



Getting our act together

Lessons on collaboration from
the natureandpoverty* programme

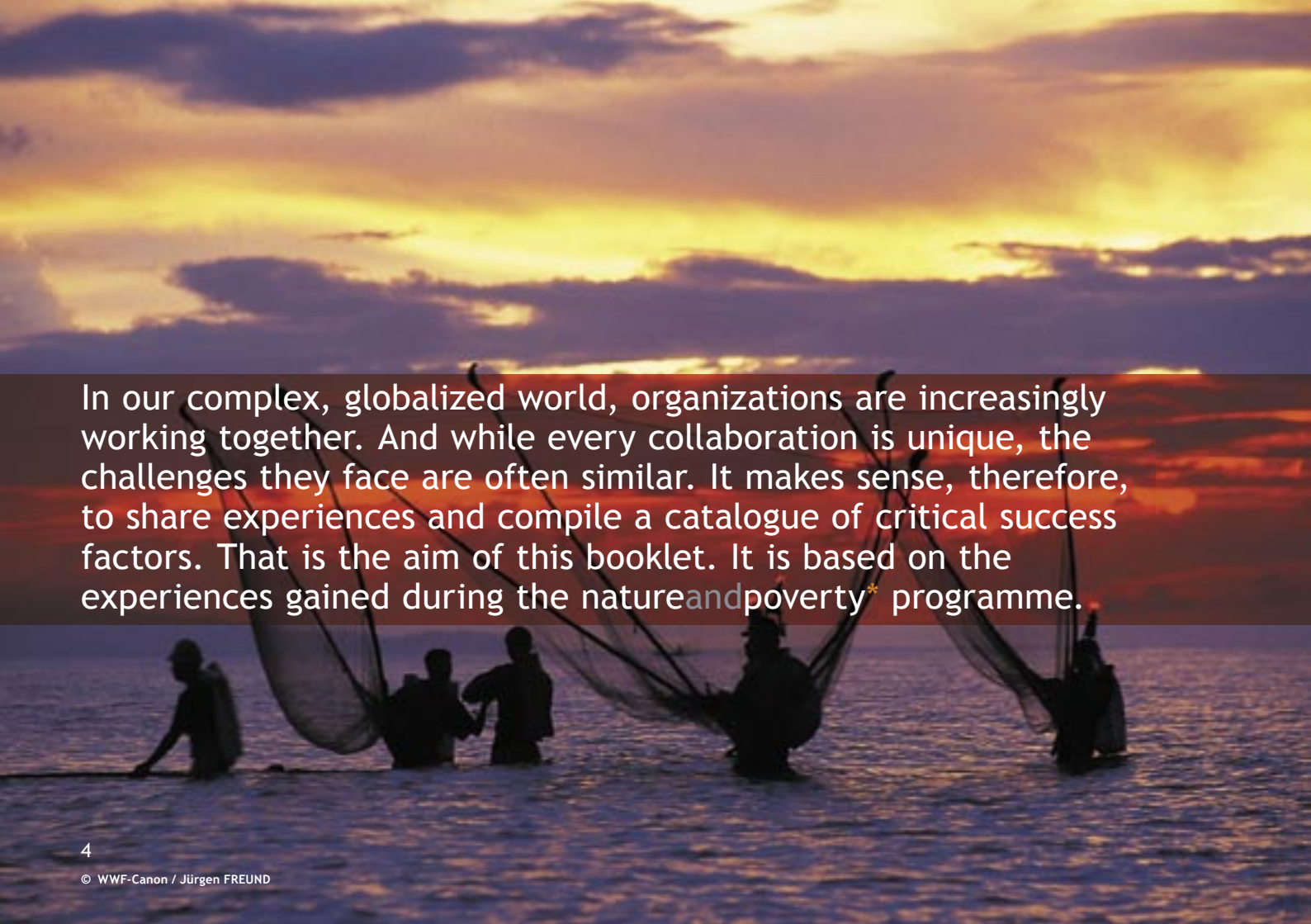
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natureandpoverty*



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A photograph of several fishermen silhouetted against a vibrant sunset sky. They are wading in the water, pulling a large, dark fishing net. The sky is filled with clouds, illuminated by the low sun, creating a warm orange and yellow glow. The water is dark and reflects the light from the sky.

