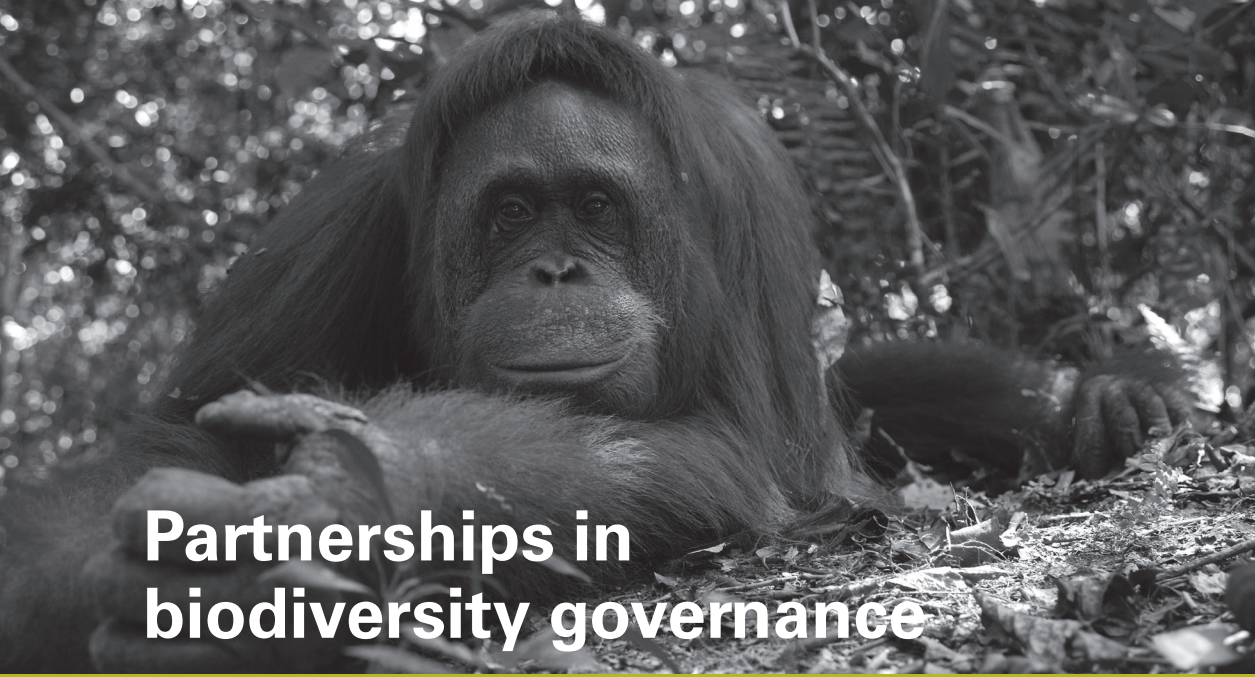

Partnerships in biodiversity governance

An assessment of their contributions to halting biodiversity loss

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Summary

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Introduction
Although the first international environmental agreements date back to the 18th century, international environmental policy as we know it today was mainly developed during the second half of the 20th century. This development took place in several phases; each with its own specific characteristics. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 can be seen as the beginning of a new phase in contemporary international environmental policy, in which market and civil society actors are increasingly viewed to play a prominent and evident role in sustainable development, a transition often called the shift 'from government to governance' (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992). It is expected that in this new phase the market mechanism and cooperation between public and private sectors in partnerships will become widely accepted as instruments for sustainable development (Andresen and Hey 2005). This dissertation focuses on some of the specific characteristics of this new phase in contemporary international environmental governance. It aims to increase our understanding of the relatively new instruments of partnerships and their contributions to and consequences for sustainable development.

Biodiversity
The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity[1] has been chosen as empirical field, because it is one of the main and established international environmental issues. The international community is struggling to meet its so-called '2010 Biodiversity Target' to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional, and national level, as decided by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), endorsed by the WSSD and the United Nations General Assembly, and incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Human activity is threatening the survival of species and causes extinction of species, and virtually all ecosystem types have been dramatically transformed by human actions. Habitat and land cover change represents the most important cause of biodiversity loss for terrestrial ecosystems; overexploitation (fishing) is the main threat to marine biodiversity. A driver of increasing importance is climate change. It is expected that these impacts will increase significantly in the future, showing the urgent need for effective governance (MEA 2005a).

