CIDIN) of Radboud University.



Jan Gruiters is Director of IKV Pax Christi Nederland.



Pieter van Stuijvenberg is Managing Director of Euroconsult / BMB Mott MacDonald.



Bernike Pasveer represents ECDPM. She is independent consultant and assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University.



Jessie Bokhoven is Chief Strategy at SNV Netherlands Development Organisation.

Who's who

Current DPRN Task Force members (continued)



Han van Dijk is Scientific Director of CERES, Professor of Law and Governance in Africa at Wageningen University and research fellow at the African Studies Centre in Leiden.



Henk Molenaar is Executive Director of NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development and observer in the DPRN Task Force.



Theo van de Sande is Senior Policy Adviser at the Effectiveness and Coherence Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and observer in the DPRN Task Force.

Who's who

Former DPRN Task Force members



Rob van den Berg was the first to chair DPRN when he was IOB Director at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He is now Director of GEF's Evaluation Office in Washington.



Mariecke van der Glas is Regional Manager for Central America and Haiti for ICCO and Kerk in actie.



Johan van de Gronden is Director of the Netherlands chapter of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). As former Director of SNV he was member of the DPRN Task Force.



Otto Hospes is Associate Professor Public Administration and Policy at Wageningen University. As former IOB Inspector, he was member of the DPRN Task Force.



Jan Ubels is Senior Strategist at SNV Netherlands Development Organisation.



André Leliveld is Senior Researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden.



Martin de Graaf is Senior Advisor at Euroconsult / BMB Mott MacDonald.



Bram van Ojik is Director of the Social Development Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As former IOB Director he was observer in the DPRN Task Force.

Who's who

Former DPRN Task Force members (continued)



Paul Engel is Director of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).



Eric Korsten is independent consultant at 'IMPACT'. As former Senior Strategist Impact Evaluation at SNV he was a member of the DPRN Task Force.



Pieter de Baan is Executive Director of the Trust Fund for Victims at the International Crime Court. He was DPRN Task Force member when he was Senior Advisor at SNV.



Rob Visser is a fellow researcher at CIDIN. As former Chief Scientist at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs he was observer in the DPRN Task Force.



Lolita van Toledo is Policy Advisor at CERES and Utrecht University.



Dick Foeken is Deputy Director and Senior Researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden.

Who's who

The DPRN team



Mirjam Ros-Tonen is DPRN Coordinator and Assistant Professor in Human Geography and International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam.



Kim de Vries is Programme Assistant at DPRN.



Joska Landré is responsible for DPRN's ICT Support.



Koen Kusters is DPRN representative in the Worldconnectors Project Group and freelance writer for Wereld in Woorden – Global Research and Reporting.



Joëtta Zoetelief is DPRN Project Assistant for Search4Dev at the Royal Tropical Institute. She is MSc student in International Development Studies at the UvA.

Who's who

Former DPRN Team members



Caroline Muilwijk is an independent nurse and remedial teacher. As CERES office assistant and web coordinator she provided administrative support to DPRN in 2005–2006.



Puikang Chan provided administrative support to DPRN from mid 2006 until February 2008. Currently she is Project Manager at the University of Amsterdam.



Marianne van Heelsbergen is Secretary at the University of Amsterdam and provided administrative support to DPRN in 2008 and 2009.



Tijmen de Groot is Account Manager at Ebretti Benelux. As Student Assistant he provided administrative support to DPRN in 2009 and 2010.



Thijs Turèl is Strategy Advisor Scenario Planning at Futureconsult. As student assistant with DPRN he was responsible for ICT support in 2007.



Karen Witsenburg is Advocacy Officer at Both Ends. She was programme assistant and represented DPRN in the Worldconnectors Support Group in 2007.

Overview of activities

DPRN processes Phase II (2008–2011)



Structure follows strategy

Structure follows strategy: the organisation of Dutch development and international cooperation

A three-year process aimed at discussing new strategies and structures for Dutch international and development cooperation (IC/DC) in order to identify alternatives to the fragmented nature of Dutch IC/DC. The process included the organisation of several expert and public meetings, and the publication of two issue papers.

Organising agency: DPRN.

Website:

<http://structurefollowsstrategy.dprn.nl>



Understanding development better

Understanding development better

A one-year process aimed at discussing the complexity of development processes and ensuring that the issue of development theories and models was put back onto the Dutch debate agenda. The process included a three-day conference and the publication of a position paper.

Organising agencies: MDF Training & Consultancy (coordination), Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Vice Versa.

Website:

<http://udb.global-connections.nl>



Microfinance Stimulating Business Development?

Stimulating business development: another side of microfinance?

A one-year process aimed at investigating which role microfinance institutions can play in improving access of small entrepreneurs in developing countries to non-financial business services. The process included three interlinked seminars and the publication of a paper and synthesis report.

Organising agencies: Triodos Facet (coordination), Inholland University of Applied Sciences.

Website:

<http://microfinance.global-connections.nl>



GM Soy Debate: creating common sense on genetically modified soy

A one-year process aimed at initiating a constructive, informed and science-based debate on the benefits and drawbacks of GM soy in Latin America from an environmental and rural development perspective. The process included research with stakeholder involvement (through steering committee advice and a stakeholder conference) and the publication of popular reports based on the study.

Organising agencies: Aidenvironment (coordination) and Plant Research International (PRI)–Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) with support from Solidaridad, WWF Netherlands and the Ministry of VROM.

Website:

<http://gmsoydebate.global-connections.nl>



Value chain governance and endogenous growth: how can NGOs, firms and governments achieve social inclusion and poverty reduction?

A 2.5-year process aimed at assessing how inclusive value chain governance can be established by systematically comparing, discussing and integrating diverse analytical and intervention frameworks used by firms, NGOs and governments. The process included a writeshop, several meetings and the publication of research papers (later published as a book).

Organising agencies: Institute of Social Studies (ISS) (coordination), WUR, Woord en Daad, ICCO–Kerk in Actie, Hivos, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV), Concept Fruit BV.

Website:

<http://value-chains.global-connections.nl>



On track with gender

A three-year process aimed at rethinking and working towards transforming the current understanding and practice of gender mainstreaming in order to improve policies and practices of development actors towards gender equality. The process included two conferences and the publication of research papers and policy briefs.

Organising agencies: Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN)–Radboud University (coordination), Hivos, Oxfam Novib, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Human Rights and Peace Building Department, DMH).

Website:

<http://www.ontrackwithgender.nl>

Commercial Pressures on Land

Rethinking Policies and Practice for development

Commercial pressures on land: rethinking policies and practice for development

A one-year process aimed at providing an evidence base to influence policy processes that enable more secure and equitable access to land for the poor who face increased commercial demand for their land. The process included setting up an online interest group, paper publications and a one-day workshop.

Organising agencies: Centre for Development Studies (CDS)–University of Groningen (coordination), International Land Coalition (ILC), Oxfam Novib.

Website:

<http://pressuresonland.global-connections.nl>

Phosphorus Depletion

Phosphorus depletion: the invisible crisis

A one-year process aimed at increasing global awareness of the depletion of phosphorus (an irreplaceable and indispensable nutrient for plant growth) and investigating possible mitigation options for avoiding food insecurity. The process included the publication of articles, case studies, a documentary, and a plan for the setup of a future ‘Nutrient Platform’. Two seminars were held to raise political awareness.

Organising agencies: Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP) (coordination), WASTE advisers on urban environment and development, Plant Research International (PRI–WUR).

Website:

<http://phosphorus.global-connections.nl>

Agrofuels platform

Fuelling knowledge on the social and ecological impacts of agrofuel production

A one-year process aimed at generating insights into the social and ecological effects of agrofuel production and expansion, with a view to enabling informed decision-making designed to minimise the negative effects. This process included the publication of a paper, setting up an online knowledge community, and a multi-stakeholder meeting.

Organising agencies: Both ENDS (coordination), IUCN NL, ETC International, Cordaid, AISSR–UvA, Alterra–WUR, Institute of Environmental Sciences (CML)–University of Leiden, Law and Governance Group–WUR, Mekon Ecology.

Website:

<http://www.agrofuelsplatform.nl>



Raising Tax Revenues

Supporting developing countries' ability to raise tax revenues

A one-year process aimed at enhancing the exchange of information and cooperation among actors who support developing countries' ability to raise tax revenues, and formulating recommendations on how to address any hindrances to do so. The process included the publication of three research papers, the building of an online library and database, and the organisation of a synthesising seminar.

Organising agencies: Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO) (coordination), CIDIN–Radboud University, Oxfam Novib, Tax Justice NL, Oikos, Ministry of Foreign Affairs–DEC.

Website:

<http://taxrevenues.global-connections.nl>



Singing a new policy tune

Singing a new policy tune

A one-year process aimed at improving the quality of policymaking in development cooperation in the Netherlands by revitalising thinking about policy theories. The process included an assessment of previous policy-formulation initiatives, a kick-off conference, 2 public debates to discuss different policy domains, a meeting to discuss the WRR report, and the publication of a note outlining the contours of a new policy theory.

Organising agencies: MDF Training & Consultancy (coordination), Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Lo-kaalmondiaal–Vice Versa.

Website:

<http://www.singinganewpolicytune.nl>



Collaborate Innovate

The knowledge triangle in developing countries: a missed opportunity in university development cooperation?

A one-year process aimed at raising awareness on the idea that science and technology are crucial for development and that the knowledge triangle – education, research and innovation – is important for a knowledge-based society. The process centred on an international workshop in South Africa. Following a call for papers, several presentations were held.

Organising agencies: Ghent University (coordination), Centre for Development Innovation (CDI)–WUR, Nuffic, City of Ghent (Department of North–South cooperation).

Website:

<http://innovate.global-connections.nl>



Civic Driven Change: Implications for policymakers and practitioners

A one-year process aimed at stimulating dialogue and learning about what Civic Driven Change (CDC) implies for the policy and practice of international cooperation in the Netherlands and Belgium. The process included meetings about bringing CDC into practice in local politics and development policies. A synthesising writeshop was organised to outline the strategies needed for the further promotion of the CDC concept.

Organising agencies: Context international cooperation (coordination), Hivos, Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Cordaid, Broederlijk Delen, Social E-evaluator.

Website:

<http://cdc.global-connections.nl>



Afghan-Central Asian water cooperation on the management of the Amu Darya river: connecting experts and policymakers in the lowlands

A one-year process aimed at improving cross-border cooperation between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on the management of the Amu Darya basin's water resources. The process included connecting experts in 'The Amu Darya Basin Network' and an international conference.

Organising agencies: EastWest Institute Brussels (coordination), Irrigation & Water Engineering Group (IWE)-WUR.

