



Explorations 07

**Brokering and facilitating
NL funded PPPs:**

**Understanding
the role of Dutch
embassies and
the challenges
they face**

Acknowledgements

2 For this exploration brief, 28 diplomats, policy advisors, program managers, and experts have been interviewed. I would like to express my gratitude to all interviewees for their time and effort, as well as for their valuable insights and feedback. I would also like to thank PPPLab - in particular Marieke de Wal, Astrid van Agthoven and Jan Ubels - for their feedback and support. Moreover, a special thank you goes to Marije Balt for her excellent contributions, support, and engagement.

Stella Pfisterer, October 2018

Colophon

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Executive summary

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It is widely assumed that Dutch embassies can play a valuable role in contributing to effective public-private partnerships (PPPs). This assumption is based on the rationale that embassies know the local political, economic, social, and societal contexts, and can easily link up with the actors on the ground; they can help to embed projects in the local context and to increase the chance of achieving transformation beyond the project by linking the partnership project to local networks and other programmes and projects of the embassy and other donors. In order to explore Dutch embassies' experiences in partnerships with private sector involvement, insights were gathered from eleven Dutch embassies and policymakers and implementers in The Hague. This allowed us to answer the following questions:

What is the role of Dutch embassies in partnerships?

The findings highlight that most embassies play several roles that are not mutually exclusive. Activities linked to brokering and facilitating are the most commonly mentioned. Such activities can take place within the process of a partnership or in the environment where the partnership operates. Activities include matching actors, providing ideas and local expertise for project proposals, checking whether project ideas fit the local context, convening meetings, providing access to the government of the (partner) country, joining steering committees, taking part in field visits, convening or mediating issues and problems between partners, and aligning projects to local needs and embassy strategy.

What affects their role and the intensity of their engagement?

Despite the fact that embassies report similar roles and contributions to partnerships, the intensity of embassy engagement varies widely. Embassies seem to be more engaged when programmes are set up and managed by themselves. A good fit of the partnership to the embassy's vision and strategy is a key requirement. But perhaps unexpectedly, embassies seem to have more time and opportunities for facilitating partnerships when they do not have to manage their own funds and projects, but when the projects are administrated and managed centrally from The Hague. Embassies seem not to carry out different activities when they work in water or food security PPPs, except that water PPPs have more involvement from the partner government. Embassies are also most actively involved in the building phase of partnerships.

What key tensions do embassies face when facilitating partnerships?

Working in partnerships with the private sector under the 'from aid to trade agenda' provokes a number of tensions for embassies. The exploration discusses four of these tensions and how the embassies experience and deal with them:

- the issue of working directly with the private sector or via an NGO as a development intermediary;
- the issue of the double - perhaps even contradictory - role of being a funder while also aiming to influence the partnership;
- the issue of ensuring local embeddedness of the partnership's projects with limited capacity on the embassy side;
- and the tension associated with flexibility while working within the framework of public accountability.

5 **Ultimately we ask, what are the lessons for partnering?**

The insights we gain into how embassies currently work and experience partnerships with private sector involvement allows us to reflect on lessons for partnering with embassy involvement.

First, PPPs and embassies need to have an open dialogue about why the embassy should become involved in the first place. To what extent do the visions of the PPP and the embassy align?

Second, it should be clear what support for the PPP is required and feasible from the embassy. How can embassies become the right piece in the puzzle? Flexibility and realism in terms of roles is key.

Third, when is embassy involvement in a PPP most helpful and feasible? PPPs and embassies need to understand that the intensity of relationships changes over the course of partnering, but that there is a constant need to ensuring the local embeddedness of PPPs.

Fourth and finally, creative partnering approaches are required for complex problems. What responsibilities and flexibilities of different partners and embassies can be integrated into the PPP approach?

1. Introduction

6 Since the early 2000s, the Dutch government has facilitated partnerships with businesses, non-profit organizations, and knowledge institutions in development cooperation. Such public-private partnerships (PPPs) aim to accelerate inclusive development while at the same time creating sustainable business solutions. Embassies are involved in such partnerships - at least to a certain extent. But what is their role in Dutch partnerships? What affects the intensity of their engagement? What key tensions do they face when facilitating such partnerships? Answering these questions will help to create a better understanding of embassy engagement in partnerships.

1.1 PPPs in Dutch development cooperation¹

Public-private partnerships² that move beyond infrastructure development but make use of cross-sector collaboration as a mechanism occur in a broad range of sectors in Dutch development cooperation, such as water, and agriculture. Collaborations that combine the strengths of actors from business, the public sector, civil society, and knowledge institutes gained prominence in Dutch development cooperation after the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The Dutch government has since then gained experience in facilitating PPPs, and has further developed its portfolio and partnering strategy.