The urgency becomes even more apparent when taking the social, economic and political aspects of biodiversity into account. Especially local communities and poor people who are most dependent on ecosystem services, like the provision of food or wood, have been disadvantaged by biodiversity loss. Economic and political aspects have often dominated international negotiations

on biodiversity: important issues are the economic value of biodiversity and its ownership, the autonomy of developing countries to decide on the biodiversity within their national borders, and the rights of local communities dependent on biodiversity (Hannigan 2006). Biodiversity conservation should thus be considered an issue of sustainable development, incorporating ecological, social and economic aspects.

Theoretical background

This dissertation can be placed in the current debates in social science on the rise of private steering mechanisms in the international governance of sustainable development, and their relationship with and consequences for (inter-) governmental environmental regimes. The main bodies of literature are regime literature, traditionally focused on intergovernmental regimes, and governance literature, focused on new steering mechanisms. Partnership literature is regarded as a specialized part of governance literature. Although the boundary between these two bodies of literature is becoming blurred, since regime authors are increasingly including governance questions in their research, the two can still be viewed as separate bodies of literature.

The research of this dissertation takes place on the theoretical crossroads between regime and governance literature, contributing to the further development and to the ongoing merging of the two bodies of literature. It introduces modern governance questions to the regime debate, expanding the debate to include the effectiveness of private steering mechanisms and their interactions with (inter-) governmental regimes. It also applies the concepts of effectiveness and institutional interaction from regime literature to private steering mechanisms, and methodologies developed by regime researchers are used to analyze new governance instruments.

The aim of the dissertation is to obtain an improved understanding of the contributions of partnerships to international environmental governance, more specifically to biodiversity governance, and the consequences for the biodiversity governance system as a whole. The central research questions are formulated as follows.

I. *What are the contributions of international intersectoral partnerships[2] to biodiversity governance, and how can these be explained?*

II. *What are the consequences of these partnership roles for (inter-) governmental regimes and the biodiversity governance system[3] as a whole?*

These research questions are answered through the analysis and discussion of the following three main theoretical themes. All three main theoretical themes contribute to answering both central research questions.

1. Functions

The contribution of partnerships is firstly operationalized by the governance functions they fulfill. The following governance functions are distinguished.

a. *Agenda setting*
   Starting the debate on new issues in the governance system

b. *Policy development*
   Developing public or private policy, for example sustainability standards
c. *Implementation*
   Contributing to or enabling implementation of sustainability measures 'on the ground'
d. *Metagovernance*
   Strategic steering and coordination in the governance system
e. *Ensuring good governance*
   Improving transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and/or responsiveness (UNHCHR 2000) in the governance system

2. Effectiveness
Secondly, the contribution of partnerships to biodiversity governance is operationalized by the effectiveness with which they fulfill these governance functions. Effectiveness is researched, among others, in terms of output and outcome (Underdal 2002), leaving aside impact.

3. Interaction
Finally the contributions are operationalized by the manner in which partnerships interact with (inter-) governmental regimes in fulfilling governance functions.

The empirical chapters
Chapter 2, 'Partnerships in forest governance' analyzes the contribution of partnerships to the conservation and sustainable use of forests, which provide habitat for half or more or the world's known terrestrial plant and animal species (MEA 2005b). Several partnerships are focused on one of the main threats to forest biodiversity, namely unsustainable logging, conversion, and illegal logging, while others use a more integral approach. The following partnerships are analyzed: the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Canadian Standards Association (CSA), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC), Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC), Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS), World Bank – WWF Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use (WB-WWF), Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), and the Asia Forest Partnership (AFP).

The research shows that partnerships fill gaps when governments are not willing or able to regulate. One of the major problems of the intergovernmental forest regimes has been lack of implementation. Partnerships for sustainable logging have complemented these regimes by developing and implementing standards for sustainable forest management, thereby contributing to conserving forest biodiversity 'on the ground'. They do this with varying effectiveness, however, since the standards differ in terms of stringency and inclusiveness.

Evidence is provided for the development of a complex structure of forest biodiversity governance including both public and private actors. The main explanation for the limited partnership effectiveness can be found in public-private interaction, especially since public-private partnerships choose less stringent and inclusive approaches towards sustainability. These partnerships were developed by government and industry actors to compete with an existing more rigorous standard. Because governments are involved in these partnerships, forest

certification has become politicized: forest-rich countries and their forestry industries are using the new steering mechanisms to defend their interests.