Website:

<http://www.amudaryabasin.net>



Strengthening planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) in development projects that deal with complex social contexts

A one-year process aimed at developing a better understanding of the effectiveness of outcome mapping as a PME tool in development projects that deal with complex social systems. The process included the publication of several documents on PME practices and policies. The results of these were discussed in a synthesising seminar.

Organising agencies: HIVA-Research Institute for Labour and Society-KU Leuven (coordination), VVOB-Flemish Office for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance, Vredeseilanden-VECO, PSO Capacity Building in Developing Countries.

Website:

<http://pme.global-connections.nl>

Other DPRN activities



Global-Connections

Global-connections is a web portal with a searchable database of development expertise in the Netherlands and Flanders. The database provides access to the thematic, geographical and MDG expertise of Dutch and Flemish scientists, policymakers, development practitioners and people working in the private sector. The Global connections web portal also provided the infrastructure for the individual process websites.

Organising agencies: DPRN in collaboration with the African Studies Centre and KIT Information & Library Services.

Website:

<http://www.global-connections.nl>



Search4Dev

Search4Dev is an online library for digital publications of Dutch organisations in the international development cooperation sector. For all publications bibliographic information and a link to the full text version is available. By using international standards and protocols, the publications can easily be retrieved by search engines and other information services.

Organising agencies: KIT Information & Library Services in collaboration with the Digital Production Centre of the University of Amsterdam.

Website:

<http://www.search4dev.nl>



Worldconnectors




The aim of the Worldconnectors is to increase attention for international cooperation among selected key players in the Dutch business, policy and science sectors, and to increase support for development cooperation in the media and parliament. The Worldconnectors prepare statements on relevant themes in Round Table Meetings and engage in public dialogue during public events or via media activities.

Organising agencies: The Worldconnectors is a collaborative initiative of the Society for International Development Netherlands Chapter (SID NL), DPRN and NCDO. DPRN is taking part in both the Worldconnectors Project Group and Steering Group.









Website:

<http://www.worldconnectors.nl>

DPRN meetings Phase I (2004–2007)

Thematic meetings	<i>Organising agencies</i>
 The Millennium Development Goals as a challenge for scientists and development practitioners (2005)	DPRN, CERES, ISS
 Measuring results in development (2006)	DPRN, CERES, ICCO
 European development cooperation: does more mean better? (2007)	DPRN, ECDPM, CIDIN

Regional meetings	<i>Organising agencies</i>
 Non-EU Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia	Institute of Social Studies (ISS), in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Southeast and Eastern Europe and Matra Programme Department (DZO).
 East Asia	Centre for Development Studies (CDS)–University of Groningen, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Asia and Oceania Department (DAO).
 Southeast Asia and Oceania	International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Cultural Anthropology Department of Radboud University; Culture, Organisation and Management Department (COM)–VU University Amsterdam; and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Department Asia and Oceania (DAO).
 South Asia	IIAS Amsterdam, Asia Studies in Amsterdam (ASiA)–University of Amsterdam, WOTRO–IDPAD, Amsterdam Foundation for Research on the Exploitation of Working Children (IREWOC), in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Asia and Oceania Department (DAO).
 Mexico and Central America	Cultural Anthropology–Utrecht University, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Western Hemisphere Department (DWH).

 The Caribbean, including Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles	Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Western Hemisphere Department (DWH).
 South America	Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA), in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs– Western Hemisphere Department (DWH).
 Horn of Africa	African Studies Centre, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Sub–Saharan Africa Department (DAF).
 East Africa	African Studies Centre, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Sub–Saharan Africa Department (DAF).
 Central Africa	Institute of Development Policy and Management/Instituut voor Ontwikkelingsbeleid en –Beheer (IOB)–Universiteit Antwerpen (2005, 2006) and African Studies Centre (2007), in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Sub–Saharan Africa Department (DAF).
 Western Africa	African Studies Centre, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Sub–Saharan Africa Department (DAF).
 Southern Africa	SAVUSA–VU University Amsterdam; Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NIZA); and SANPAD in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Sub–Saharan Africa Department (DAF).
 Middle East and Northern Africa	Clingendael, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs–North Africa and Middle East Department (DAM).

Dilemmas in broad policy debates

DPRN filled a niche in organising and supporting policy debates. These debates, which covered a broad spectrum of development cooperation, attracted large audiences. For these debates to have an impact, DPRN considered it important to involve all constituencies and create broad support. At the same time, room was needed for in-depth reflection on specific themes in smaller circles.

When he evaluated DPRN's second phase, Heinz Greijn (L4D) recognised the need for occasional broad debates organised and supported by DPRN. Debates like those on the Millennium Development Goals, Measuring results in development, or Understanding development better (see Box) generated broad participation and keen interest among various stakeholders, notably practitioners, who like to exchange views from different sides. However, Greijn also noted that researchers generally lose interest in broad policy debates because discussions tend to become political and drift away from re-

search-based evidence. There thus seems to be a dilemma between the need for in-depth discussion and reflection and creating broad support for debate outcomes.

Policy theory

One process that tried to unite in-depth discussions with public debates was 'Singing a new policy tune'. This process was designed to fulfil the need among policymakers to better underpin development policies. The Institute of Social Studies (ISS) was challenged to develop a policy theory that clarified relationships between context, underlying assumptions, norms and values, policy goals, instruments and outcomes. Such theory building is unimaginable without continuous dialogue between policymakers, scientists and other development professionals. Arjan de Haan (ISS), who took up this challenge, recognises the dilemma between the need for scientific reflection and a broad dialogue: 'This tension was very noticeable throughout our process. We, as social scientists, participated actively in the ongoing discussions related to the WRR report,

The broad policy debates within DPRN

- The Millennium Development Goals as a challenge for scientists and development practitioners (DPRN, 2005).
- Measuring results in development (DPRN, 2006).
- European development cooperation: does more mean better? (DPRN;ECDPM, 2007).
- Understanding development better (MDF/ISS/Vice Versa, 2008)
- Singing a new policy tune (MDF;ISS;Vice Versa, 2009–2010).
- Structure follows strategy (DPRN, 2008–2010).

but this left virtually no time for us to sit back, disconnect from the daily politics, and reflect on a policy theory in a scientific manner. Indeed, the ways academics work and particularly their time horizons are very different from those of policymakers and practitioners.'

Public debates

Besides the theoretical reflection in small expert groups, 'Singing a new policy tune' also encompassed public debates to discuss the challenges of key policy themes with a

broader audience. Following these two tracks allowed the organisers to combine the pros and cons of breadth versus depth. But in practice this combination proved not to be easy. Hans Rijnveld (MDF): 'What worked well were the small working groups discussing a well-defined topic. An example is the meeting we had with staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Dutch military, discussing the 3D approach in Afghanistan.' Maintaining the quality of broad public debates proved more difficult. 'Our idea was to explore the principles and assumptions underlying development cooperation', Rijnveld explains. 'But the goal - making the foundations of the thematic policy domains explicit - was not properly met. It was simply too ambitious. In public meetings the discussion usually shifted immediately to actual practices, without touching upon the underlying norms and values. In such settings, facilitation is crucial; you really need someone who stringently guards the direction of the discussion.'

Engaging policymakers

Policymakers were strongly in-

involved in getting 'Singing a new policy tune' on the agenda. But after their initial participation, they gradually withdrew. Hans Rijnveld points to some reasons: 'With hindsight, the kick-off meeting lacked a clear focus and output. The discussions on policy theory and the foundations of Dutch development assistance policies proved to be too abstract and theoretical for many participants.'

This certainly did not mean that policymakers refrained totally from the broad policy debates. They were actively involved in the 'Structure follows strategy' process initiated by the DPRN Task Force in 2008. The Ambassador for Development Cooperation at the Ministry, Maarten Brouwer, chaired one of the parallel working groups that discussed the Dutch international development cooperation architecture and underlying strategies for achieving development goals. According to him, policymakers will come to discussion meetings only if they consider the topic of immediate relevance to their daily work. This can work in two ways, says Brouwer. 'Firstly, there is a window

of opportunity when a topic is high on the political agenda. Secondly, policymakers are sometimes struggling to get a certain topic on the political agenda, and are therefore looking for alliances with other parties.' He adds that policymakers, just like researchers and business people, will only remain involved in such processes if they expect it will yield something they can actually use. 'If they feel a first meeting neither generated new insights nor broadened their network, they may not show up the second time.'

Practitioners

As said, it was easier to get practitioners involved in DPRN's general debates and this sometimes had interesting spin-off effects. One of these resulted from the 2006 thematic meeting on 'Measuring results in development', organised as a follow-up to the report by the Dijkstal Commission, entitled 'Trust in a vulnerable sector'. This event inspired various organisations to launch a partnership for the 'Tracking Local Development' evaluation project in Northern Ghana and Southern Burkina Faso,



Group discussions during the 'Understanding development better' conference.

funded by the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Woord & Daad, and Prisma. Together with researchers from the Universities of Amsterdam and Tamale in Ghana, this four-year project seeks to develop innovative and participatory evaluation methods to assess poverty and development impacts of Dutch development interventions. By involving policymakers from the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as practitioners, researchers and the private sector, this is a clear example of

increased synergy between the four domains in terms of agenda-setting and research. Through its participatory nature and the involvement of an African University, the partnership also has a strong Southern voice.

Constituencies

In order to ensure a broad debate, the 'Structure follows strategy' process organised an intensive round of public consultation in four parallel working groups. In all groups the four sectors (academia, policy, practice and business) were equally represented. Each sector

provided a working group chair, which gave each group its own 'colour'. Each working group met twice and together they formulated 47 propositions, which DPRN brought together in a synthesis document that was discussed in a public meeting with a larger audience. This formula worked well, but here too several dilemmas surfaced. Kim de Vries, who organised the process logistically, notes that 'the working groups were held in a short time span. Practically that meant that a lot of the participants were unable to participate twice, which prejudiced the continuity and depth of the discussion.'

Impact

Based on the output of the working group, Jan Donner took the lead in writing a 'Programme of requirements for the organisation of Dutch international development cooperation', which became known by its Dutch acronym PROVO. When he was asked about what is needed for such a debate to have an impact, Jan Donner emphasised the importance of timing. 'Through the 'Structure follows strategy' process we hoped to achieve that the fac-

tual reorganisation of the structure of Dutch international cooperation would be preceded by a fundamental discussion about the strategy. Although we very much succeeded in stimulating and facilitating the discussion, one could also say that we failed in that the current Rutte Government has merely adopted elements from the WRR report, without discussing its underlying norms and values with national stakeholders. The previous government was about to embark on a serious discussion when it fell.' Nonetheless, Donner is proud of the substantial business involvement in the 'Structure follows strategy' process. The complaint of business people that they sometimes felt alien because they did not understand the development jargon shows the need for building new bridges in their direction.