In our complex, globalized world, organizations are increasingly working together. And while every collaboration is unique, the challenges they face are often similar. It makes sense, therefore, to share experiences and compile a catalogue of critical success factors. That is the aim of this booklet. It is based on the experiences gained during the natureandpoverty* programme.

01 The natureandpoverty* programme

The natureandpoverty* programme was a collaborative venture by the World Wide Fund for Nature Netherlands (WWF NL), Friends of the Earth Netherlands (FOE NL), the IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands (IUCN NL) and their international affiliates. Its main aim was to alleviate poverty through a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. The partners pursued a combination of three interrelated intervention strategies:

- Direct poverty reduction through improved ecosystem management
- Capacity building of Southern stakeholders and partner organizations
- Influencing policies and practices to improve ecosystem management and to enhance the positive effects on poverty

Natureandpoverty* was implemented in fifteen countries spanning four continents and addressed seven themes across five sub-programmes. It was launched in 2003 with a budget of € 10 million from the Dutch development cooperation department and formally ended on 1 January 2007.



The natureandpoverty* experience is especially relevant to other NGOs funded by the Dutch department for development cooperation, as well as government officials and politicians wanting to know how new policies can stimulate new NGO practices. Lessons can also be learned by businesses and government institutions partnering NGOs.

Natureandpoverty* *was implemented in fifteen countries spanning four continents and addressed seven themes across five sub-programmes.*

We operate in five regions:



02 Challenges

Environmental NGOs have traditionally focused on nature conservation and environmental issues and tend to address poverty issues more or less implicitly. In the 21st century we will have to make the link between nature conservation and poverty alleviation much more explicit to create openings for new solutions. Natureandpoverty* set out to explore and demonstrate how joint interventions for ecosystem management can make a positive impact on poverty reduction.

Development cooperation is changing. New policy and funding priorities¹ aim to embed development cooperation within a global perspective, making it part of the larger playing field of international cooperation. Poverty alleviation (and ecosystem management) in the South is being broadened to include intervention strategies for policy coherence, policy and market influencing and policy dialogue at global, national and regional levels. This new playing field moves away from traditional donor-recipient relationships and reformulates the responsibilities and roles of Northern and Southern partners. As natureandpoverty* was funded by the Dutch department for development cooperation, the programme also had to explore these new realities and priorities.

¹ Notably those set out in the policy paper *Aan Elkaar Verplicht* (2003) by the Dutch development cooperation department and in the MFS Policy and Funding Framework.



The ambition driving natureandpoverty* was to increase the impact of environmental organizations through joint working and synergy. Although in the Netherlands WWF NL, IUCN NL and FOE NL have a history of working together, or at least coordinating their activities, such horizontal integration is less usual in the South. Besides, whereas each of the Dutch organizations was integrated vertically within its own international network, collaboration between the three networks was limited, although some working relationships existed.² The goal was to improve horizontal as well as vertical integration between organizations and networks. It was expected that their complementary strengths would make them work more effectively together than on their own.

² Some FOE groups, for instance, received funding from the IUCN NL Small Grants Programme and were part of IUCN's network. Collaboration between the IUCN and WWF networks has been strong since the beginning.

What is synergy?

Synergy is when two or more bodies work together to produce an effect that is greater than the sum of its parts. For example, two people, A and B, are too short to reach an apple on a tree. If person A sits on the shoulders of person B, they are tall enough to reach the apple. In this case, the synergy is one apple.



A group of approximately ten women are standing in a shallow river, surrounded by lush green trees. They are wearing colorful headwraps and traditional patterned skirts. Each woman is holding a large, circular, woven fish trap. They appear to be engaged in a collaborative activity, possibly sorting or preparing the catch. The scene is set in a natural, rural environment.

