



Intersectoral partnerships for sustainable commodity chains: Developing an analytical perspective

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Abstract

This project is dedicated to so-called intersectoral partnerships; defined in this paper as collaborative arrangements in which actors from two or more spheres of society are involved in a non-hierarchical process through which these actors strive for a sustainability goal. The main question of the PhD project of which this paper is a product is what role, if any, partnerships can play in making commodity chains more sustainable, and how this can be explained. In this paper an analytical perspective is developed. It shows what insights are needed to analyse the cases and to answer the main question. The main presumption in this paper is that the actual influence of partnerships in a commodity chain depends on: a) the internal characteristics and internal working of a partnership, b) characteristics of the chain, and c) the activities and the effects of the partnership given a) and b).

1. Introduction

In past years a new form of arrangements has been developed: the form of partnerships. Partnerships between parties from the same societal domain, or *intrasectoral* partnerships are not that new. More novel are partnerships formed between parties from different sectors from society or *intersectoral* partnerships. These new arrangements perform different tasks, including attempts to make production more sustainable. This project is dedicated to these intersectoral partnerships, which are defined in this paper as: *collaborative arrangements in which actors from two or more spheres of society (state, market and civil society) are involved in a non-hierarchical process through which these actors strive for a sustainability goal.*

Until now, academic attention for partnerships has mainly been focused on what can be called ‘process success’; improved relations between actors, building of trust, development of a shared understanding, and how best to achieve this. Although these are very interesting and relevant issues as they can be seen as a prerequisite for or part of the performance of partnerships, in this project another dimension is added. Inspired by wondering what all this collaboration is good for, the added dimension in this project is what intersectoral partnerships achieve in terms of increased sustainability. The chosen focus of this project is on the possible role intersectoral partnerships (with an emphasis on the ones between business and Non- Governmental Organisations) can play in making commodity¹ chains more sustainable. The main question of the PhD project of which this paper is a product is: What role –if any- can intersectoral partnerships play in making commodity chains more sustainable, and how can this be explained? The main goal of this paper is to develop an analytical perspective for this study based on different theoretical insights.

¹ A ‘commodity’ is defined in this paper –in line with the Oxford English Dictionary- as ‘a raw material or agricultural product that can be bought and sold’. Examples are coffee, cocoa, rubber and wood. Commodities are bulk goods; products or resources traded primarily on the basis of price, and not on differences in quality or features



2. Research design

In this study it is presumed that the possibilities and limitations of intersectoral partnerships are determined by the combination of characteristics of the chain they are aimed at and characteristics of the partnership itself. In this approach partnerships are considered as one of the factors in the economic process, in this case the commodity chain. This implies that to answer the main question it is necessary to look firstly at the chain under study, then into partnerships, and thirdly at what the chain characteristics and the partnership characteristics mean for the possibilities of the partnership. Following this line of reasoning there are several questions that will be addressed in this paper.

First we need to understand what a commodity chain is and how it can be analysed. The first question is therefore:

1. What is a commodity chain and what are suitable methods to analyse it? This will be addressed in section 4.

Then we can go to the sustainability problems in a chain and how they are related to the governance structure of the chain. The next two questions are therefore:

2. How can we define the main sustainability problems in a chain? This will be addressed in section 5;
3. What are the main characteristics within the chain and its governance structure that influence these problems? This will be addressed in section 6.

Subsequently, we can turn to intersectoral partnerships. As a factor in an economic process partnerships are assumed to induce an incentive to make (parts of) a commodity chain more sustainable. To assess this influence, we need to analyse the roles partnerships actually play. In order to do so we need firstly to define the theoretically possible roles of partnerships. These are expressed in the fourth research question:

4. What functions can partnerships theoretically fulfil in the process of making commodity chains more sustainable? This will be addressed in section 7.

Furthermore, we assume that the actual influence of partnerships in a commodity chain depends on:

5. The internal characteristics and internal working of a partnership (addressed in section 8);
6. The match between the partnership and characteristics of the chain. This will be addressed in section 9.