Generally, the organisers of broad debates signal the need to include unconventional actors in development debates. Looking beyond the 'usual suspects' is necessary not only to articulate development cooperation policies to a broader public, but also to work towards a

broader international cooperation agenda in which more stakeholders are involved. It stimulates out-of-the-box thinking, which is needed in times when development cooperation is quite compartmentalised.

Policymakers or politicians?

For broad policy debates to be effective, it seems to be crucial to involve both policymakers and politicians. The latter have a particular interest in influencing the direction in which development policies should go. The 'Structure follows strategy' process was one of the few that targeted both groups. Intensive contacts were maintained with high-level staff at the ministries (including the then Minister of Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders), but also a former politician and prominent members of political parties like Marianne Douma (D66), Peter Heintze (PvdA) and Joris Voorhoeve (then VVD, now D66) were invited and played an active role in the public event. Although such people can trigger the debate, we feel that more substantial influence on policy can be exerted if the debate is targeted towards staff of ministries.

Lessons learned

For broad policy debates to have widespread appeal it is needed to:

- ✓ Have a strong focus and clear objectives.
- ✓ Find a common language and avoid jargon.
- ✓ Include unconventional actors to stimulate out-of-the-box thinking.
- ✓ Be aware of the tension between politicised discussions and factual evidence.
- ✓ Involve actors from all sectors and give each sector an appropriate role.
- ✓ Combine in-depth expert discussions with public debate for general support of the outcomes.
- ✓ Align with policymakers during agenda setting, implementation and formulation of output and recommendations.
- ✓ Create a sense of ownership of debate outcomes among the participants.
- ✓ Involve politicians to trigger debate and target ministry staff to have an impact on policies. ■

Stimulating informed debates – What methods work?

Eight years of organising DPRN events have shown a diversity of methods to bring people together and stimulate debate. Below we highlight the most salient examples.

When DPRN started its regional expert meetings in 2005, in most cases the conventional 'scientific' seminar format prevailed. The standard recipe: a keynote speaker or two, a few parallel sessions to discuss specific themes, a plenary summary and discussion, and the most interesting part in terms of networking at the end of the day when the drinks were served. Several attempts were made to inject some dynamics into this standard format, ranging from a stand-up comedian and cartoonist at the Southern Africa meetings, to live music from the region in a meeting on the Caucasus. The African Studies Centre (ASC), responsible for the meetings on West Africa, East Africa and the Horn of Africa, stood out in bringing more substantial variation in the methodologies.



A cartoonist was part of the method employed in the Southern Africa meeting.

Speed dating

The ASC took the mission of bringing together development experts from different sectors seriously and started each meeting with 'speed dating', an ice-breaking method known from big cultural events with a heterogeneous audience. Upon arrival, each participant received a speed-dating booklet with instructions to stay in their own 'territory' (North, South, etc. for researchers, NGO staff, policy-

makers and 'others', respectively) and be available for dating during a specified time slot. During the other time slot – typically half an hour – they were free to wander around other territories and 'date' others. Preferred dates could be indicated in advance or selected ad hoc. The method was a success in establishing contacts and creating an informal ambience. For young researchers in particular, the method lowered the threshold to talk with 'big shots' with whom



Speed dating at the African Studies Centre.

they would otherwise not easily make contact.

Open space technology

It was also the African Studies Centre which ventured with the Open Space Technology (OST), a meeting methodology developed in the 1980s by Harrison Owen (USA). The participants determine the day's agenda. Facilitator Theo Groot, based in Uganda, explains on www.theogroot.com: 'OST is

one of the most open and flexible large group meeting methodologies. There is no pre-set agenda and participants are encouraged to self-organise around a well-chosen theme. It allows for a large heterogeneous group of people to discuss in depth the issues they consider most important and depending on the length of the meeting to find the best solutions to their challenges.' In practice this means that participants first iden-

tify and rank topics for discussion, after which they self-manage a number of workshops. Key points and recommendations for action discussed in these workshops are shared through reports written on the spot. Depending on the purpose of the conference, action groups are created which set priorities for future interaction and collaboration. The African Studies Centre opted for OST because it encouraged group dynamics, interdisciplinary connections and continuous interaction. The general experience was that discussions in the working groups were in depth and personal, and that the methodology allowed new contacts to emerge and old ones to be reinforced. Also a lot of information and relevant details were exchanged. With hindsight, however, both organisers and participants agreed that the groups formed were basically too small to ensure maximum benefit from the OST.

World café

With greater diversity of actors involved in the organisation of DPRN events from 2008 onwards, the methods used to enhance informed

discussions also became more varied. Triodos Facet and Inholland University of Applied Sciences introduced a vivid way to discuss microfinance and business development services in the form of a World Café. This is a process developed in the mid 1990s to host conversations about ‘questions that matter’. Following seven design principles (see Box), the World Café creates an interactive setting for discussions that, according to the World Café website (www.theworldcafe.com), ‘link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in

Seven design principles of the World Café method

- Set the context.
- Create hospitable space.
- Explore questions that matter.
- Encourage everyone’s contribution.
- Connect diverse principles.
- Listen together and notice patterns.
- Share collective discoveries.

Source: www.theworldcafe.com.



World Café at a microfinance seminar.

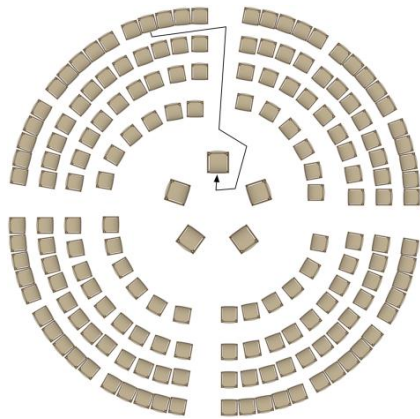
their life, work, or community.’ The World Café makes the collective intelligence of a group visible and their capacity to come up with creative solutions. The discussion is visualised in real time on blank paper on the table or digitally on laptops.

Fishbowl

The ‘Agrofuel’ and ‘Singing a new policy tune’ processes applied the fishbowl method – a method that has become increasingly popular for being more participatory than,

for instance, a panel discussion. In a fishbowl session, there are a number of chairs in the inner circle, to be occupied by those who are either selected to take an active part in the debate or do so voluntarily. The other participants act as listeners in the outer circle. In an open fishbowl, one chair in the inner circle is left empty and can be occupied by anyone from the audience willing to join the discussion. Someone else then leaves the inner circle voluntarily in order to free a chair. In a closed fishbowl,

one group discusses for a certain time, and is then replaced by another group, which continues the discussion in the next time slot.



The arrangement of chairs in a fish bowl session. Four concentric rings of chairs surround a smaller group of five chairs. An arrow indicates how any member of the audience may enter the middle section (Source: Wikipedia).

Lessons learned

As far as methods to stimulate informed debate are concerned, we learned that:

- ✓ Interactive methods (such as speed dating, OST, World Café and fishbowl) increase participants' active involvement as well as the vividness of the debate.

- ✓ Focused debates yield better results. What helps is a position paper made available to the meeting participants in advance.
- ✓ A good (and knowledgeable!) convenor is key to success.
- ✓ Detailed reporting – either real time or immediately after the discussion – ensures that the participants feel themselves heard.
- ✓ Expert discussions are often more satisfactory to the participants than public debates.
- ✓ Involving new target groups, however, adds fresh ideas to the debate. In order to reach such new groups (e.g. the business sector) the use of jargon is to be avoided.■

Closing the research – policy gap

DPRN aims to generate informed debate. By funding DPRN, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged the value of research as an input to policy. Yet, it was sometimes a challenge for DPRN to actively involve policymakers in its activities. What are the reasons and what did DPRN do to close the gap?

The research–policy gap was most prominent during DPRN’s first phase, when DPRN organised its meetings on a regional basis. During these years, policymakers constituted only 10 per cent of the participants. Getting policymakers involved was a challenge, even when the meetings were held in The Hague or when policymakers were contacted well in advance. Harry Wels (VU University Amsterdam), organiser of three regional expert meetings on Southern Africa experienced this difficulty explicitly when he deliberately organised a meeting in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague. ‘Even in their own building relatively few of them came, and many of those who did,

disappeared after the various breaks during the day’, he recalls.

Wil Pansters (Utrecht University), who organised the Central America meetings, also found it difficult to get policymakers involved. ‘My experience has been that the meetings were useful and at times very interesting, but that it was especially difficult to commit members of the governmental policy community to participate. They were champions in last minute cancellations’.

Zooming in on policy problems

What could DPRN do to make its activities more attractive to policymakers? Following the outcome of internal discussions and the recommendations of the midterm evaluation, DPRN changed its approach in the second phase. Themes were taken as the starting point for debates instead of regions, since policy fields are not limited to single regions. Also policy review was to play a greater role, while more focus was given to



Representatives of all DPRN constituencies together in a meeting.

producing policy-relevant output. Lastly, involving policymakers in the processes from the start was conditional to the subsidy. These requirements served as criteria for assessing proposals in the second phase. This worked quite well. The interest of policymakers in DPRN activities increased towards 14 per cent of all meeting participants by the end of 2009. Overall, more intensive contacts evolved with policymakers from thematic policy departments and at higher policy levels. This made DPRN realise that it is not realistic to expect policymakers to make up 25 per cent of the meeting participants and that the quality of established research-policy linkages is more important than the quantity of policymakers involved.

Engage and communicate

Policymakers tend to show interest in research that is debated in DPRN processes, especially when it relates to a problem they face in their immediate work. It is therefore important to assess the knowledge needs of policymakers from the start and to monitor whether these are addressed

Assessment criteria for DPRN process proposals in Phase II

The following assessment criteria were used to assess the proposals:

1. Relevance for international co-operation.
2. Innovativeness of the theme.
3. Stimulates *informed* debate (interaction science & other sectors).
4. Stimulates inter-sectoral cooperation & synergy.
5. Involvement of relevant partners in the *formulation* of the proposal.
6. Involvement of relevant partners in the *implementation* of the process.
7. Inclusion of relevant activities.
8. The perspective for follow-up.
9. Soundness of budget.
10. Overall quality.
11. Involvement of Flemish partners (2009).

throughout the process – even if policymakers are seemingly participating actively. The ‘Micro-finance’ process is a case in point. Hans van der Veen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) participated in several meetings in this process. He explains: ‘The decision to focus on business development services was made without consulting us about

our major concerns around micro-finance at the time. If you want to be relevant for policy and get policymakers involved, it is important to make sure that you align with issues that we are struggling with so that we feel the discussion can contribute to policymaking.’