**Collaboration is not an end in itself
but a means to an end.**

03 Dimensions of collaboration

We distinguish four dimensions to the dynamics of inter-organizational collaboration:

- **Leadership** - if organizations are complex systems, collaboration between organizations is even more complex, and puts high demands on leadership.
- **Working atmosphere** - working together requires an enabling environment, a collaborative spirit based on trust, and positive relationships between people and organizations.
- **Operational and administrative arrangements** - these are needed to systematically plan, implement, facilitate and monitor collaboration, and for learning.
- **Actual results** - collaboration is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The resulting synergies can generate new, better and quicker outcomes.

Within each dimension we pose two questions: What is the relevance of this dimension for the inter-organizational collaboration? And what lessons can be drawn from nature and poverty* for organizations that want to collaborate?

04 Leadership

Collaboration between organizations increasingly takes place in network structures. Instead of the vertical pyramid model of the past, networks are characterized by horizontal relationships. Such collaboration tends to demand a different style of executive leadership, but also depends on staff being receptive and taking leadership responsibilities. Executive leaders need local line leaders, operating where sustainable ecosystem management and poverty alleviation are integrated 'in the field', and internal network leaders who take responsibility for operations, diffuse new approaches and connect the different parts of the network.³ Seeking to integrate three networks, nature and poverty* had the characteristics of a network structure and leadership responsibilities were delegated criss-cross throughout the programme.

³ Peter Senge (1999), *The Dance of Change - the challenges of sustaining momentum in learning organizations*.



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Building blocks of the natureandpoverty* organizational structure

- **Board** Responsible for the overall vision, strategy and direction, organization, progress management, external representation and conflict management. The members of the board were the three directors of the Northern organizations. The board provided the executive leadership.
- **External 'third party' Programme Management Unit (PMU)⁴** Responsible for overall project coordination and support: operational and administrative arrangements related to planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting, as well as formal communication and learning. The PMU also provided a variety of services to strengthen capacities and skills and facilitate informal communication and cooperation within natureandpoverty*. The PMU reported to the Board and represented the staff to the Board.
- **Staff** 'Liaison officers' responsible for the day-to-day management and results in the field, facilitation and coordination of the sub-programmes, and representation of natureandpoverty* in their own organizations. The three liaison officers were employees of the Dutch organizations and operated as internal network leaders. Liaison staff reported to the PMU and were also important channels of communication to their own directors.
- **Sub-programmes** Wetlands Pantanal (Latin America); marine resources West Africa; forests Congo Basin Africa; forests South East Asia and coasts South East Asia. Southern partners involved in the sub-programmes reported to the liaison staff.

⁴ The PMU was staffed by the not-for-profit consulting firm AIDEnvironment, Amsterdam.

Leadership is responsible for:

- **Vision and common purpose:** what is the motivation to collaborate, what do we want to achieve, what is our declared aim?
- **Strategy:** starting from where we are today, what path do we take to reach our destination?
- **Objectives:** beacons marking the route toward the vision.
- **Organizational design:** what roles, responsibilities and resources are expected of each partner? Design also includes rules for decision making and communication. (See section 6: 'Operational elements' on page 24)
- **Core values:** what are the values behind the vision? Core values explain why an organization wants to realize its vision, and how it wants to behave on the way. (See section 5: 'Working atmosphere' on page 19)

Lessons learned from the natureandpoverty* programme

Vision

It is the role of leadership to define a shared vision created by the collaborating organizations. Building a collective vision is especially important in international collaboration because it joins different organizational and national cultures. Working together is self-evident in some cultures, but not in others.

From the outset, the three founding natureandpoverty* organizations were convinced that combining nature conservation and poverty alleviation was so complex they needed a shared vehicle. To achieve its full potential, the collaboration would need a long-term vision based on a strong internal belief in the value of working together. Having such a long-term reference point also allows for accommodation to short-term changes in external circumstances.

A good vision provides direction and is inspirational and coherent; it binds actors together and fosters commitment among individuals and organizations. Natureandpoverty* has taught us that the vision should complement and not compete with the visions of the collaborating organizations. A shared understanding of the contribution of ecosystem management to poverty alleviation is crucial in developing a common language. If this is not created during the initiating stage of collaboration, confusion and irritation may arise at the implementation stage.