Chapter 3, 'Partnership as governance mechanism in development cooperation: Intersectoral North-South partnerships for marine biodiversity' improves our understanding of partnerships in development cooperation and marine biodiversity. Marine biodiversity represents an important part of global biodiversity, since coastal and marine ecosystems are among the most productive ecosystems in the world (UNEP 2006). The performance of two development cooperation partnerships is analyzed: one that works on sustainable shrimp aquaculture, and one that focuses on sustainable anchoveta fisheries.

The partnerships have delivered a modest contribution to international fisheries governance. They have brought together relevant stakeholders from the different sectors of society, enabling agenda setting of different approaches to sustainability and increasing the understanding among partners. Main explanations for this limited performance are the following. It is difficult for partnerships to add value to a governance system in which numerous initiatives are already in place. Also, partnering is extremely problematic when different discourses (or basic visions) meet. A basic consensus among partners on, among others, strategies for sustainable development seems necessary for partnership success. This implies that civil society groups with more pragmatic approaches towards sustainability, which match the approaches of market and governmental actors, usually become involved in partnerships. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with more inclusive views on sustainability generally do not. Consequently, some discourses become underrepresented in partnerships, disabling their potential of addressing certain issues. Another explanation can be found in the existing rules (or established norms) for intersectoral relationships. The research shows that the partnerships are not able to structurally improve these relationships. The existing weak position of Southern NGOs has been reinforced by the partnerships; they have not been able to contribute to the emancipation of civil society in the South. Existing power inequalities among the partners also have an important influence on partnership effectiveness. In the analyzed case studies, the economic importance of the fishing and aquaculture industry had a decisive impact on the partnerships' performance.

Chapter 4, 'Conservation partnerships in biodiversity governance: Fulfilling governance functions through interaction', focuses on the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP), the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), and the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN), which work on the conservation of great apes, hotspots and coral reefs respectively. The research contributes to the debate whether private steering mechanisms reinvent, complement or erode public regimes. The analyzed conservation partnerships reinvent conservation politics by placing new conservation discourses on the governance system agenda and by playing important metagovernance roles. They also strengthen the role of civil society in global, regional, and national conservation politics. The partnerships complement intergovernmental regimes by fulfilling implementation functions and enabling conservation implementation through funding. They support developing countries in implementing their commitments in international biodiversity regimes. The partnerships' effectiveness is influenced by the political situation in the regions in which they are active and by the partnerships' limited resources. The resources cannot support the intensity and duration of activities in all regions necessary to ensure lasting

fundamental changes. Therefore the effectiveness of the fulfilled functions is significant but fragile.

Chapter 5, 'Interaction management by partnerships: The case of biodiversity and climate change governance system interaction' answers the question of what role partnerships play in the interaction management of the biodiversity and climate change governance systems. The chapter focuses on climate change, the main new threat to global biodiversity. The following partnerships are discussed: the HSBC Climate Partnership, Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels (RSB), RSPO, Global Bioenergy Partnership (GBEP), Better Sugarcane Initiative (BSI), Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (GPFLR), BioCarbon Fund (BioCF), Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA), Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), GRASP, and the CBFP.

The chapter studies the functions which partnerships fulfill in the interaction management of the issues on which the governance systems interact intensively: climate change-integrated conservation strategies (CCS), afforestation and reforestation, biofuels, and reducing emissions from avoided deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). Both the partnerships and the intergovernmental regimes mainly perform agenda setting and policy development functions, followed by implementation. The regimes, especially the CBD proactively manage the biodiversity-climate change interaction. While the regimes are more active in general interaction management, the partnerships often focus on the interaction management on a specific issue; they thus complement each other. The governance system interaction on some issues is mainly being managed by partnerships, and partnerships are generally more successful in their interaction management activities than the regimes. However, neither the regimes nor the partnerships have been able to structurally improve the existing interactions between the biodiversity and climate change governance systems. Partnerships play a unique policy development role by initiating pilots on emerging issues. In this sense partnerships are innovative instruments, developing new methodologies that can then be scaled up and used by others. Because REDD is seen by many actors working on forest biodiversity as a new funding opportunity for forest conservation, it receives relatively much attention. The danger of this development is that the conservation of other ecosystems may become underrepresented in both the biodiversity and climate change governance systems.