‘On track with gender’ showed how active participation of policymakers in the process Steering Committee enhanced synergy between policy, practice and science. The committee members jointly discussed and took decisions about every step in the process. Ella de Voogd, who sat on the Steering Committee as co-organiser on behalf of the Gender Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, notes that the active dialogue made it possible to define research questions that were inspired by policy concerns. ‘These questions were addressed in five papers, which reviewed what works and what doesn’t regarding gender equality and mainstreaming at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, universities and NGOs. This improved our understanding of what is needed to keep gender on the agenda. It also helped to draw relevant recom-

recommendations for future interventions in a policy brief. In general, the process laid a basis for synergy between researchers, policymakers and NGO staff by stimulating dialogue and joint learning and creating mutual respect', she says. 'We expect that this allows for more effective and sustainable results.'

Bounded

Policymakers may however face a dilemma when the direction of a DPRN debate deviates from the official position of the Dutch government. This happened to Theo van de Sande (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) when the organisers of the GM soy debate – Aidenvironment and Plant Research International – invited him to sit on process' Steering Committee. He explains: 'This was a debate on a sensitive and then heavily publicised topic on which opinions had been widely diverging for a long time. Ministers received letters calling for a cease to governmental support to the Round Table on Responsible Soy. Questions were asked in Parliament about the topic. In such a situation it is extremely difficult for policymakers from various ministries to

steer a debate, because they have to speak with one voice when answers to questions are interdepartmentally coordinated. I therefore decided not to sit on the process Steering Committee, though I did participate in some of the process meetings.'

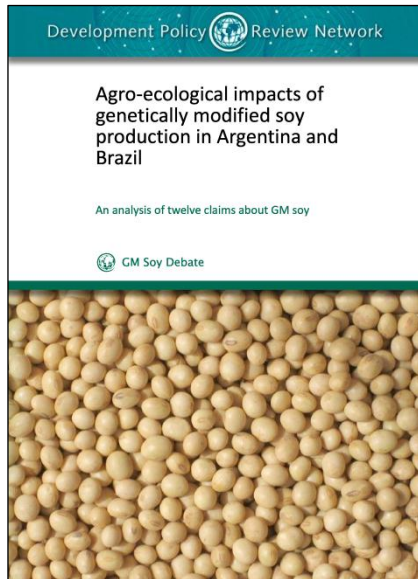
A policymaker's dilemma poses one for DPRN, too. Its mission is to actively engage policymakers in its processes and encourage the organisers to make an effort to make this happen. At the same time, it is clear that policymakers have less

freedom than scientists and practitioners to engage in controversial debates. Van de Sande: 'In such debates policymakers are to act cautiously and in line with official policies as reflected in letters to Parliament and directives. This inevitably restricts their input in politically sensitive discussions.' He recommends spotting topics on which there is not yet or no longer a finite government position.

Interestingly, policymakers from the Ministries of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) and



The political arena may pose its dilemmas (Source: www.stemmee.nl).



The public report of the GM soy debate.

Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM), seemed keen to seize the opportunity to reopen the GM soy debate. Especially VROM became involved in the debate, because the process might feed the debate on socioeconomic criteria for admitting GM crops into the EU. This opportunity even made VROM decide to finance some additional process activities. The GM soy case therefore shows that perspectives on policy dilemmas may differ among ministries and that it is smart to take this into

account in attempts to get policymakers involved in DPRN processes, either as participants or in a steering function.

Policy windows

Several debates did not start from policymakers' predefined knowledge needs but succeeded in putting new issues on the policy agenda. This required a keen approach with ample attention being given to the agenda-setting of policies. Looking for so-called policy windows – opportunities for research to influence policy agendas – is thereby a must.

The organisers of the 'Agrofuels' process found such a policy window. They aimed to raise the sense of urgency on the social and ecological effects of agrofuel production and expansion. The platform members also wanted to address the various assumptions and motives underlying biofuel policies at various Dutch ministries. A policy window was found by aligning with the ministries of LNV and VROM, which were already engaged in a discussion on sustainability criteria within the framework of a EU di-

rective on renewable energy. Process coordinator Karen Witsenburg (Both ENDS) explains how they managed to get a foot in the door. 'One of the platform members had worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the theme of biofuels before. He knew exactly which people were dealing with this issue at the various ministries. Via this person we managed to contact some of these key policymakers for an interview. After the interviews we tried to keep them involved in the process, for example by sharing some of our findings. Ultimately, most of them actively participated in the multi-stakeholder discussion at the end of our process.' Aligning with matters these ministries were concerned with resulted in policymakers consulting the Agrofuel platform members on a frequent basis. In line with this, Both ENDS participated in the interdepartmental working group on the 'Bio-based Economy', initiated by the Ministry of LNV.

Different roads lead to Rome

As several examples have shown, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not always the first and only target

for getting policymakers involved in DPRN processes. The ‘Tax revenues’ process is another example. It succeeded in involving not only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also the Ministry of Finance. Co-organiser Ruerd Ruben (CIDIN) explains that it was particularly important to get the Ministry of Finance involved, as that is the ministry responsible for international tax arrangements. For Ruben the ministry’s interest came as no surprise, as it was already involved in ongoing activities and research carried out by some of the process organisers.

Addressing various ministries at the same time is important because it offers opportunities to address coherency issues and promotes knowledge exchange between different ministries involved in international cooperation. This is particularly relevant given the trend to broaden development cooperation and make it part of international cooperation.

Targeting the EU level

Policy opportunities also occur beyond national boundaries. Some of

the DPRN processes succeeded in creating policy opportunities by targeting the EU level. The East-West Institute, for example, faced difficulties in getting Dutch and Belgian policymakers involved in their efforts to create a network on Afghan–Central Asian water cooperation. The organisers therefore decided to reach out further, in an attempt to involve more stakeholders, particularly at the level of the European Union. Guljamal Jumamuratova, one of the process

organisers, explains: ‘While long-term development in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region certainly is on the agenda of Dutch and Belgian policymakers, their priorities at the time of the project were primarily related to short-term security issues, which were of more immediate political relevance. At the EU level, however, there seems to be more room for long-term issues related to development in Afghanistan and Central Asia, which explicitly includes regional

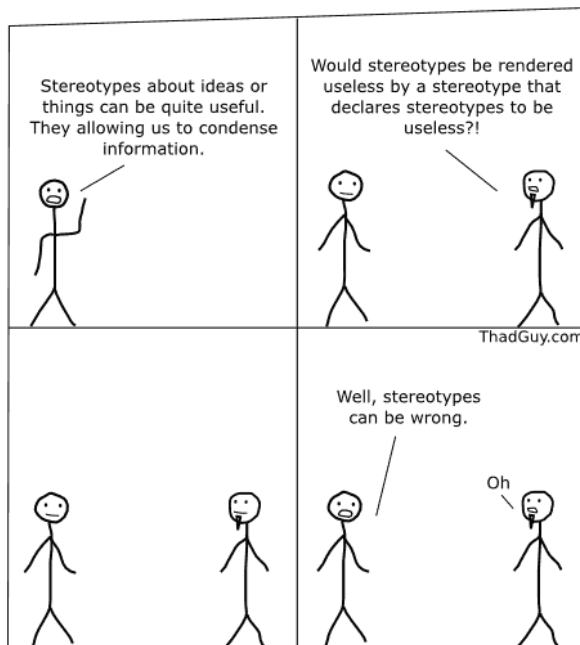


Targeting EU policymakers may help influence the policy agenda (Source: Wikimedia).

cooperation on water management.'

Tackling stereotypes

Stereotypes still prevail among DPRN target groups. One of these is that policymakers are not really interested in research and that staff of particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are quite closed towards other actors. While the ministry admits that it should address its learning culture, some policymakers firmly state that *others* should open up to exchange knowledge with them. Yet, in some of the DPRN processes that made an effort to achieve joint learning with policymakers, these policymakers were hardly present. This happened in the 'Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation' process. Organiser Jan van Ongevalle (Catholic University Leuven) thinks that policymakers might be reluctant to attend such multi-stakeholder seminars, because it can put them in an uncomfortable



position. 'Possibly some policymakers are not at ease when they are among the organisations they support financially, but who at the same time may criticise their policies.'

Hence, there is still room for breaking down stereotypes. This is crucial to close the research-policy gap. Overall, DPRN activities have shown that the issue can best be addressed by providing an open learning environment where one can freely exchange knowledge.

Lessons learned

Successfully involving policymakers in informed debates requires:

- ✓ A focus on current policy problems, preferably through a thematic approach.
- ✓ Engaging key policymakers from the start and monitoring whether their knowledge needs are met.
- ✓ Actively engaging with and responding to policy opportunities ('policy windows').
- ✓ Understanding that the political context may make it difficult for policymakers to speak freely, particularly in controversial debates.
- ✓ Understanding that targeting policymakers at EU level, instead of the national level, may sometimes be more effective.
- ✓ Tackling stereotypes by creating an open learning environment. ■

Crossing knowledge divides – The need for brokering

Bridging knowledge divides calls for brokers capable of crossing boundaries between sectors. What role did brokering play in DPRN processes?

Strong knowledge brokering and advocacy skills are required to facilitate any DPRN process effectively. What makes a successful broker? A typical one is a diplomat and effective communicator with a big network and an open mind. Brokers maintain good relations that extend far beyond the sector to which they belong and their judgement is respected by friend and enemy alike. A broker himself and one of DPRN's founding fathers, Ton Dietz, recognises this description. He adds: 'Brokers are curious people. They like to observe unknown worlds and they try to connect them. Brokers are also empathic people – good at listening and trying to understand different opinions in their contexts.' According to Dietz, brokers have been crucial throughout the DPRN period. 'Scientists, policymakers,

NGO representatives and business people all operated in separate worlds. Their relationship was often characterised by condemnation and contempt, or simply neglect. Linking these worlds obviously demanded skilful brokering.'