In the following, these questions will be addressed one by one. In this way, an analytical perspective for this study is developed that can be used to describe the cases in a later stage of this project. Please note that this is a preliminary version of the framework; several refinements can be thought of.

3. Methods

This paper is based on study of literature and a limited number of exploratory informal and formal interviews with experts; both academics and 'partnership practitioners'.

In building this analytical framework, two different bodies of literature are drawn from; commodity chain literature and what can be called 'partnership and collaboration literature'.



The first, commodity chain literature, will be used to sketch the characteristics of commodity chains, as these can be used to gain insight in the problems and opportunities for intersectoral partnerships in changing commodity chains.

The second, what can be called ‘partnership and collaboration literature’, will be used to describe possible roles of partnerships and, among other things, what issues are at stake in collaborative processes, and when and how collaborative processes can work well. This literature deals with intrasectoral and intersectoral forms of collaboration. I agree with among others Van der Voort (2004) that intersectoral collaboration can have a lot in common with intrasectoral forms of collaboration. However, intersectoral partnerships are considered a special form that might require special care because of e.g. different backgrounds of partners. Using collaboration and partnership literature, several main themes will be formulated that can be seen as crucial in intersectoral partnerships and that can be used in a next step of this project to describe and analyse the partnership cases.

4. The concept of commodity chains

To start with, a closer look can be taken at commodity chains and methods of analysis for commodity chains. What is a commodity chain and what are suitable methods to analyse it? Hopkins and Wallerstein (in Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994:2) have defined a commodity chain as “a network of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity”. For Gereffi et al. (1994: 2), a Global Commodity Chain (GCC) consists of sets of interorganizational networks clustered around one commodity or product, linking households, enterprises, and states to one another within the world-economy. These networks are situational specific, socially constructed, and locally integrated; underscoring the social embeddedness of economic organization. Specific processes or segments within a chain can be represented as boxes or nodes, with each box representing a specific and separable production process. These boxes are linked together in networks. Each successive node within a chain involves the acquisition and/or organization of inputs (e.g. raw materials or semi finished products), labor power (and its provisioning), transportation, distribution (via markets or transfers), and consumption. Note that, as also appears from this definition; the word ‘chain’ is in reality somewhat unrealistic, in reality chains are not static chains, but merely constantly changing networks.

In literature different names can be found for both the actual chain and for methods of analysis. Common terms and approaches are supply chain analysis, Global Commodity Chain Analysis, Global Value Chain Analysis and the originally French ‘*filière*’ approach. In general they refer to more or less the same processes, but there are differences. Differences can be distinguished in the level of analysis: national level –e.g. the *filière* approach (Lauret, 1983 in Reynolds, 2002) - or international level; the sectors they are applied to (some plea for a different approach for different product sectors, e.g. agro-food commodities); or in the focus: on the creation of value in the different nodes (profit) or more on the actual material flows (products). In this paper, the term commodity chain will be applied for the actual chain. For the analysis of these chains, a Global Commodity Chain Analysis (GCC Analysis) will be applied. The choice for this approach is supported among others by Van der Grijp et al (2005); they state that “the approach has proven to be useful when explaining restructuring and transition processes in specific sectors of the economy” (p. 447). GCC Analysis was originally used as an economic approach to commodity chains, but in later years



other uses have been developed as well. “Commodity Chains Analysis² has initially been used to better understand why many of the potential benefits of globalisation fail to reach the poor and why particular countries and types of enterprises find it difficult to enter certain sectors. It has been widely used as a tool for action research by e.g. fair trade organisations. Commodity Chains Analysis conceptualises enterprises as parts of chains of different but linked production and exchange activities operating in different geographical areas. It focuses on analysing ‘chain governance’ i.e. how value is distributed at different levels of the chain and the different interests and power relations which influence this distribution. In this way it leads to a more sophisticated modelling of the positive and negative impacts, whether direct, indirect or unintended, of different interventions” (Mayoux, 2003).