Conclusions

The contributions of partnerships to biodiversity governance

The twenty-four analyzed partnerships contribute to biodiversity governance in different manners and with varying effectiveness. Seven partnerships (FSC, RSPO, GRASP, CEPF, BioCF, CCBA, and the FPCF) deliver unique and important contributions to biodiversity governance; they have been named the 'gems' of partnerships. The seventeen other partnerships perform governance functions with lower effectiveness and play less paramount roles. The following general conclusions on the partnerships' contributions can be drawn:

- Agenda setting and policy development are the most effectively fulfilled governance functions;

- Private partnerships (between business and civil society actors) are generally more effective than public-private partnerships;
- The highest effectiveness is found in private partnerships and state-civil society partnerships; partnerships between state and business actors are less successful;
- The effectiveness of market-oriented partnerships (which mainly use the market as steering mechanism and often develop certification standards) is more varying than of those which are more policy-oriented.

The overall contribution of partnerships to biodiversity governance should be evaluated as varying. The most important contribution is the innovative role partnerships play; they can be effective drivers of governance system innovation. Certification standards are another important partnership contribution. Contrary to the hope raised at the WSSD that partnerships could become an important instrument for the implementation of sustainable development measures, their contribution to implementation has overall remained limited. Partnerships have generally also not lived up to the expectation that they would improve participation of different actors in biodiversity governance.

Explaining the contributions

A first important explanation for the partnerships' governance contributions is the discourses which the partnerships represent. The 'gems' have a high level of ambition for sustainability: they represent more stringent and inclusive discourses on sustainable development. Moreover, they do not only view partnerships as a means to improve intersectoral collaboration, but also want to reach tangible results: they represent the result-oriented discourse on partnerships. The low effectiveness of other partnerships can be explained by the less stringent and/or inclusive discourses on sustainable development and/or their process-oriented discourse on partnerships.

Partnerships also run into the same difficult issues that have dominated the international regimes, like the autonomy of states to decide on the biodiversity within their national borders, and the rights of local communities. Only a few partnerships have been able to address the issue of local community rights. They have worked around the vested interests and dominant discourses in intergovernmental regimes, and use a new arena, like the market, with more favorable power relations for the partnerships' aims. It often proves difficult in the longer term, however, to maintain this comparative advantage, as the powerful actors from the intergovernmental arena quickly find their way to the market to defend their interests.

Existing power relations among the partners, rules in intersectoral relations, and the local political situation also explain the contributions of partnerships. These factors have an especially large influence on biodiversity partnerships, since most biodiversity is located in developing countries, where these factors are often not favorable for partnership success.

Partnerships are also dependent on effective government policy for their success. Governments can have a tremendous influence on the governance contributions of partnerships, both through their 'classical' government policy, like land use planning or law enforcement, and through their metagovernance roles, for example by ensuring fair competition among certification schemes.

Partnership effectiveness is usually not supported by governments becoming active as members in partnerships.

The differences in the success of the gems and other partnerships can also be explained by their strategic approach. The gems understand the potential added value of the partnership approach, and their initiators and partners have a clear strategy for the partnership's role in biodiversity governance. Several gems successfully make strategic use of the public-private interaction that takes place in the partnership, using the partnership as a vehicle of interaction. Other less successful partnerships have not formulated a clear strategic governance role.

The consequences for the governance system

The roles of partnerships have important consequences for the biodiversity governance system as a whole. Public and private steering mechanisms in biodiversity governance can enhance each other. Most partnerships complement or support intergovernmental regimes (with varying success), and a few are able to reinvent biodiversity politics. No evidence has been found for partnerships eroding governmental authority. However, there are also limitations to the governance contributions of the partnership instrument.

If the current trend of most partnerships developing less rigorous standards continues, the contribution of certification as instrument for biodiversity governance and sustainable development will remain limited. Because the demands of these standards are low, the sustainability improvements made in order to become certified are relatively small. Furthermore, there is a risk that the proliferation of standards with different stringencies and scopes could undermine the position of the niche market standards which have more ambitious sustainability demands. They will have difficulties competing with mainstream standards, since the products certified according to these lower standards are cheaper. By depending solely on the market mechanism to establish the dominant approach towards sustainability, a race to the bottom may actually be enabled. Market regulation may therefore be needed in order to ensure a fair competition among the different certification schemes.

Several partnerships focus on export industries in developing countries. This is highly relevant work since there is a trend of increasing volumes of natural resources and basic products being produced in the South for Northern markets. These products include timber, soy, palm oil, fish, and sugar cane, which all have high impacts on biodiversity. However, by focusing on these commodities, the partnerships may be legitimizing sectors or trends that could in essence be unsustainable. Fundamental questions are being raised on whether export industries can contribute to the sustainable development of developing countries and on the potential sustainability of the commoditization of global production and consumption patterns in continuously rising volumes. Although these partnerships can contribute to stepwise improvements of commodities towards sustainability, biodiversity governance system participants should not expect most individual partnerships to cause broad paradigm shifts.