Tackling controversies

Brokering is particularly important in processes that debate highly polemical issues like genetically modified soy. Opponents of GM soy point to the (unknown) long-term environmental and health risks of GM crops, the dependency of soy farmers on a handful of companies, and negative social effects of further expansion of GM soy cultivation. In order to increase the legitimacy of the debate, the organisers established an independent Steering Committee, which consisted of professionals from both the North and the South. According to Sven Sielhorst (Solidaridad), co-organiser of the GM soy debate, Aidenvironment was the main broker in this process. 'It brought together the different parties – some of whom had completely opposing views on GM soy –



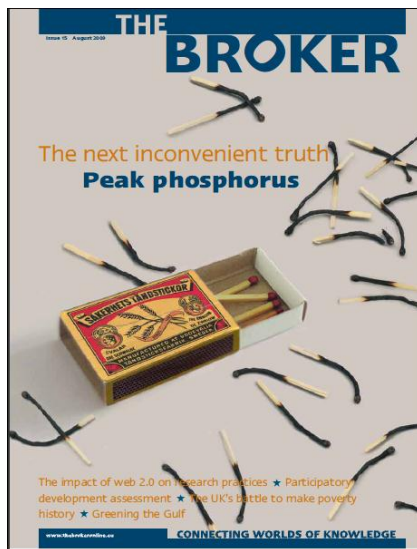
Ton Dietz (DPRN Task Force): 'Brokers are crucial'.

in one Steering Committee.' Sielhorst thinks that Aidenvironment's success in bringing these parties together is related to its status as an independent high-quality consultancy, which is not associated with either side in the discussion. Also, the fact that the Steering Committee consisted of both opponents and proponents of GM Soy was important in raising the credibility and weight of the process outcomes. The inclusion of a lobbyist from the Product Board for Margarine, Fats and Oil (MVO) appeared to be crucial to open doors to the Ministries of LNV and VROM.

Agenda-setting

Brokering is also vital to convince others to put a topic on their agenda. When WASTE advisers on

urban environment and development, the Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP), and Plant Research International (PRI) wanted to put the issue of phosphorous depletion on the political agenda, they found it hard to find a listening ear at the Ministry of LNV. They ultimately succeeded in aligning with the TA group (Technology Assessment Steering Committee), an organisation appointed by the Ministry of LNV to advise the Minister directly on important strategic issues. The process organisers collaborated



The Broker reporting on phosphorous depletion.

'The fact that we are independent and represent parties with varying interests makes us a trustworthy broker for ministries and businesses, as well as for other stakeholders.'

(Ger Pannekoek, NWP)

with this committee to jointly address phosphorus depletion as a key issue. The contacts with the TA group made it easier to raise the interest of staff at the ministries of LNV and VROM and to align with their policy processes. They ultimately decided to organise a seminar on the day the TA group presented its policy note. According to Bert Smit (PRI), 'this raised maximum awareness'. The actual brokering was mostly done by the NWP, a network that unites Dutch water expertise with partners from private companies, government, knowledge institutes and NGOs. Ger Pannekoek (NWP) explains: 'The fact that we are independent and represent parties with varying interests makes us a trustworthy broker for ministries and businesses, as well as for other stakeholders. Independence combined with

the fact that many different perspectives are represented, are key factors for successful brokering.'

Inter- and transdisciplinarity

Brokering is also needed to bridge knowledge divides between researchers from different backgrounds. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches are a plus for research that aims to be relevant for policy and practice. In the first case, scientists combine different disciplinary perspectives to approach a societal problem. In the second case, joint problem analysis, awareness raising and capacity building are promoted with non-academic actors as part of the research process. In the 'Value chain governance' process, Bert Helmsing (ISS) and Sietze Vellema (WUR) followed both approaches. They first organised a dinner meeting where researchers and business and NGO representatives sought a common language and framework for understanding how value chains can contribute to the inclusion of small producers and local development. Next, a group of 31 researchers from different universities united through the

CERES value chain network that was set up for this purpose. Researchers with diverse academic backgrounds formed twelve interdisciplinary teams around specific themes, whereby junior and senior researchers worked together. This offered junior researchers new opportunities to use and develop analytical and writing skills. All researchers eventually retreated in a writeshop to work jointly on papers in which they analysed how theories relate to practices of value chain governance. After the writeshop the papers were successfully submitted to Routledge Publishers, where they will be published as a book in May 2011. Effective facilitation was crucial in this process. According to Bert Helmsing this included efforts to bring researchers from different backgrounds together, trying to convince them to take up a certain topic as a team and to address one common question from different disciplinary angles. Helmsing says that there are no handbooks for such interdisciplinary processes. 'It was challenging and time-consuming, but very interesting', he concludes.

Lessons learned

Concerning the involvement of brokers in stimulating informed debate we learned that:

- ✓ Strong brokering skills are needed to facilitate DPRN-like processes.
- ✓ Brokering requires an open mind, empathic attitude and extended network, as well as curiosity and the skills to connect different worlds.
- ✓ An independent organisation, network or steering committee helps to broker in sensitive issues. Especially when they represent parties with varying interests they are considered trustworthy parties.
- ✓ Aligning with on-going policy processes can strengthen advocacy.
- ✓ Active facilitators and 'interpreters' capable of translating 'jargon' are needed to broker between scientists and practitioners of different backgrounds and promote inter- and transdisciplinarity.■

What's in it for academia?

Several DPRN processes have shown that it is feasible to combine outreach and informed debate with academic performance. But this places special demands on process facilitation and communication with non-academics.

The 'On track with gender' trajectory is one of the DPRN processes that successfully integrated scientific research and policy debates. It established a Steering Committee including representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hivos, Oxfam-Novib, ICCO, Cordaid, KIT and CIDIN (Radboud University). The committee identified five themes that it felt were crucial to investigate from a policy and practice perspective. It resulted in five papers, which not only responded to the knowledge needs and policy concerns of policymakers and practitioners, but are now also being considered for publication in a scientific journal. At the same time, they formed input for an extensive discussion at the 'Taking Stock' seminar where the organisers deliberately chose to let keynote speakers rather than the paper au-

thors present the papers. This allowed the presenters to include their own experiences and reflections, thus feeding a dynamic debate between scientists and other gender professionals. Furthermore, the organisers summarised the findings in a policy brief, which, thanks to the active role of the Steering Committee, has direct relevance for policy and practice. The process is thus an example of a win-win situation in terms of generating debate and scientific output. However, balancing between societal relevance and academic performance is a learning process that is not always easy. Process coordinator Anouka van Eerdewijk

'As a policymaker or practitioner, you will need some more patience to get answers to your questions.'

(Anouka van Eerdewijk, CIDIN)

(CIDIN) explains: 'In order to work together, you have to stretch the often narrow mandates of your organisation. As a policymaker or practitioner, you will need some more patience to get answers to your questions, and the answers



Source: abstrusegoose.com.

might not be as straightforward as practice sometimes demands. As a scientist, you get involved in processes for which you don't get academic credits. Asking practitioners and policymakers to define the main questions for research papers, as we did, left less room for academics to decide which question they wanted to investigate. At the same time, the practitioners and policymakers had to leave more room to the scholars, when compared to assignments given to consultants. A different practice, which generated fresh insights.'

Communication

While academia has come out of its ivory tower, keeping the communication going can be challenging.

Looking beyond academia is more intensive and time-consuming than conventional science and calls for inclusive communication. Also, there comes a moment that scientists need time to reflect, analyse and write up. In the 'Value chain governance' process, communication with non-academics virtually stopped during the writing of a book, whose contents had been defined in discussions with policymakers, practitioners and business people. Looking back, co-organiser Bert Helmsing (ISS) does not think this could have been prevented. 'The main themes and questions were defined in collaboration with non-academics, but the actual research and writing was a process in itself. This took up more time than expected, not least because all researchers were involved on a voluntary basis.' Eventually, the researchers successfully restored communication with policymakers, NGO staff and business people in 'bilateral dialogues' that they held during the final 'Agenda-setting' meeting in September 2010.

Influencing research agendas

Within DPRN processes there were

more examples of researchers trying to influence policy through evidence-based debate than of policymakers and practitioners trying to influence the research agenda. One of the exceptions was 'Singing a new policy tune' that was built on the need among staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a policy theory. Such a need cannot be met within the context of a one-year process. Arjan de Haan (ISS): 'This project was too complex and too ambitious considering the time and budget available. But the ISS made an effort and intends to follow this up in the 'aiddebate@iss Part 2.' Also the 'Raising tax revenues' process addressed a question based primarily in policy and practice. Researchers from SOMO, Tax Justice NL and CIDIN wrote papers dealing with international and domestic barriers to raising tax revenues in developing countries.

Lessons learned

Those who aim to combine informed debate with academic performance with a view to creating a win-win situation should realise that:

✓ Research takes time. One-year

projects are too short to effectively address questions that emerged from policy and practice. The only processes that effectively succeeded in combining research and outreach were multiannual ventures.

- ✓ For research results to feed into policy and practice, due attention is needed to ongoing and inclusive communication with non-academics and 'repackaging' the message in a digestible manner. This means extra work for which a researcher does not receive proper academic credits.
- ✓ Research that is relevant for policy and practice is often interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in nature. This requires proper facilitation.■

Talking business – Profit for development?

Overall, there is a trend among conventional development actors to reach out to the corporate sector. As the WRR report ‘Less Pre-tension, More Ambition’ (2010) also noted, the primacy of development-relevant knowledge production lies no longer only with scientific researchers, ministry staff and NGOs. What can be learned from DPRN’s efforts to include entrepreneurs in the development debate?

Values like return on investment, opportunities for innovation, employment creation and economic growth are becoming increasingly important in the ‘development industry’. DPRN included the business sector explicitly as a target group in its second phase. In practice, however, structural contacts between the development and business sectors are still scarce, and there are still a lot of ‘cultural’ gaps to be bridged.

Time is money

Of all participants in DPRN meetings in 2008 and 2009, 16 per cent came from the business sector.



Although this is higher than the proportion of policymakers, a closer look reveals that a lot of them are consultants. The percentage that represents the corporate sector proper is much lower, not in the least because ‘time is money’ and participation in debates does not immediately translate into new business proposals.

According to Hessel Abbink Spaik, Director of the independent consultancy The Responsibility Lab BV and involved in the ‘Value chain governance’ process, the only way to involve for-profit companies is by offering them something concrete. ‘Companies are used to working bilaterally, that is, to doing business with parties that are within their immediate sphere of influence, such as their financiers, their suppliers and their customers. So-called multi-stakeholder

initiatives are often way too vague and non-committal for commercial companies.’ For Sven Sielhorst (Solidaridad and co-organiser of the GM Soy debate), the key to getting business people involved lies in setting a short-term and practical goal. ‘Business representatives who participate in these initiatives are not interested in endless rounds of discussion meetings. They need to deliver. All the more so because they will have to sell their time commitment when they are back in the company, where they can expect plenty of scepticism.’