A useful aspect of the analysis is the different dimensions of a commodity chain that practitioners have identified. Gereffi (in Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994: 96-97) identifies the following:

1. an input-output structure: a set of products and services linked together in a sequence of value-adding activities;
2. a certain territoriality or geographical coverage;
3. a governance structure: i.e. authority and power relations that determine how financial, material and human resources are allocated and flow within a chain;
4. an institutional and policy dimension: policies and organizational arrangements affecting the distribution of value in a chain

The first and second can be used in this project to help describe the configuration and organization of commodity chains: the geographical shape of the chain and the actors involved (e.g. main industrial players). The third and fourth, the governance structure and institutional dimension of a commodity chain, are a bit more complex but seem very interesting for an analytical perspective. The governance structure points at issues of e.g. power divisions in a chain, the institutional dimension at policies and regulations. An example of the latter is the influence that state intervention -despite liberalization and privatization trends- may still have on the economic position of actors and their decisions in global chains (Diaz-Porrás, 2003: 42). Both dimension 3 and 4 can be seen as referring to (im)possibilities of change in a chain. This leads to the insight that there are certain characteristics or circumstances in a chain that determine what can be changed in it and who can do this. Therefore, it seems relevant to determine what the characteristics are that influence change of a chain into a sustainable direction. This will be done in section 6. Firstly, however, we will take a closer look at sustainability issues in chains.

5. Defining sustainability problems in commodity chains

Commodity chains can be seen as critical to sustainable development as they often span both production and extraction of resources in developing countries and processing and transport, trade and consumption in developed countries. Obviously, what the sustainability issues of a commodity chain exactly are depends on which chain is studied. A more thorough overview per chain can be given in the case studies of this project³. There are however, some general relevant issues that can be thought

² Mayoux uses the name ‘Value Chain analysis’ in this quote.

³ In the empirical part of this project, three commodity chains will be studied on their organisational characteristics, their sustainability problems and the partnerships involved in them. The first is the coffee chain. Preliminary results are however beyond the scope of this paper.



of. Problems like objectionable working conditions, poor prices for local producers, damage to health and environmental devastation due to pesticides, agrochemicals and mono-crop cultivation (Gonzalez-Perez and McDonough, 2005 on problems in the banana industry) are still quite common in agro-food chains.

Without wanting to go too deeply into the discussion on definitions of sustainability, I would like to shortly point at some definition matters on what sustainable production could or should be. This, because the definition of sustainable production and a sustainable commodity chain determines what one considers problematic or desirable. In the words of the American NGO Ecotrust, “sustainable value chains differ from traditional supply chains in terms of control, transparency, distribution of profit, and the very idea of value itself (...) Conventional supply chains limit the concept of value to economic profitability. Sustainable value chains expand the idea of value - to include economic, ecological, and social profitability. Value chains, in other words, add values and relationships to an otherwise purely 'price driven' equation”⁴. Following this line of reasoning, ‘sustainability’ is seen in this project as having three dimensions: a social, an environmental and an economical one. Or as Elkington (in: Van Marrewijk, 2003: 103) put it, trying to realize a balance between “People, Planet, Profit, which refers to a situation where companies harmonize their efforts in order to be economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible”. This is however still a very broad division, especially if we want to apply all aspects of it to commodity chains. Ahmed and McQuaid (2005) give a more specific description of principles essential to a sustainable production process:

- Products and services are: safe and ecologically sound throughout their life cycle; as appropriate, designed to be durable, repairable, readily recycled, compostable, or easily biodegradable; and produced and packaged using the minimal amount of material and energy possible;
- Processes are designed and operated in such a way that: wastes and ecologically incompatible by-products are reduced, eliminated or recycled on-site; chemical substances or physical agents and conditions that present hazards to human health or the environment are eliminated; energy and materials are conserved, and the forms of energy and materials used are most appropriate for the desired ends; work spaces are designed to minimise or eliminate chemical, ergonomic and physical hazards;
- Workers are valued and their work is organised to conserve and enhance their efficiency and creativity; their security and well-being is a priority; they are encouraged and helped to continuously develop their talents and capacities; their input to and participation in the decision making process is openly accepted.