The process of vision building on nature and poverty benefits enormously from the input of Southern organizations, because for most of them these issues are two sides of the same coin. Initially, however, some Southern organizations

Collaboration cannot be based on competition between organizations.

saw natureandpoverty* as 'just another funding regime' instead of a new approach linking poverty alleviation to ecosystem management. It was not helpful that some of the sub-programmes were in effect a continuation of existing projects and programmes. The West African sub-programme, for instance, was an extension to an existing WWF programme. Taking existing projects and moulding them to fit a new context carries the risk of creating the impression of 'business as usual'. The best results in added value and learning were achieved where the partners created a new programme.

The lesson learned is that taking sufficient time at the initial stages to cultivate shared ownership of the project, with a clear understanding of Southern partner viewpoints and demands, speeds up and improves the implementation process.

Strategy

Collaboration cannot be based on competition between organizations. This does not mean that complete consensus has to be reached on all issues. A balance must be found between establishing enough common ground and ensuring enough diversity for complementary working. A specific challenge faced by natureandpoverty* was the platform structure of IUCN NL as a National Committee of IUCN. It meant that indirectly 33 Dutch IUCN member organizations also had to agree with the natureandpoverty* mission.

Natureandpoverty* has learned that collaboration works better if organizations agree fully on their roles, responsibilities and mutual interests. The founding organizations, although complementary in a number of respects, also share a number of core competencies. All three are



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environmental NGOs. As it is not the similarities but the differences between them that create scope for added value, each organization's role, interests and responsibilities must be precisely defined and embedded in the vision and strategy. For instance, an organization's strength in lobbying will only add value if the vision emphasizes lobbying and this is translated into a strategy for lobbying. Natureandpoverty* did this, but much of it happened without forethought, and only became apparent during implementation. The lesson learned is that what each partner contributes, and how, should be specified at the start of the collaboration. This not only creates commitment to the vision and strategy, but also between the collaborating organizations. They can see each other as equal partners and value each other's roles and responsibilities.

The natureandpoverty* strategy was to build a bridge between ecosystem management and poverty alleviation. In the design stage, the three founding organizations believed they provided a strong complementary mix of networks, activities and skills, and in many cases this has indeed proved to be the case. During the course of the programme, though, it was felt that including development organizations or private parties in a later stage could generate additional benefits. The follow-up to natureandpoverty* designed by the three partners does indeed incorporate development organizations. They will participate in a Knowledge and Learning Network on Nature and Poverty (NP.Net) which will facilitate discussions, learning and information exchange on poverty alleviation and ecosystem management.

A group of African women and children are gathered in a community setting. In the foreground, a woman in a white shirt is holding a baby wrapped in a pink cloth. Other women, some wearing headwraps and patterned dresses, are looking on. A young child in a white shirt is also visible. The background shows a wooden structure and lush green foliage.

**The more people within an organization
committed to the collaboration,
the better the climate for cooperation.**

05 Working atmosphere



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A good working atmosphere is created by engagement and commitment, trust, responsibility, confidence and the values shared by individuals and collaborating organizations. This is a delicate issue because one cannot assume these qualities will always be present, neither should they be demanded too forcefully.

**Creating a good working atmosphere is a challenge,
but the potential benefits are substantial:**

- A high degree of shared personal and institutional engagement and commitment encourages risk sharing, pooling resources and talents, and commitment to a common purpose.
- A high level of trust between partners will lead to productive informal relations between people and organizations, facilitating better collective action and planning.
- Values like openness, mutual respect and freely giving feedback provide a strong basis for effective teamwork.

Lessons learned from the natureandpoverty* programme

The clarity of a shared and long-term vision and of each organization's role and unique value binds partners together and cements commitment and trust. Without a solid long-term vision (on the collaboration itself), issues with a 'political' dimension or which relate to the continuation of the collaboration can cause disagreement. The natureandpoverty* partnership was only able to avoid such difficulties by agreeing on concrete and specific tasks, with a focus on visible results.

The more people within an organization committed to the collaboration, the better the climate for cooperation. Natureandpoverty* made good progress by promoting open communication and feedback between all vertical and horizontal layers in the partnership, as well as between key staff and board members.

In the North, the good working climate within natureand-poverty* led to increased mutual respect and more regular policy dialogue and coordination between the three Dutch partners. An important gain has been dispelling stereotypes. The leadership learned that they must be alert to possible tensions between the collaborative initiative and the institutional interests of partner organizations.