Triggers

The organisers of the ‘Phosphorus depletion’ process and GM soy debate were very effective in incorporating business people. In the first case the topic raised the interest of companies engaged in wastewater treatment and farming innovations because of potential opportunities that go together with phosphorous depletion. Leon Korving (manager at NV Slibverwerking Noord-Brabant) explains in a short documentary that was made as part of the ‘Phosphorus depletion’ pro-

cess: 'Because phosphate is getting scarcer, the price of phosphate is going up. So there are economic opportunities in recycling phosphate from sludge.'

The GM Soy debate showed that an unbiased and evidence-based debate also helps to involve business executives in a meaningful way. Social and environmental organisations often exclude businesses from discussions on GM soy, because they regard a position in favour of GM soy as unacceptable by definition (as some of them made clear when they demonstrated outside the building where the stakeholder conference was held).

According to Sven Sielhorst, the secret behind successful involvement of the industry is twofold: 'First, the private sector needs a direct interest to get involved. In the GM Soy debate, several companies were worried about the commercial effects of negative attention for GM soy. They therefore had a direct interest in getting involved in a discussion about the pros and cons of genetic modification. Second, when trying to involve the private sector, one needs



Recycling phosphorous – a new economic opportunity (Source: phosphorous documentary, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqOfcUufyzQ>).

to know who to target. Say you want to involve the chemical industry in a discussion on chemical fertilisers. It certainly will not do to send an email to, for instance, the DSM secretariat. Instead, you will have to know exactly which person within DSM is dealing with this particular issue, and then contact him or her directly.'

Challenges

The banking sector and business advisory bureaus actively engaged in discussions about 'Microfinance and business development'. For Alberic Pater (Triodos Facet) this

was no surprise. He explains: 'Our process dealt with the possibility for microfinance institutions to become more successful through the delivery of business development services to their clients. Logically, the private parties that invest in these microfinance institutions, such as the Rabobank and ASN, were interested in this theme, because it can help them to improve their business. As they were already part of our network, it was not difficult to involve them in the process.' The process also facilitated continued cooperation between science and practice on this

theme. Klaas Molenaar, head of the research group on Microfinance at Inholland University of Applied Sciences, explains: 'The connections established during the DPRN process are still very valuable today, as we were able to engage them later in a long-term research project on business development services that we are conducting here at Inholland.' Molenaar is also the founder and General Director of Triodos Facet, and as such he is familiar with both the research and the private side of microfinance and business development services. This, he admits, makes establishing contacts between both worlds much easier.

The corporate sector also played a role in the 'Value chains governance' process. In the final stages of the process, it turned out to be relatively difficult to interest leading firms in taking an active part in the bilateral dialogues and final agenda-setting event. Co-organiser Bert Helmsing (ISS) clarifies: 'On several occasions, managers of key processes such as supply chain management and corporate social responsibility, were willing to take

'Such meetings are relevant, as I can find out who does what, and meet a lot of people.'

(Hessel Abbink Spaink,
The Responsibility Lab BV)

an active part. However, they were barred from doing so by their senior management, who did not see this to be of strategic importance.' Hessel Abbink Spaink, specialised in business-like approaches towards sustainability, was one of the private sector representatives at the final event. For him this was mostly about networking. 'Such meetings are relevant, as I can find out who does what, and meet a lot of people. But the more traditional industrial companies are often absent. Possibly, many more business representatives would come if the organisers would advertise the networking component much more actively.'

Attempts to involve business people may fail for various reasons. Nancy Terryn (Ghent University and coordinator of the 'Collaborate to innovate' process) reflects on the absence of the corporate

sector at a seminar that was organised in South Africa about the relation between education, science and innovation: 'We wanted to involve Southern African spin-off companies, which are small-scale innovative businesses that have recently emerged from the academic environment. We invited several such companies, like a small-scale seed company and a semi-commercial healthcare centre, which were set up by people with a direct university link. Other companies were invited through the Technology Transfer offices of some of the bigger universities in South-Africa. However, in the end, none of the companies attended the seminar.' The fact that the invited businesses were small and new may actually explain why they did not show up, thinks Terryn. 'They were probably too busy keeping their heads above water, and did not see the relevance of participating in such a seminar for their own business.'

Making sense

Although increasing engagement of the corporate sector in development cooperation is an undeniable and innovative trend, for some

themes their role is less self-evident. Can entrepreneurs add value to a debate on, for example, gender mainstreaming or planning, monitoring & evaluation (PME)? Related to the latter, Jan van Ongevalle (Catholic University Leuven and co-organiser of the PME process) argues that the very fact that private companies are becoming increasingly important in the development cooperation arena implies that they should be involved in efforts to improve PME methods. But it is not always easy. Van Ongevalle: 'As companies were not part of our existing networks, building linkages with the private sector would have taken a lot of time, while we effectively had less than one year to complete this process. We are planning to continue the multi-stakeholder dialogue on PME methods in the coming years, and will definitely try to include the private sector'. In the 'On track with gender' process there were no active efforts to include the private sector, as it explicitly focussed on development cooperation as practised by governments, NGOs and multilateral organisations. Anouka van Eerde-

The primacy of development-relevant knowledge production lies no longer only with scientific researchers, ministry staff and NGOs.

(After the WRR report)

wijk (CIDIN) does, however, see how the private sector may broaden the discussion on gender equity. 'While in the non-profit sector, the social justice perspective is an important driver in gender policies, striving towards more gender equity by private actors may be based on considerations related to profit making and management. The business case for gender is becoming more prominent in development cooperation, and at the same time development is less separated from the private sector. Although I think that the normative justice perspective should always be the main underlying principle for gender equality policies, the experiences in private companies with promoting gender concerns is interesting and may trigger innovative thinking. It therefore is of value to development cooperation.'

Lessons learned

In order to involve the business sector in development debates in a meaningful way, it is important to:

- ✓ Have an open attitude to various and diverse perspectives.
- ✓ Be concrete and to the point.
- ✓ Avoid 'endless' rounds of discussions.
- ✓ Be clear that there is 'business in it': new contacts, a corporate social responsibility image, new economic opportunities.
- ✓ Target the right person.
- ✓ Have people involved with a leg in two worlds, e.g. science and business.
- ✓ Involve brokers.
- ✓ Realise that for small-scale businesses, even more than for others, 'time is money'.■

The Netherlands and Flanders – Speaking the same (policy) language?

Despite the fact that they speak the same language, there is little co-operation and synergy between the Netherlands and Flanders as far as development cooperation is concerned. Both in terms of regional focus and the way development cooperation is institutionally organised, the Netherlands and Flanders differ considerably. What did DPRN do to bridge this gap and what did the two countries learn from each other?

Asked about the differences between Belgian and Dutch development cooperation, Prof. Filip Reyntjens of the Institute of Development Policy and Management (IOB) at the University of Antwerp notes three points. First, the development cooperation budget of the Netherlands is much larger than that of Belgium. Second, the Netherlands is ahead in terms of professionalisation of the sector, although Belgium has been catching up in recent years. Third, Belgium focuses primarily on the countries with which it has a historical bond,



Prof. Filip Reyntjens, IOB–University of Antwerp’ (organiser Central Africa meetings).

such as Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC, while the list of Dutch focus countries seems to be less coloured by its colonial past. Reyntjens found it interesting to organise the regional expert meetings on Central Africa within the framework of DPRN. ‘These were special occasions, because it rarely happens that Belgian and Dutch experts from various disciplines and societal sectors meet face to face. Being at these meetings I remember learning about the Dutch

regional approach in Central Africa. I was quite impressed. Since then I have been looking with special interest to the strategy applied by the Netherlands.’

Active steering

With some exceptions, there was not a lot of Flemish participation in DPRN activities. This changed in DPRN’s last year, when the Task Force took some proactive measures to promote Flemish participation. The third and last call for proposals was purposively disseminated among Flemish academic and NGO networks. Furthermore DPRN announced that involvement of a Flemish partner in the initiative would be a plus in proposal assessment. It resulted in four new processes in which Flemish organisations played a prominent role. Three of those were coordinated by an organisation based in Belgium.

Exciting

Partners in the ‘Civic driven change’ process found the Flemish–Dutch interaction exciting. Ivet Pieper (Context, international co-operation) about this experience:

'It was fascinating to be able to share experiences and to find out how Belgian development cooperation is organised. The Belgian government, for example, seems to keep a much larger distance from the NGOs they finance, compared to the Netherlands. Also, speaking the same language while coming from different countries resulted in interesting discussions about the translation and interpretation of the English term 'Civic Driven Change'. You could say this really benefited our understanding of the concept.' One of her Flemish counterparts, Pol De Greve (Broederlijk Delen) adds to this: 'Collaboration over national borders may be quite common for academics, but for us practitioners it was really new. We were all very curious to know how things are organised on the other side and learned a lot from each other through this process. I believe the Netherlands has more experience with linking policy to practice, which is something Belgium needs to invest in. Things are moving though: the Belgian umbrella organisation for NGOs, called 11.11.11, recently started to discuss the possibility to establish

an academic chair on development-related issues to stimulate the dialogue between academics, policymakers and practitioners.'

Also Cristien Temmink (PSO Capacity Building in Developing Countries and involved in the PME process) found the cooperation with Flemish organisations an instructive process. 'I found out that our Belgian colleagues were dealing with exactly the same issues and questions as we were. Some Belgian NGOs are actually quite ahead of the Dutch in terms of experimenting with qualitative methods for methods for planning, monitoring and evaluation. Through the DPRN process we benefited a lot from their experiences.' She is very pleased with the Dutch-Belgian collaboration. 'For us, this DPRN process really was an eye-opener, and we will definitely continue working with Belgian organisations'.

One of her Flemish counterparts, Jan van Ongevalle (Catholic University Leuven), would be in favour of a Flemish equivalent of DPRN. 'Obviously, I would welcome a similar network in Belgium. In fact, our

DPRN process has attracted plenty of attention, and there are already plans to establish a multisector platform on the theme of PME, following the example of DPRN.'

Lessons learned

As far as Dutch-Belgian cooperation is concerned, we learned that:

- ✓ Bringing together Dutch and Flemish development experts requires a targeted effort. These actors do not meet automatically.
- ✓ Stimulating dialogue between Dutch and Flemish development experts leads to well-appreciated cross-fertilisation.
- ✓ The DPRN experience turned out to be a hothouse for thinking about similar initiatives in Belgium. ■



Learning & linking 2.0

Interaction, knowledge sharing, collaborating and linking groups are all inconceivable without information and communication technology. DPRN created the DPRN, Global Connections and Search4Dev websites to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by ICT. We learned that, while everything in ICT is automatic, it does not go automatically.