The economical dimension of sustainability perhaps lacks attention in this definition. This is not the intention of the author; in making commodity chains more sustainable, the economical aspect of sustainability is very important. Therefore, attention will at least be paid to distributions of income along the chain⁵.

Although the definition is originally about sustainable production processes and is still quite broad, the principles seem relevant to use when looking at global commodity chains. It can be used to identify sustainability problems in the chains. For now, we will stick to this description. Empirical research on the first chain that is being undertaken at the moment will lead to more elaborate ideas on what the

⁴ Ecotrust: http://www.vividpicture.net/documents/value_chain.html, vis. 12-04-06

⁵ When talking about a sustainable distribution of income one can think of e.g. a ‘fair price’ for workers in producing countries.



sustainability issues at stake can be and will probably lead to insights on how much attention should be paid to describing sustainability issues of a chain in the analytical framework of this study.

Now that we have a preliminary idea of which sustainability problems are at stake in commodity chains, we can continue by looking at what actually causes and maintains these problems. This will be elaborated on in the following section.

6. Finding influences on sustainability changes in a commodity chain

Although not originally designed for the purpose, GCC analysis can be used, as among others Raynolds (2002) and Ponte (2004) have shown, to analyse commodity chains on characteristics that influence the transition from a traditional or conventional, to a more sustainable chain. In this research a commodity chain analysis will be undertaken that has an emphasis on sustainability issues. An important aspect of this seems to be to identify the characteristics of a chain that influence if and how sustainability issues are dealt with in a chain (question 2). This is done in this section.

The characteristics identified in this section are based on a study of literature, part of which with a GCC perspective. The characteristics found are categorised in three types: at (single) actor level, characteristics on the level of existing relations between actors in a chain, and influences from factors and involvement of parties outside the chain. The characteristics are described in a neutral way, i.e. not as problems but as influences, as they can have both a positive and a negative influence.

Characteristics at (single) actor level

Factors at the level of decision making by single actors in a chain can cause that these actors do not work in the most sustainable way. Examples found are:

- Costs; the inability and/or unwillingness of industry players to bear the extra costs associated with sustainable production in a competitive environment (Potts 2004; Vermeulen and Ras 2005).
- Motivation; willingness or lack of willingness of parties to change their behaviour (Vermeulen and Ras 2005) this is influenced e.g. by the aforementioned costs, but one can also think of priorities of a CEO. Motivation is an all-inclusive factor; it is the outcome of an equation made by the actors of advantages and disadvantages of certain behaviour.
- (Sense of) urgency of sustainability issues; when continuity of the sector is endangered, this leads to a certain pressure that increases the chance that actors will form a partnership and make it function well. An example is the Marine Stewardship Council in the fish sector as described, among others, by Bendell (2000).
- Knowledge and expertise about sustainability issues; industry is only beginning to grasp the full implications of sustainable production and trade along mainstream supply chains, parties don't know how to change, or are (un)aware about sustainability issues (Vermeulen and Ras 2005; Potts 2003: 3-4).
- Consumer behaviour and the perception of consumer behaviour by actors in a chain. I.e. if there is, or parties think there can be a change in consumer demand. This is influenced by whether the consumers are (un)aware of, and (un)clear about sustainability issues (Potts 2003).



Characteristics at the level of relations between actors in a chain

Besides the factors at single actor level, there are also factors in the relations between actors that influence change. Examples of this are:

- Trust and continuity of supplier relations (Vermeulen and Ras 2005).
- Power to enforce change; e.g. with suppliers, also described as 'disparities in market power' (Potts, 2003: 2; Vermeulen and Ras, 2005)⁶.
- Transparency and (imperfect) information flows (among others Vermeulen and Ras 2005).

