The project has two research hubs: the Dutch hub considers the varied experience of five Dutch knowledge platforms and European knowledge brokering initiatives with the private sector, while the Ugandan hub focuses on Ugandan and African knowledge brokering initiatives. The project employs the same mixed-methods (a scoping literature review, in-depth interviews, surveys, and online and face-to-face consultation) in both locations to compare findings across contexts and sectors. As part of the empirical research, a questionnaire survey was conducted of international knowledge brokering professionals, as well as semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in knowledge hubs in both locations. One paper (the literature review) has been submitted and the other two papers (based on the empirical research) are currently being written. In addition, two policy briefs are also being produced. The ongoing results of the research have been communicated at national, regional and international conferences in the field of development studies and knowledge management for development.

Key Messages

To researchers

The private sector is extremely complex, ranging from small informal enterprises in the Global South to multinational enterprises. Although contributors to knowledge brokering in international development tend to be formal enterprises, this diversity has considerable implications for the analysis of their current and potential roles. These diverse private sector actors are engaged in many different knowledge brokering activities in both the Netherlands and Uganda.

To policymakers

There is considerable distrust of the private sector by the public sector, so opportunities for face-to-face contact and interaction are important to remove barriers to collaboration. Such spaces for interaction and collaboration—whether they are funding instruments or physical meetings—need to reflect the private sectors’ priorities, such as scaling up and risk reduction.
To practitioners
Development policy is very much targeted at encouraging cooperation with the private sector in knowledge brokering and other activities, but it is important to be realistic about the trade-offs involved in working with the private sector, based on the development and sustainability relevance of specific actors. In the identification of new partners, benchmarking exercises and standards can be useful in identifying private sector partners that share common perspectives and practices.

(Interim) research findings

- **Little research on private sector** | There is very little research on the role of the private sector in knowledge brokering for international development. This dearth of knowledge was also recognized by the international practitioners consulted during this research. These two observations indicate that this project is much needed and timely.

- **Pro-private sector discourse** | The private sector has been recognised as an important actor for the achievement of the SDGs. The discourse reflected in the SDGs is very much a pro-private sector discourse, however, critics argue that the private sector is responsible for many of the development and environmental challenges that the SDGs are designed to address. It is important to work with actors who have demonstrated their development relevance (e.g. social entrepreneurs) and companies positively recognised by benchmarking.

- **Trust is important** | There is considerable evidence of the importance of personal relationships and trust as a basis for knowledge brokering.

- **Divers outcomes of knowledge brokering activities** | The outcomes of knowledge brokering activities involving the private sector range from influencing policy and practice, generating funds for implementation, and building capacity, to establishing engagement platforms and learning networks.

**Demand drivenness** | Many of the knowledge brokering partnerships developed with the private sector are demand driven by the public sector.

Project highlights

- **Reaching out to a far greater audience** | Working with The Broker has made it possible to reach a far greater audience than would be possible by researchers alone. In addition, The Broker’s expertise has made it possible to communicate key messages in a more interesting, understandable and dynamic way for practitioners and policymakers. We have also been able to clearly anchor the research on knowledge brokering within ongoing debates around international development. See, for example, the blogs on The Broker website, which have been co-created with colleagues from The Broker.

- **Interest from stakeholders** | There has been considerable interest in the project from key external actors. For example, we were invited to present the project’s interim results at the UN Conference on Public-Private Partnerships in Geneva in July 2018 and as keynote speakers at the UN in New York in November 2018 and European Commission’s European Knowledge Week in September 2019.

**Successful data collection** | The data collection phase went well. The online survey was filled in by more than 100 people (a good result given that the questions were detailed and complex) and the interviews with the knowledge platforms in the Netherlands and Uganda were interesting and are generating many new insights.

**Project website:** unusualsuspect.org

Consortium partners

**Formal partners:**
- Dr Barbara Regeer | VU University Amsterdam
- Dr Suzanne Kiwanuka | Makareere University
- Dr Sarah Cummings | Athene Institute, VU University Amsterdam (contact person: sarahcummingswork@gmail.com)
- The Broker

**Informal partners:**
- Dutch knowledge platforms
- Knowledge Management for Development community