Without any ICT support whatsoever, DPRN created its first website in 2005 as a subpage on the CERES website. The design was fairly sim-

ple and fulfilled the purpose of providing an overview of DPRN's mission, organisational structure, activities, outputs and partners. In addition, the website offered the possibility to join the mailing list and contact the coordinator. It gained a more professional look in 2008 thanks to Joska Landré, who joined DPRN to provide ICT support, but the function of the independent website www.dprn.nl did not change essentially throughout the years.

Web portal

Ambitions went a step further as

The potential of electronic publishing online for Africa

With the support of DPRN, the ASC hosted the 2006 CODESRIA-ASC Conference on Electronic Publishing and Dissemination from 6–8 September 2006. The aim of the conference was to address asymmetries in communication between African and Western scholars. The conference also discussed the opportunities and challenges for electronic publishing for Africa, as a way to disseminate academic knowledge for development. About 45 people participated in the conference, most of whom were librarians, editors, publishers and researchers from Africa. They concluded that partnerships and scholarly communities need to be built to address inequalities in scholarly communication. Several bottlenecks need to be overcome, such as the need to safeguard quality under open access sources, which are not subject to peer reviews. In relation to this, it should be made clear who can be allowed to publish in open access sources and under what conditions. It was concluded that Connecting-Africa (which was officially launched during this conference) could be further developed as one means of scholar community building in Africa.

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Connecting Africa

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- Add your profile
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Welcome to Connecting-Africa
Connecting-Africa is the web portal for African Studies in the Netherlands.

We are currently (September 2010) redesigning the Connecting-Africa server web portal to improve its performance and remove the features that are presenting problems for users. We regret any temporary inconvenience this may cause but an improved version will be available in the near future.

Search
Use the [Search](#) facility to find information and to access research materials.

Your profile
Please [add your profile](#) if you are a researcher, development practitioner or policymaker affiliated to an organisation based in the Netherlands or Belgium and if you wish to participate in Connecting-Africa.net. Please [edit your profile](#) if you wish to update your account.

Your publications
Information on [how to submit publications](#) to your institutional repository and publisher copyright policies.

Calendar
Visit the 4th European Conference on African Studies (ECAS 4, Uppsala, 15..18 June 2011)

Events to remember
2010

today

Our pick of the month

Power to the people? A study of power relations in community participation initiatives in Contemporary Ghana.
Author: Ditte Wegeberg

Recent additions

far as Global-Connections.nl is concerned. With a view to facilitating contacts and exchanges of information between DPRN's target groups, DPRN sought to develop a web portal with a search facility to find development expertise in the Netherlands and Flanders. It soon spotted Connecting-Africa.net (developed and maintained by the African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden) as an example that could fit the purpose. This web portal for African Studies in the Netherlands provided access to the geographical and thematic expertise of scientists specialised in Africa and sought to link these experts to their publications. As it would be a waste of effort to re-invent the wheel, DPRN contacted the ASC to explore its willingness to join Global-Connections, to open up its database for professionals outside academia, and make its website architecture available for web portals focusing on other regions. That resulted in close cooperation between DPRN and the ASC in the years that followed.

Need for more interactivity

Global-Connections.nl enabled a

sound basis to be laid for a web portal where development experts can register and link up with each other on the basis of their geographical and thematic expertise. The database allowed DPRN to publish inventories of available expertise for the 13 regions on which expert meetings were organised as well as inventories of MDG expertise. This was a way to show 'who is who and who is doing what' around the regional and thematic expert meetings organised during DPRN's first phase. However, several problems limited the further use of the website for DPRN's purposes. Its architecture was too

complicated for DPRN staff to manage it actively and independently from the programmer based at the ASC, and it lacked interactive modalities like a mailing list to support the network. DPRN therefore opted for a content management system (CMS) that enabled people without detailed ICT knowledge to publish information on the internet and offered more opportunities for interactive and network-supporting modules. Thanks to assistance from KIT Information & Library Services, this CMS was installed. From 2008 onwards it was thus possible to create process-specific websites with

Part of the Development Policy Review Network | www.dprn.nl | www.global-connections.nl | www.search4dev.nl

On track with gender

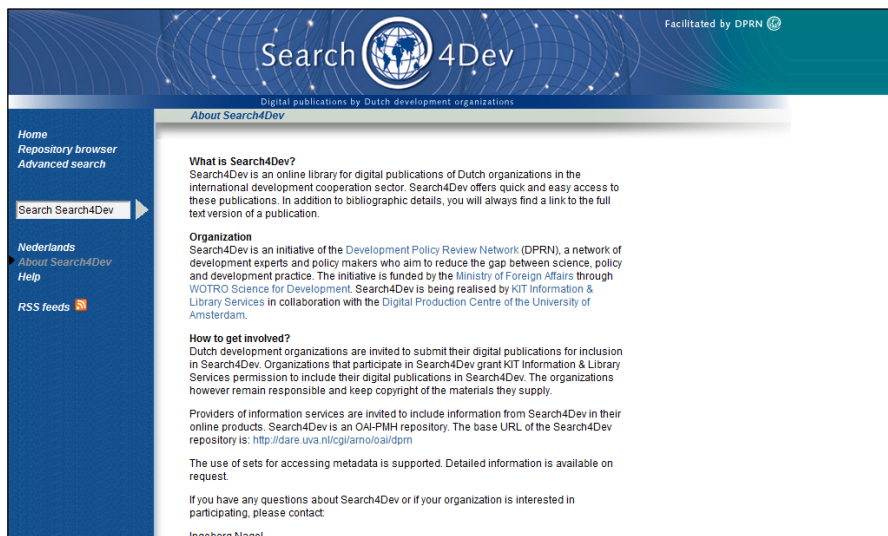
Home » Registration for 21 February 2011

Home
Workshop registration
Moving Forward
Publications
Trajectory
Taking Stock
Login

Registration for 21 February 2011
Gender Mainstreaming 2.0 Dialogue
Fields marked with an asterisk (*) are mandatory.

First name: *
Surname: *
Sex: *
 Male
 Female
E-mail: *
Organisation: *
Function:
Development sector: *
 Science / Research
 Policymaker
 Practitioner / NGO staff
 Consultancy / Business

Search this site:
Process organisers:
CIDIN
Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen
geen grenzen aan mensen
Hivos
Buitenlandse Zaken
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Oxfam Novib



Dutch development organisations. The Search4Dev.nl website offers quick and easy – and, through fixed links, permanent – access to these documents. Hetty Verhagen, who currently coordinates the initiative, soon rang the alarm bell, saying that interest in the website far exceeded available staff time to process the requests. DPRN facilitated additional support and Joëtta Zoetelief was seconded to KIT for two days a week to meet the demand from organisations wishing to join Search4Dev. Currently 31 organisations have made their online resources available through the website. The following quotation in KIT’s Annual Report 2008 illustrates how much the initiative was welcomed in the sector. Evelijne Bruning, then editor-in-chief of the Dutch professional journal on development cooperation, *Vice Versa*, reports: ‘It opens up a wealth of knowledge to which I and our readers previously had little or no access.’

Now that a firm infrastructure has been created, a lot has still to be done to promote awareness of the website among potential partici-

interactive options like a discussion board, a wiki and a mailing list. Joska Landré, responsible for ICT support within DPRN, did a great job designing attractive websites for each of the processes with room for a library with background documents and process outputs, interactive tools such as an online forum, and options to register for events. He also instructed the process organisers on how to update the websites, which was greatly appreciated.

Online library

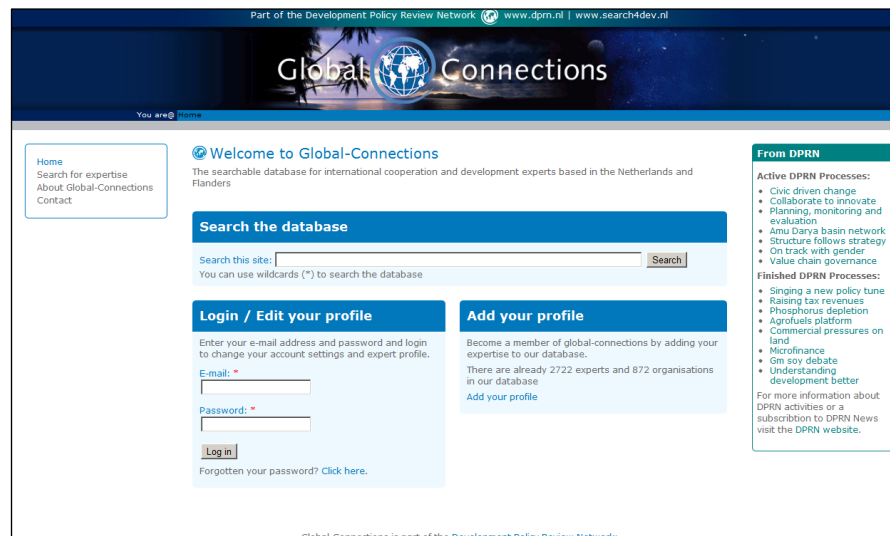
Until recently, linking experts to their publications was possible on-

ly for scientists whose publications are stored online in university repositories from which the titles can be ‘harvested’. Such online repositories were not available for publications of development experts who published outside academia. DPRN therefore signalled the need to provide access to non-academic publications such as policy documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and development organisations, public consultancy reports and journalistic work. It found a partner in KIT Information & Library Services, whose staff took up the challenge to create an online library for digital documents from

pants and users. Hetty Verhagen hopes for a snowball effect. 'The more organisations are in, the more easily others will follow and the more users Search4Dev will attract. I notice that it helps when I tell organisations that some of the big NGOs have already joined. Next to the NGOs, we are trying to get the Ministry of Foreign Affairs interested in making its reports accessible through Search4Dev – that could be a major breakthrough in our efforts to build a bridge between the ministry and other sectors involved in international cooperation.'

Database

In the meantime, DPRN struggled to make the Global-Connections database more user-friendly and to keep it up-to-date. An online survey among potential users yielded positive results. Respondents saw the added value of the database mainly in the information on people's thematic and geographical expertise and contact data, and links to their personal websites. They also indicated that the database could be made more attractive, for instance by creating the



possibility to upload pictures and by linking to other social media, notably LinkedIn. It remains to be seen whether the Global-Connections database can compete with the new social media. 'An expert database can compete with the new social media only if it has an added value', says Jos Damen, head of the library of the ASC. Damen believes that linking the expert database to publications can create this added value. 'At the ASC we have already implemented this on our Connecting-Africa web portal, which now has about 1,400 experts linked to 32,000 publications.' For Damen, the advantages

over other social networks and search engines are obvious. 'To get full access to publications on a search engine like Google Scholar, a contract with the publisher is often required. But many people, especially in the South, do not have this', he explains. 'On our Connecting-Africa web portal all publications are fully accessible to everyone, and you have a direct link to the author and related experts. Moreover, the ASC screens all publications, so there is a quality check.' Damen and his team will continue to maintain and expand the Connecting-Africa web portal for the years to come, and he rec-

ommends a similar approach for Global-Connections. Staff of KIT Information & Library Services agree, and certainly see potential in linking the Global-Connections database with the publications in Search4Dev. Whether future funding will allow them to take up this challenge and take over the expert database is still unclear. In any event it is clear that maintaining a searchable database and keeping it up-to-date requires active promotion and concerted attention beyond the staff time that was available within DPRN.