Influences from outside the chain and 'context' factors

Actors and factors outside a chain can also influence the way of working in a commodity chain. Parties that are not part of the actual chain but that do influence it are for example governments and trade organizations. Examples of factors are:

- Involvement of NGOs in a chain and their campaigning activities.
- Main national and supranational governmental bodies involved and their relevant actions; e.g. (a lack of) political support/political ideas on production and consumption or existence of institutional barriers in international trade (Vermeulen and Ras 2005).
- The anonymity of commodity markets (based on Vermeulen and Ras, 2005); this is one of the factors that lead to a lack of transparency.
- General supply and demand balance; if there is more supply than demand the price small producers get for their products drops which makes it harder for them to earn a proper income. This could be seen as one of the economic aspects of sustainable production.
- Existence of other past or present sustainability initiatives in a sector: dependent on the form and success of these initiatives (e.g. eco-labels) these could work stimulating or not.

These lists can be specified per chain once the description of the chains using the dimensions of the GCC Analysis has been done. The GCC analysis will probably lead to insight in what influences sustainability problems. The given list can then be specified and compared with what is found. The list can also be used in interviews, asking experts what they see as causes of the sustainability problems mentioned.

7. The possible role of intersectoral partnerships

From a more general view on commodity chains and the sustainability issues therein, attention can now be directed to the topic of intersectoral partnerships. The first question to be addressed here is what functions partnerships possibly can fulfil in the process of making commodity chains more sustainable.

If we take a moment to think about what intersectoral partnerships could mean, especially in a chain, then the value of partnerships should be in addressing one or more of the issues of sustainability in production processes (section 5) and or by dealing with (part of) the mentioned chain characteristics as mentioned in section 6. Literature tells us that, ideally, partnerships could bring different actors together, in a collaborative, not-competitive way; actors in the chain and 'new' actors, from outside the chain like governments and NGOs. By doing this, partnerships could mean:

⁶ The examples from Potts come from his experience on prominent obstacles to building long-term sustainability in the coffee sector



- a new availability of means and resources like knowledge and ideas.
- a possibility for actors to influence each other; partnerships can be a form for e.g. NGOs or governments to address business actors in a chain, to motivate them.
- in situations where different sustainability initiatives from different actors already exist, the role of partnerships could be in bringing these different actors (both in and outside the chain) together and coordinate the activities or come to a common plan of action (based on Weyzig and Stichele, 2004).
- In the end, partnerships could also influence other business actors than the ones that are in the partnership: they can set an example, have a benchmark effect on the sector. They can thus pressure (or 'motivate') other parties to change their behaviour.

A relevant issue when discussing the possible role of partnerships is the diversity within the partnership world; partnerships that comply with our definition of 'intersectoral collaborative alliances with a sustainability goal' can still be very different 'creatures'. Relevant differences are:

- The part of the chain the initiative is focussed on; some partnerships are aimed at the whole chain, others at a certain part of it. Some are based in a producing country, specifically focussing at the part of the chain in this specific country. Other initiatives are meant to influence the whole international industry. A categorisation for this could be made, for instance in partnerships affecting the consumption side of the chain, the production side, the sourcing end or the whole chain.
- The aim; what does the partnership want to accomplish or contribute to? There are big differences in what the aims or goals of different partnerships are. Study of the coffee chain shows examples of partnerships aiming at providing credit, development of criteria for an eco-label, helping producers to comply to criteria, and promote sales of sustainable coffee, to name a few.
- Closely related to the aim of the partnership is the form it takes, some are more institutionalized than others. Examples are the form of an eco-labelling organisation, a broad round table-like setting, or a more loosely organised arrangement between one NGO and one company. Interesting is the question what this means for their performance; partnerships that take different forms could be expected to have different roles and outcomes. On the other hand, one can imagine different forms of partnerships to have the same kind of influence on a chain. They could for instance all lead to exchange of knowledge, irrespective of their form.
- The kind of actors involved; partnerships that involve governments among the participants seem to be quite different from purely private partnerships; furthermore, partnerships between small producers and NGOs seem to be very different from the ones involving NGOs and big retailers or roasters (usually from developed countries).
- The number of actors involved; i.e. the whole sector or just a one-on-one collaboration between one company and an NGO. This is obviously related to the aim of the partnership and the part of the chain it focuses on; roundtable-like initiatives will involve more actors than an initiative that focuses on increasing the amount of sustainable coffee in a certain supermarket.