These tensions can be dealt with by:

- giving feedback on experiences and lessons learned on collaboration to the partner organizations;
- convincing human resources managers of the partner organizations that working in the collaboration initiative is a useful professional development opportunity for staff;
- highlighting opportunities for synergy from the collaboration as such;
- promoting collaboration through the partner organizations' internal communication channels and inviting feedback;
- setting up encounters between key players who do not normally meet, but may have much to share with each other;
- allowing time to build trust and identify synergies.

In the South, commitment is influenced by the fact that organizations have other donors as well. Despite this, natureandpoverty* was particularly successful in bridging differences and building trust. The best way to promote a positive working atmosphere lies neither in assuming it will automatically arise nor in pushing too hard for it, but by applying certain strategies and tools that lie between these two extremes. These natureandpoverty* strategies and tools focused on the idea of creating harmony out of diversity. They taught the partners to value and respect each other and to understand the added value of collaboration. Their constant application helped to structure field activities in the sub-programmes and to embed learning in real-world situations.

The Synergy and Exchange Meetings (see section 7: 'Actual results of collaboration', page 37) were particularly instrumental in creating common ground, inspiring within the participating Northern and Southern organizations the will to collaborate and cultivating recognition that it would strengthen the impact of all their endeavours.

The benefits of this 'investment' can be seen in each sub-programme. During the four years of natureandpoverty* implementation, the partners in the various sub-programmes moved through the following stages:

- **Getting to know each other** Partners exchange and evaluate information, experiences and agendas, and build trust and a shared understanding.
- **Testing the water** Partners start to coordinate their respective activities, strategies and agendas.
- **Cooperating** Partners develop and implement a common agenda, with joint planning. At this stage, collective action becomes more dominant; each partner's individual contribution belongs to the whole and the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

The degree of cooperation achieved by natureandpoverty* is considerable, but is still relatively fragile. It will need continued attention and support in natureandpoverty* follow-up activities.



Differences in the working climate between sub-programmes:

- Every natureandpoverty* sub-programme had its own dynamics. In the Pantanal it took time and effort to overcome political and ideological differences between the partners. This initially restricted collaboration to technical issues. Partners in the Asian sub-programme arrived at a common agenda faster, perhaps because they had identified a 'common enemy' (e.g. the palm oil producers), which highlighted the value of collective action for quicker results and greater impact.
- Apart from cultural differences, there are also differences in the professionalism, sense of ownership and relations between individuals, which either slow down or speed up the process of working together. Sometimes personal relationships made a difference in bridging the gap between organizations, as with WALHI and WWF in Indonesia where key staff happened to be former school friends.

06 Operational elements for collaboration

Collaboration needs an administrative and organizational infrastructure to make the vision reality. Ideally, this will support the achievement of short-term objectives and keep the programme moving towards the long-term vision. These arrangements are a necessary but not a sufficient condition to realize the vision, other conditions being leadership, a good working atmosphere and results that feed further collaboration.

Decisions on the organizational structure should not be made before exploring the options and implications carefully. Although the optimal management structure will depend on the objectives and strategy of collaboration, in many cases the benefits of outsourcing coordination to an independent 'third party' will outweigh the costs.⁵

⁵ Strong arguments based on partnership experiences are given in: Ross Tennyson (2005), *The Brokering Guidebook - Navigating effective sustainable development partnerships*. International Business Leaders Forum.

The management of the natureandpoverty* programme was outsourced to a third party, the Programme Management Unit (PMU), which was responsible for a wide variety of operational and administrative arrangements:

- Planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting
- Contractual relationships and finance
- Communication, learning and capacity building, including the provision of tools and services to strengthen these
- Resolving specific issues and day-to-day challenges
- Training and building the capacity of the partner organizations to gradually take over responsibilities for operational and administrative arrangements



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Lessons learned from the natureandpoverty* programme

Outsourcing programme coordination and support to an external third party (PMU) had the following advantages:

- It contributed to equality among the three collaborating (Northern) NGOs, because none of them coordinated the others.
- Having a 'one-stop shop' facilitated communication, for example with the Dutch development cooperation department (the donor) and other external parties, such as members of parliament and journalists.
- The third party provided a continuous quality check and drive because they were able to focus freely on the completeness, relevance and communication value of field results.
- The third party played a valuable 'neutral' role in putting issues onto the agenda, mediating between the collaborating parties based on facts, and making suggestions for 'non-political' solutions.
- The three Northern partners lacked sufficient professional expertise to manage a relatively large donor-funded collaborative programme such as natureandpoverty*.