Although the high number of new biodiversity governance initiatives taken by different partnerships creates opportunities for innovative and additional contributions, they are not based on common strategies or analyses of what is needed most. This creates the risk of at random

choices, leaving governance gaps, for example when some issues are neglected by governance system participants, or when certain steering mechanisms, like certification standards become institutionalized and frequently used tools. This at random governance can lead to an unbalanced and less effective governance system.

Partnerships have contributed to the ongoing change in the manner in which biodiversity is governed; international intersectoral partnerships represent an important component in the process 'from government to governance' on the issue of halting biodiversity loss. The biodiversity governance system that has emerged since the beginning of the 1990s, when the first partnerships emerged, has developed into a solid and complex network of interacting (inter-) governmental regimes and (public-) private steering mechanisms. The political space in the governance system for intersectoral collaboration has expanded and is expected to continue growing. Intersectoral collaboration is becoming an autonomously growing and self-strengthening phenomenon, as partnerships work on enabling new partnerships throughout the world. The rule to work through intersectoral partnership is being 'exported' from the international biodiversity governance system to the regional, national, and local level, especially in developing countries where intersectoral collaboration is often still a novelty. Partnerships themselves thus contribute to the further institutionalization of the partnership approach.

A consequence of this further institutionalization of intersectoral governance could be that there will be less political space for more fundamental discussions since opposing views are usually put aside by partners due to the wish to collaborate in partnerships. The work of partnerships is focused on overlapping views and interests of partners, not on conflicting ones. Moreover, the increased use of intersectoral governance could create less attention for, and recognition of the 'classical' roles of governments, market actors, and civil society. So even though the research provides no evidence of single partnerships eroding governmental authority, the institutionalization of the partnership approach in the long term may have exactly this effect, not only for governments, but also for the other societal sectors. The effects of this development on civil society can already be noticed. There is increasing tension between the NGOs that represent more fundamental discourses and the more pragmatic NGOs. The question is how much political space will remain in the biodiversity governance system for the more fundamental discourses and, maybe just as important, for critique when partnership effectiveness remains limited.

Towards a more strategic use of the partnership instrument

The strengthened process 'from government to governance' increases the urgency of improving the effectiveness of partnerships' governance contributions and managing the potential negative consequences associated with contemporary governance. The potential contribution of partnership as instrument for sustainable development can become much greater, since the partnership instrument is still relatively new. Prerequisites for a strengthened contribution of partnerships in biodiversity governance are improved and increased metagovernance and interaction management, and a more proactive role by (inter-) governmental regimes.

Metagovernance measures can include supporting initiatives that are fulfilling unique, important governance functions, starting initiatives or convincing other actors to do so when gaps are found, or steering initiatives in a certain direction. Enhanced governance system interaction

management among several governance systems at the international level is also needed. Metagovernance and interaction management can be performed by all governance system participants.

(Inter-) governmental regimes have a special responsibility in metagovernance and interaction management, since they are expected to be able to have a general overview of all active steering mechanisms. Giving new responsibilities to governments is problematic, since the emergence of private steering mechanisms and the biodiversity governance system as it exists today is to a large extent a reaction to the lack of effective governmental action in the past. However, a more effective biodiversity governance system is not conceivable without a more proactive role for intergovernmental regimes. Increasingly, not only NGOs but also market actors are asking governments to take action, among others to create a level playing field in the market for sustainable products, and to develop stable long-term visions to enable better informed, solid and strategic decision-making for sustainable investment by companies.

Governments can improve the sustainability impacts of their own policies, and ensure that all (inter-) national policies are biodiversity-friendly and sustainable. They can also ensure fair competition among certification schemes, and take measures to ensure that the international biodiversity governance system as a whole is as effective as possible. Only when governments take up these roles in a proactive manner, an effective biodiversity governance system can be achieved.

Notes

1 Biodiversity is defined as the variability among living organisms from among others terrestrial and marine ecosystems; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (MEA 2005a).

2 International intersectoral partnerships are defined as strategic alliances between governments, market actors, and/or civil society groups from more than one country.

3 The international biodiversity governance system is defined as the total of all public, public-private, and private international initiatives working on the conservation and/or sustainable use of biodiversity.

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