These differences can be used to categorize the partnerships found in the chains that will be studied in a later stage of this project.



8. The relevance of the internal working of partnerships

We assume that the actual influence of partnerships in a commodity chain depends among others on the internal characteristics and internal working of a partnership. These terms are related, but slightly different. Internal characteristics is descriptive, these are characteristics or features of a partnership that shape it internally. Internal working is more evaluative, the internal working is seen as constructed of different internal characteristics and can be used to indicate how well a partnership functions internally. Note that at this stage it is not argued yet that partnerships have to function well internally to achieve certain goals. This may seem illogical, but it seems good to keep the option open that partnerships, although failed in their own view or in terms of process success, did cause some sort of effect on the sustainability issues in a chain.

To study partnerships internally, the ‘collaboration and partnership’ body of literature provides some very useful insights. In this, next to the characteristics mentioned in the former paragraph that can be used to categorise partnerships, certain internal themes can be found that can be used to describe characteristics of partnerships, and to analyse their internal working. Interesting themes can, among others, be found in the work of Gray and Wood (1991), Gray and Yan (1992), Logsdon (1991), Vangen and Huxham (2003) and Huxham and Vangen (2004). Based on a study of literature several themes are chosen and translated into ‘internal characteristics’. The ones selected seem, based on the research questions of this project and exploratory study of the subject, the most relevant. These are ‘partners’, ‘goal setting’, ‘power’, ‘leadership’ and ‘trust’.

Partners

First of all, partnerships can be analysed on the partners involved in it. Having the right partners in the partnerships is mentioned by different authors (Caudron, 1995; Tholke, 2003) as an important issue. Authors advise to identify key stakeholders (Conrad, Doran et al., 2005) and to avoid assembling the same people for every new partnership initiative (Poncelet, 2001). A mix of experienced and inexperienced actors is thought to be beneficial to a partnership (Poncelet, 2001).

Goal setting

An important issue when it comes to working in partnership is agreeing on the goals of the partnership while motivations of participants, some hidden, and some open, often differ. The difference in the goals and motivations of individual partners in the partnership and the partnership goals can be a tough issue in intersectoral partnerships: “Often, the only practical way forward is to get started on some action without fully agreeing (...)” (Huxham and Vangen, 2004: 193). Earlier work of the author of this paper and colleagues (Francken, van Huijstee et al., 2006) pointed furthermore to the need of a careful choice of topic and goals of a partnership, i.e. not only the exact goals, but also, more broadly, the topic the partnership is formulated on is important. This should preferably ‘fit’ with the core business of the partners involved. ‘Goal setting’ is an issue that is decided upon internally, but which is of great influence on what the partnership accomplishes externally, in terms of changes in a chain.



Power

Besides power struggles in the chain, e.g. between suppliers and buyers, power is also acknowledged in literature as an important topic within partnerships. In intersectoral partnerships, power is at first sight usually unequally distributed. In terms of size and financial means companies tend to outweigh NGOs by far. Huxham and Vangen however note, in my view correctly, that most parties minimally have at least the 'power of exit' (2004: 193), i.e. the threat of pulling out. This is something most companies would want to prevent, especially once the partnership has become known to the outside world.