Bottlenecks in online discussions

DPRN also made an effort to stimulate online discussions in its processes and considered joining Dgroups - an online platform offering tools and services that bring individuals and organisations together in the international development community. With the transformation of Global-Connections into a content management system, the same tools and services became available as offered by Dgroups, whereas the international coverage provided by Dgroups was not necessary for

DPRN to meet its ends. It was therefore more cost-effective to stimulate online cooperation through the Global-Connections websites.

Although all organisers were encouraged to make use of the tools, in practice it appeared to be difficult to mobilise actors online. Among the reasons reported are:

- The lack of a clear issue to be discussed online;
- Lack of staff and/or money to moderate online discussions;
- Lack of time among the target groups;
- Lack of interest to express opinions online;
- The time lapse between two events, which made interest in the process fading away until the next announcement was made.

People have a lot of interest in accessing resources online, but much less in engaging in online debates. The experience of The Broker (www.thebrokeronline.eu) made it clear that online debates are successful only if intensively moderated (see Box).

Experiences with online debates outside DPRN: The Broker's discussion on the WRR report

The discussion about the WRR report on The Broker's website (www.thebrokeronline.eu) was successful for several - mutually reinforcing - reasons, says editor-in-chief at The Broker Frans Bieckmann. 'First, the entire development sector had already been anxiously waiting for the report to come out for several months, so the interest in the topic was huge. Second, we had access to the report before its official publication and managed to have a summary online on the same day the report came out. This attracted a lot of attention to the website. Third, we actively approached a range of people from the sector for a reaction. Only after some dozens of contributions, which demanded a lot of time and energy of the moderators, did the ball start rolling. People increasingly began to see the list of contributors as a 'who's who' in the development cooperation sector. In the end, there were more than a hundred entries to the discussion.'

Websites as mobilisers

Although setting up online discussions proved difficult, several process websites became important means to communicate between the various stakeholders and mobilise them. Organisers used the websites to announce meetings, send out newsletters, publish reports and make background material available. In the 'Amu Darya Basin' process, the website became instrumental in establishing a solid network of policymakers and experts interested in the issue of water security in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Guljamal Jumamuratova and Benjamin Sturtewagen write in their report: 'It is our firm belief that the online platform www.amudarya-basin.net has made a significant contribution to the ad hoc cooperation and information exchange that resulted from the project.'

The 'Commercial pressure on land' process experienced something similar. Michael Taylor (International Land Coalition, ILC) wrote to us as follows, several months after the closure of the project: 'The blog on commercial pressures on



The screenshot shows the website for 'Commercial Pressures on Land', which aims to 'Inform evidence based debate on large scale land-based investments and their alternatives'. The site is part of the International Land Coalition. The funding partners listed are:

- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) / Agence canadienne de développement international
- Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) / Development Policy Review Network
- European Commission (EC)
- Kingdom of the Netherlands – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) / Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) / Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft / Confédération suisse / Confederazione Svizzera / Confederaziun svizra

Weblog on commercial pressures on land acted as a catalyst.

land – started as a component of the DPRN project – grew to the extent that it was receiving 10,000 hits per month and being refer-

enced in international press and research articles. Based on the DPRN activities, we initiated a fruitful partnership with Oxfam

Novib, which has grown significantly. Other partners have since joined ILC and Oxfam, such as the University of Bern, CIRAD, GIZ and others. Last month the blog was re-launched as the commercial pressures on land portal (www.commercialpressuresonland.org), which will form a part of new Land Portal, to be launched by ILC and 40 partners in April 2011. ILC and Oxfam-Novib are the core partners, joined by others from the portal, in an ambitious project to build a database of verified information on large-scale land acquisitions. This started soon after the end of the DPRN process, and the data is going to be launched in mid 2011. It is the most comprehensive database on this phenomenon that exists, and will be invaluable in informing action to address the risks involved.'

Lessons learned

What we learned about online network facilitation is that:

- ✓ Interactive ICT facilities – including possibilities to work on and exchange content through discussion boards, wikis, and

mailing lists – are needed to support a network like DPRN.

- ✓ Websites can act as a catalyst to build new networks. In these cases information provision played an important role.
- ✓ Online debates work only if intensively moderated. Lack of time hinders both organisers and participants when it comes to engaging in such discussions spontaneously.
- ✓ Maintaining an expert and publication database or a combination of both requires continuous promotion and dedication.
- ✓ Such a database should be attractive and user-friendly.
- ✓ The attractiveness of Global-Connections lies mainly in the availability of personal information: people's thematic and geographical expertise, contact data and links to personal websites.
- ✓ An expert database can be made extra attractive by linking it to other databases and social media.
- ✓ The success of the Connecting-

Africa web portal is largely based on the combination of publications with data about Africa specialists.

- ✓ Search4Dev – the online library for digital publications of Dutch organisations active in international cooperation – fulfils a clear need.
- ✓ Information services like Global-Connections and Search4-Dev require relatively few investments in relation to their added value. Sustainable maintenance of such services is however impossible without a sound financial basis. ■

The way forward

Now that DPRN is coming to an end the question arises ‘What next?’ Various stakeholders react to the recommendations by Heinz Greijn, who evaluated DPRN.

Heinz Greijn (L4D) advocates the continuation of a DPRN style low-threshold window for initiatives that aim to get important issues on the policy agenda. He believes that such a facility can work as an incubator for innovative ideas that can help make policies and practices more effective. Maarten Brouwer, Ambassador for Development Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thinks it is useful to have such a low-threshold opportunity for inter-sectoral dialogue. ‘This can greatly benefit policy development. To generate new and inspiring ideas, small informal meetings, with the right mix of people, are much more productive than large public debates.’

NWO-WOTRO as a host

Greijn recommends considering NWO-WOTRO as the host for such a low-threshold window because of the institutional link with additional

‘I believe it is not so much the organisation that determines the success of inter-sectoral dialogues, but much more the person who takes the lead. He or she has to have the right credits and the right network.’

(Maarten Brouwer,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

research funds. Furthermore, NWO-WOTRO has the experience of fulfilling a similar combination of tasks as it hosts the secretariat of the Netherlands Platform for Global Health Policy and Health Systems Research. One could say this is the successful ‘precursor’ of the knowledge platforms consisting of policymakers, scientists, NGOs and entrepreneurs that were initiated by former Minister Koenders with a view to formulating policy relevant research questions. Jan Donner emphasises the need for a platform where stakeholders from policy, practice, academia and the business community meet and he agrees that NWO-WOTRO ought to take this role. Maarten Brouwer, sees more options: ‘NWO-WOTRO could indeed play a role, but or-

ganisations like the ISS or ASC could organise small-scale discussions as well. I believe it is not so much the organisation that determines the success of inter-sectoral dialogues, but much more the person who takes the lead. He or she has to have the right credits and the right network.’

Tacit knowledge

If a DPRN-style low-threshold window is going to be continued, Greijn suggests mobilising the knowledge brokering expertise developed by the DPRN team for future processes supported by this window. Making this tacit knowledge explicit was also one of the reasons for DPRN to write this booklet and organise the final ‘Linking to learn & Learn from linking’ event, which aims to draw lessons from the DPRN experience.

Follow-up

Greijn furthermore recommends establishing mechanisms that connect the incubator function of cross-sectoral debates with more substantial follow-up funding for those policy issues or innovative ideas that require additional re-

search. However, as we noted in our contribution to the 2010 Netherlands Yearbook of International Cooperation (Hoebink, forthcoming), sometimes more time is needed for awareness raising and lobbying to get or maintain an important issue on the policy agenda. In such cases a multisectoral platform would be a more logical follow-up than a research proposal.

Call for proposals

Greijn is in favour of continuing the practice of calls for proposals in which the most promising ideas are selected by an independent forum. The assessment should include selection criteria that prioritise initiatives that involve unconventional actors and actors from the South. He expects that this can stimulate creativity and act as an antidote to intellectual inbreeding.

Broad policy debates

Last, but not least, he proposes identifying a separate organisation, network or forum to continue the broad policy debates. According to Jan Donner it is not necessary to create yet another organisation or platform to that end. ‘Consolida-

‘Consolidation is required, rather than the establishment of yet another agency.’

(Jan Donner, Chair DPRN Task Force)

tion is required, rather than the establishment of yet another agency. There are plenty of Dutch organisations prepared and competent to stimulate public debate. They can be found among universities, the major NGOs and my own Royal Tropical Institute (KIT)’, he comments.

Maarten Brouwer agrees with the need to have an organisation that initiates and facilitates broader debates. He points to the fact that the ministry has already provisioned this by enabling the National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO) to take up this task, together with the Society for International Development (SID), the Worldconnectors and others.

Knowledge for development

DPRN Task Force member Ton Dietz emphasises that a lot still needs to be done to organise a

better ‘synergy of learning’ between the very many, and still very scattered, development-oriented activities of all those different stakeholders. ‘The WRR report ‘Less Pretension, More Ambition’ pleads for far better funding of ‘knowledge generation’ in the sector’ he explains. ‘One would hope that the new government strategy for international development also adopts that recommendation. I am not yet sure it does. I am convinced that an independent ‘knowledge synergy agency’ is needed, and for me that is NWO-WOTRO. I am glad that that organisation has adopted the ‘continuation of care’ for DPRN-like processes and for The Broker, but more could and should be added.’

Jan Donner contemplates: ‘The DPRN experience shows that a lot depends on individuals. Their collective efforts eventually led us to conclude that DPRN achieved what it set out to do. Without complacency, we can say that it is a satisfying result. The sustainability of this result is yet to be proven. It is now up to others to carry on the good work.’■

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DPRN activities

Reports on the processes in Phase II can be found at: <http://www.dprn.nl/phase-ii-publications>. More detailed information on the processes can be found on the websites mentioned in the Overview of activities on pages 21–26.

Reports on the regional expert meetings of Phase I can be found at: <http://www.dprn.nl/regional-expert-meeting-reports>.

Reports on the thematic meetings of Phase I can be found at: <http://www.dprn.nl/thematic-meeting-reports>.

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