On the other hand, outsourcing management to a third party could weaken the commitment of the collaborating organizations, tempting them to take a back seat. Moreover, developing the necessary 'common working language' between all parties involved required patience and shared commitment.



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Overall management

The 'third party' represented the interests of the field programmes and the responsible staff to the board, and vice versa. The project coordinator had the authority to manage the day-to-day activities of the staff members, but often felt the need to pass on important questions to the board. This two-way representative role was delicate, and it took some time for all parties to develop a feeling for which management decisions were taken where in the programme organization. The lesson to be learned is that responsibilities and mandates to make arrangements at all levels need to be agreed at the start of the collaboration and that everyone is kept fully informed.

Management of sub-programmes

Northern liaison officers were given responsibility for the field results of the sub-programmes and had to mobilize the Southern partners to act. There were no Southern lead partners responsible for coordination within the region or for communication with Northern partners. This meant, for example, that synthesis reports on sub-programmes were written by the Northern liaison officers, drawing on the separate inputs from each individual Southern partner, rather than being the product of a joint effort by all the Southern partners in each sub-programme.

The lesson learned is that collaboration will be more effective if each sub-programme is coordinated by a Southern liaison officer, or if Northern liaison officers are based in the Southern regions. In the natureandpoverty* follow up, liaison officers will indeed be located in the South. Delegating management and coordination responsibilities to Southern partners may have additional advantages, especially by helping to resolve 'complaints' about the perceived donor-driven character of natureandpoverty*.

This delegation of responsibilities would:

- be a reflection at management level of intentions to be equal partners and to follow a demand-driven approach;
- create better opportunities to bridge the gaps between the dynamics of collaboration in the field and fulfilling managerial and donor demands (finding a balance between being 'streetwise' and being 'bureaucracy proof');
- increase ownership amongst Southern partners;
- enable better synchronization of the agendas, time-tables and expectations of Northern and Southern partners.

Natureandpoverty* has learned that the dynamics, expectations, intensity and speed of collaboration with and between Southern partners may differ from the dynamic found between Northern partners. These differences (in expectations) can and must be managed by allowing enough time for ownership to grow.



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Differences in expectations can and must be managed by allowing enough time for ownership to grow.

07 Actual results of collaboration

The results of collaboration depend on leadership, a good working climate and clear organizational and administrative arrangements. If these three conditions are met, the results will follow. In turn, these results raise enthusiasm and strengthen commitment to the long-term vision. Quick gains that contribute towards the long-term vision are crucial in maintaining the momentum needed to achieve the wider aims. In a collaborative project, results are the touchstone of added value and synergy.

Failures must be honestly faced and their learning value recognized.

It is important to establish whether failures are due to deficiencies in vision and strategy, skills, resources or action plans, or due to changing external circumstances.



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Lessons learned from the natureandpoverty* programme

The time factor

Natureandpoverty* began with a one-year formulation period⁶ followed by a three-year implementation period, which created pressure to deliver visible results quickly. Natureandpoverty* found a balance between visible short-term results and longer-term investments in learning, capacity building and policy issues. This is an important achievement because organizational learning is a precondition for strategic innovation and is therefore a valuable investment in the future.

The lesson learned, however, is that strategic innovation and adding value through collaboration needs a longer time horizon and would benefit from longer-term funding regimes of 5 to 15 years. While natureandpoverty* fits remarkably well within the new donor policy priorities – collaboration between NGOs as equal network partners, and promoting a demand-driven agenda⁷ – the question is whether donor conditions actually favour such a shift and allow enough time for these conditions to be met.

⁶ During this first year, only FOE NL started implementation activities.