A slightly different, but equally useful concept is Gray and Yan's 'bargaining power'; which refers to the relative influence each partner exerts on the outcomes of the negotiations. It is a composite term (: 49;53) which they see as consisting of the subcomponents equity, similarities of expertise, strategic importance of the venture to the partners, the alternatives available to each partner and host government intervention in international settings (the latter I will address as a chain characteristic). Their 'availability of alternative arrangements' is in my view related to Huxham and Vangens 'power of exit' and seems an interesting issue to elaborate on.

Leadership

In partnerships, there is a lack of traditional hierarchies and therefore attention should be paid to the subject of leadership in a partnership if it wants to get anything done. Huxham and Vangen (2004) "consider leadership as being concerned with the mechanisms that lead to the actual outcomes of a collaboration (...), what makes things happen in a collaboration" (p. 198). According to Huxham and Vangen, leadership done by participants is difficult. Furthermore, leadership is not only enacted by people; structures and processes are as important in leading agendas as the participants. So, structures, processes and participants can be thought of as different media through which collaborative leadership is, in practice, enacted. Questions of responsibility and division of tasks can be dealt with under this heading as well.

Trust

According to Huxham and Vangen (2004), trust is in common wisdom seen as a precondition for successful collaboration, but the common practice is often suspicion as a starting point (p.194). Huxham and Vangen therefore point at the need of paying attention to *building trust*. According to Vangen and Huxham (2003: 5) to create advantage, practitioners need to engage in a continuous process of nurturing the collaborative processes. Trust appears to be significant in this process. They argue that trust building is problematic and that management of trust implies both the ability to cope in situations where trust is lacking and the ability to build trust where this possible. Interesting is also their experience that practitioners do not provide much spontaneous elaboration on trust, but that the majority argues that trust is an essential ingredient for successful collaboration and that usually they perceive a lack of trust in their own collaborative situations (Vangen and Huxham, 2003: 8). In my view, trust is a factor that combines the others in two ways; having the right partners involved, clear aims, an equal power division and good leadership can be seen as prerequisites for or making it easier to create and keep trust in a partnership, while on the other hand trust can also be said to be a prerequisite to develop the other themes.



Discussion on the study of the internal working in this project

Although very relevant and useful, it is not decided yet how thoroughly the internal working of partnerships aimed at commodity chains can be discussed in this project. Glasbergen (2006) divides three different levels of partnership study. In his division, this project, studying the functioning of partnerships as instruments in a chain, would be on one level, while the study of the internal working and the internal dynamics of partnerships, is on another. Although I am convinced that looking at the internal working of partnerships can deliver valuable insights when studying partnerships, one can wonder how much light they will shed on the role partnerships (can) play in the broader context of the commodity chain. Furthermore, doing both and doing both well might require more time than is available for this project. It might be enough to stick with a categorization of partnerships following the points mentioned in section 7.

9. Partnerships as change arrangements in a chain

As mentioned, it is expected that explanations for the success of partnerships in commodity chains can be found beyond the internal working of a partnership. Instead of looking at their internal working, the actual influence of partnerships in a commodity chain is assumed to depend on both the partnership and the chain characteristics. This will now be explored.

The questions on commodity chains and sustainability problems thereof lead to insights in what kind of sustainability problems can be looked for in the cases. Furthermore, attention has been paid to the characteristics that influence if and how these problems are addressed. These were categorised in three categories; internal, between actors and external. My presumption is that these are the characteristics partnerships should influence if they want to enforce change. They can however also be influenced by these characteristics themselves. If they manage to address the main obstacles to sustainability in a chain and to avoid suffering from them, they are presumed to have the biggest possible contribution to sustainability in a chain.

In search for a description and explanation of the role partnerships might have in changing a chain, both the sustainability problems in a chain and the chain characteristics that influence if and how these problems are addressed in a chain can therefore be put next to individual partnership characteristics. This is the light in which partnership activities and effects should be seen and analysed.