⁷ See the policy paper *Aan Elkaar Verplicht* (2003) by the Dutch ministry for development cooperation and the MFS Policy and Funding Framework.



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With more time, a number of investments and experiments would have come to full fruition and provided more evidence of the value of collaboration. Three areas where time has been a limiting factor:

- Natureandpoverty* introduced a number of learning instruments and mechanisms, including the SynEx meetings (see page 37). These have to be further developed, tested and transferred before partners can be expected to integrate them into their daily work. The natureandpoverty* follow-up, particularly NP.net, will continue to apply these tools.
- Most natureandpoverty* learning took place in the sub-programmes. Switching from learning within sub-programmes to aggregate learning between sub-programmes – putting the pieces together – would be a logical next step in improving cohesion and internal and external results, and increasing impact.
- Natureandpoverty* has worked on five commodity chains: palm oil, timber, shrimps, soy and fisheries. This offers a unique opportunity for comparison, but again it assumes learning between sub-programmes. Once the reasons for the different results within each commodity chain are understood, a list of critical success factors for NGO interventions, campaigning and lobbying could be drawn up.

General overview of results

Natureandpoverty* has achieved a range of results. The focus here is on the lessons to be drawn from the results of collaboration that could not be achieved by organizations acting individually.

1. Horizontal integration and synergy:

how partners increasingly fine tune their activities, exchange experiences and learn from each other.

- Horizontal integration between Southern partners has been a major result. Former competitors became partners. As one FOE partner in Cameroon expressed the new attitude, 'First we considered the local WWF as a target; now they have become our partner.'
- Horizontal integration has improved in the North as well. In one example, WWF NL, IUCN NL and others have launched a new post tsunami programme (later joined by the FOE network). The lessons learned in natureandpoverty* were helpful in establishing a management structure for this programme.



'First we considered the local WWF as a target; now they have become our partner.'

2. Vertical integration and synergy:

linking local experiences and activities with regional and international issues such as government policies, commodity chains and investments.

- Natureandpoverty* has been successful in introducing Southern realities into the Northern perspective. It has shown that options for improving sustainable livelihoods in the South can influence policies in Northern countries. For example, natureandpoverty* took a group of Dutch parliamentarians on a field trip to Kalimantan. The Dutch development cooperation department also took part in this trip and was involved in the preparation and follow-up.
- Natureandpoverty* has also been successful in putting Northern realities in a Southern perspective, for example by informing the government of Senegal about European fishery policies and how best to respond to them.

3. External integration:

the external influence of natureandpoverty* organizations on policies and (commodity) markets.

- At regular intervals, natureandpoverty* has reported on progress and results to officials and diplomats within the Dutch development cooperation department.
- Natureandpoverty* organized a seminar on nature and poverty with 60 participating NGOs from around the world.
- Natureandpoverty* organizations in the North have been key actors in delivering input to larger NGO networks, such as the Dutch soy coalition and European campaigns on the (illegal) trade in tropical timber.
- Natureandpoverty* has also run consumer and awareness campaigns on shrimps and palm oil, and participated in inter-sectoral partnerships on these commodities.



- Natureandpoverty* has had an impact on policies affecting commodity chains by linking local experiences and evidence of unsustainable practices in the South with lobbying and awareness campaigns in the North. As one natureandpoverty* document says: '... the Southern partners indicate that lobbying and campaigning in relation to resource management policies are crucial to achieve sustainable livelihoods.'⁸
- Southern natureandpoverty* organizations have been able to influence government policies and have obtained recognition by other NGOs, local populations, businesses and government officials. For instance, natureandpoverty* organizations have played an important role in the recognition and endorsement of access and user rights for the Bagyeli indigenous people in the management plan for the Campo Ma'an National Park, Cameroon.
- Natureandpoverty* has also influenced commodity chains and markets (see page 36) through direct involvement in the formulation and adoption of principles and criteria for sustainable management at the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

⁸ Natureandpoverty* (2006), *Progress and Financial Report 2005*.



The palm oil case

- Natureandpoverty* organizations working on palm oil were able to improve their effectiveness by integrating field activities with global campaigning and lobbying. They made optimum use of each other's strengths. By working in every link of the chain, using a variety of instruments, tools and strategies, they guaranteed more regular and intensive information exchange up and down the chain. Examples range from training and awareness building in local communities in Sarawak, PNG and Kalimantan to consumer campaigns in the Netherlands and a visit by Dutch parliamentarians to Indonesia. Building trust and providing training and other learning activities all helped to create real added value.
- The natureandpoverty* organizations working on palm oil were also successful with external and inter-sectoral integration. Their collaborative efforts in providing strategic support, guidance and advice were crucial in the process of finding acceptable principles and criteria in the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. Natureandpoverty* partners were also involved in the public-private partnership on palm oil and several policy influencing activities in the South and the North. Working together raised their negotiation capacity.
- The success of the palm oil case can be attributed to considerable horizontal, vertical and external integration. Two key assets were a well-selected economic case and momentum: Malaysia and Indonesia have an 84% market share of the world palm oil market; the Netherlands is the most important European importer of palm oil.


Organizational learning

Organizational learning combines 'formal' shifts in processes, strategies and practices with 'inner' shifts in beliefs, values and assumptions. Efforts at change fail if they do not address the latter. The outcomes are often less tangible than direct results, but equally important and meaningful. Often considered a soft issue, organizational learning has been one of the strengths of natureandpoverty*, to be cherished as a hard result.

To promote organizational learning and catalyse collaboration, natureandpoverty* introduced the Synergy and Exchange meetings (SynEx), a Performance Management and Learning System (PMLS) and an internet-based learning platform. Organizations in North and South were especially enthusiastic about the SynEx meetings. They provided a platform for Northern and Southern organizations to meet and discuss all issues related to the sub-programmes, and to elaborate issues like best practices, quality management and capacity building. SynEx meetings were the 'soul' and lifeblood of natureandpoverty*.

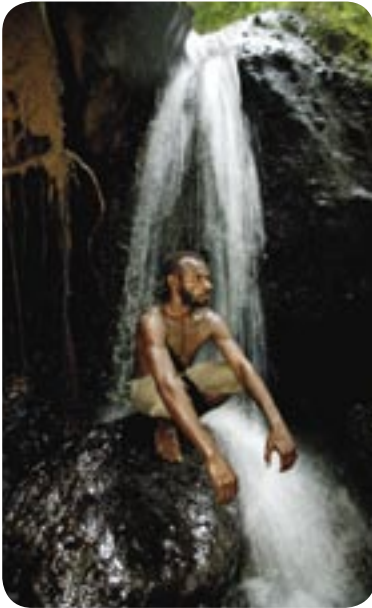
They became the key venue for learning to appreciate the different and complementary roles played by each natureandpoverty* partner, and for building empowerment and mutual trust. The PMLS and the learning platform require further development and embedding before they can demonstrate their full potential.

The issues at the heart of the learning process were the integration of nature conservation and poverty alleviation, and discovering synergy between collaborating organizations. One of the results is that Northern natureandpoverty* organizations will continue and expand their work on nature and poverty, funded by the Dutch ministry for development cooperation and with a larger budget for the 2007 – 2010 period. Before natureandpoverty*, integration of nature and poverty was often implicit; now such an approach has been made an explicit aim. Natureandpoverty* has contributed to this broadening of thematic focus.

A photograph of a young girl in a forest setting. She is smiling broadly, showing her teeth, and holding a long, thin stick or branch with both hands. She is wearing a red garment around her waist. In the background, another child is visible, looking towards the camera. The scene is set in a lush, green forest with trees and foliage. A semi-transparent red banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text.

**Above all, collaboration and learning
need time to grow.**

08 Collaboration works!



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Organizations in North and South collaborating in the natureandpoverty* programme now have a much better idea of how to make collaboration work, how to really add value. Both have learned that diversity of networks and organizations can be a true strength. Northern and Southern organizations also learned about the benefits of combining local and global interventions, and about the benefits of complementary policy and field activities. In the process it became clear that collaboration and learning benefit from a systematic approach and professional support.

Above all, collaboration and learning need time to grow. Despite just three years of implementation, natureandpoverty* has been successful in realizing results in the field, and in strengthening cooperation between participating organizations.

notes



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