First of all, the objectives of a partnership; are the aims directed at the main problems? Furthermore, we can take a characteristic of a chain that influences if and how sustainability problems are dealt with in a chain and see if the partnership has addressed it or can cope with it. An example is to take the characteristic 'knowledge and expertise of industry about sustainability issues' and see if the partnership under study has led to an increase of this knowledge. Another example would be to take the characteristic 'power to enforce change', and see who the most powerful players in the chain are. This can be put next to the partners of a partnership: are the main players involved?

Three more general questions can be formulated that should lead to insight in what partnerships do in a chain:

1. Do the partnerships work on the main sustainability problems identified?
2. Do the partnerships address the chain characteristics identified that influence how these sustainability problems are dealt with? Do they work on the relevant variables?



And if they address these, how and how well do they do this:

3. Are they strong enough to make a difference, to enforce change? Or are they hindered by weaknesses in their internal working or certain chain characteristics?

Note that if it turns out that a partnership does not work on the issues identified, we have to wonder if this can then be seen as a weakness of the partnership. Does the partnership indeed have a smaller influence on the chain than would have been possible if it would have been organised in a different way or on another topic? Or does the fact that the partnership does not address the characteristics identified mean that my presumptions about the influence of chain characteristics in general or the characteristics identified are wrong?

Furthermore, it was stated that partnerships are often not designed to influence the whole chain, but certain parts of it. Therefore, a possible outcome of such an analysis could be that they do have a significant influence in the chain, but only on a certain part of it. Additionally, how relevant the individual partnership goals and successes are when looking at the 'bigger picture' can be assessed per partnership, but in the end, some statements can also be made about the 'cumulative effect' of several partnerships in a global commodity chain.

10. Conclusions

This project is about the role partnerships can play in making commodity chains more sustainable. In this paper an analytical perspective is developed that is based on several insights and that is an analytical model for describing and analysing the cases in this research project.

In this paper it is presumed that the possibilities and limitations of intersectoral partnerships are determined by the combination of characteristics of the chain they are aimed at and characteristics of the partnership itself. This implies that to answer the main question it is necessary to look at the chain under study, into partnerships and then put these next to each other and see how they influence each other.

Firstly, attention was directed to commodity chains and sustainability problems of chains. The concepts of commodity chains and Global Commodity Chain Analysis were introduced and attention directed to how the main sustainability problems in a chain can be defined. In this project, sustainability is understood as containing economic, social and environmental elements. Also a more specific description of what a sustainable production process would look like is given.

Subsequently, several factors within the chain that influence the sustainability of production in the chain are identified. These were divided in three categories: internal, between actors and external.

Next, attention was turned to intersectoral partnerships. Possible roles partnerships can play in the process of making commodity chains more sustainable were identified. Partnerships can, among other things, bring actors from different domains together in a non-hierarchical way, leading to increased knowledge, innovative ideas etcetera. They can do this organised in different forms, like an eco-label, Code of Conduct or development of a new product, aiming at different parts of a chain and involving different kinds and numbers of actors.

As for the question of what explains the role partnerships (can) play, the assumption was taken that the actual influence of partnerships in a commodity chain depends on:



- a) The internal characteristics and internal working of a partnership. Several characteristics were selected that can be used to describe the partnerships internally and that together tell something about the internal working of partnerships. These are: partners, goal setting, power, trust and leadership.
- b) Certain chain characteristics;
- c) The activities and the effects of the partnership given a) and b).

If a certain sustainability problem is (partly) solved by a partnership depends firstly on if the partnership objective is aimed at this. Furthermore, partnerships could have a role in chains by changing the characteristics that cause these problems (or that influence how they are dealt with). They might however also be influenced by certain chain characteristics themselves, which would make it more difficult to play their possible role well. Dependent on their activities and effects, influenced by their internal characteristics and seen in the light of the characteristics of the chain they are aimed at, the partnerships are thought to have a bigger or less big influence on the chain.

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