Prominent examples of recent PPP experiences include two instruments aimed at stimulating PPPs for development. In 2012, the *Facility for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV)* was set up aiming to establish PPPs in the field of food security and private sector development in developing and emerging countries. Two FDOV calls have been issued so far, the first in 2012 and the second in 2014.³ The second PPP instrument set up then was the *PPP Fund for Sustainable Water (FDW)*. The main objective of FDW is to contribute to sustainable inclusive economic growth by using PPPs to improve water security and water safety in developing countries. Until 2017, 33 projects in

22 countries had been implemented under FDW, with a total programme budget of €42.53 million.⁴ The FDW and FDOV have elicited great interest and have given rise to several promising collaborative projects. Since partnerships are seen as both a resource and a means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the recent policy of Minister Sigrid Kaag reemphasizes the importance of PPPs in implementing Dutch development policy.⁵ Based on experience with former PPP facilities, the *SDG-Partnership Facility* was launched in the summer of 2018 to focus on food security (SDG 2) and entrepreneurship (SDG 8) and to cater to Dutch policy objectives on SDGs and the aid, trade, and investment agenda (see Box 1).

Box 1: The Sustainable Development Goals Partnership Facility (SDGP)

Launched in summer 2018, the SDG Partnership Facility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributes to the implementation of the agenda for aid, trade, and investment. The SDGP is also a vehicle for Dutch efforts to achieve several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as ending hunger (SDG 2), providing decent jobs and economic growth (SDG 8), and the partnerships for goals (SDG 17). Moreover, it focuses on three major cross-cutting themes: gender, circular economy, and climate. The SDGP aims to contribute to achieving several of the SDGs through the efforts of PPPs. The SDGP works with consortia consisting of at least one Dutch partner, one partner from the target country, one company, one NGO or knowledge institution, and one public partner. Together, these partners develop a collaborative innovative initiative that makes a substantial contribution to systemic change. Such PPPs, under the SDGs, should thus help create an 'enabling environment', with results that can be scaled up and achieve sectorwide impact. A competitive selection process by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) assesses whether the project ideas will be awarded a grant under the SDGP.

Source: Policy framework for the SDG Partnership Facility <https://english.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2018/08/Policy%20Framework%20SDGP.pdf>

¹ For extended insight into the concept of public-private partnerships, see to the PPPLab publication: *Public-Private Partnerships: A Brief Introduction. Insight Series 01, PPPLab*. ² The terms PPP and partnership are used interchangeably throughout the text. ³ KIT (2016). ⁴ https://www.rvo.nl/subsidies-regelingen/fonds-duurzaam-water-fdw?utm_campaign=918983948&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_content=265696981804&utm_term=%2Bduurzaam%20%2Bwater&adgroupid=57325084711&gclid=EAlalQobChMIrqTp4KuO3gIVTKqaCh18yglFEAYASAAEgLU_D_BwE ⁵ See the policy of the Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation and International Trade, published in 2018: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/beleidsnota-s/2018/05/18/pdf-beleidsnota-investeren-in-perspect>

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In general, the aim of PPPs in Dutch development policy is to encourage economic development through market-oriented investment. The assumption is that this ultimately contributes to poverty reduction in developing countries. Dutch PPPs are expected to permit knowledge, expertise, and financing to be pooled. The private sector's efficient and market-oriented approach is coupled with civil society organizations' knowledge of local circumstances. The research institutions contribute expertise and the government brings the parties together and cofinances the partnership. This model has become known as the "Dutch diamond" (see Figure 1).⁶

In Dutch development cooperation, a PPP is broadly defined as "a form of cooperation between government and business (*in many cases also involving NGOs, trade unions, and/or knowledge institutes*) in which they agree to work together to reach a common goal or carry out a specific task, jointly assuming the risks and responsibilities and sharing their resources and competencies".⁷

Such PPPs are meant to achieve more together in terms of identifying opportunities and tackling problems than an individual party could achieve on its own. Development PPPs usually work on a programme or project basis, and aim to identify innovative solutions to development challenges. Most are based on a leverage rationale - that is, the development agency's contribution mobilizes additional funding from the private sector for public policy objectives, thereby increasing the development impact of corporate activities. This makes it clear that the primary target is not the company, but that public investment should have a catalytic function that accelerates development outcomes. Or with other words, the objective is not to find a solution to a certain issue that a company experiences, but there should be more generic solutions identified beyond the individual organizations involved in the partnership. In this vein, the activities of PPPs must be additional: the project cannot be implemented without public funding.

Figure 1: The Dutch Diamond

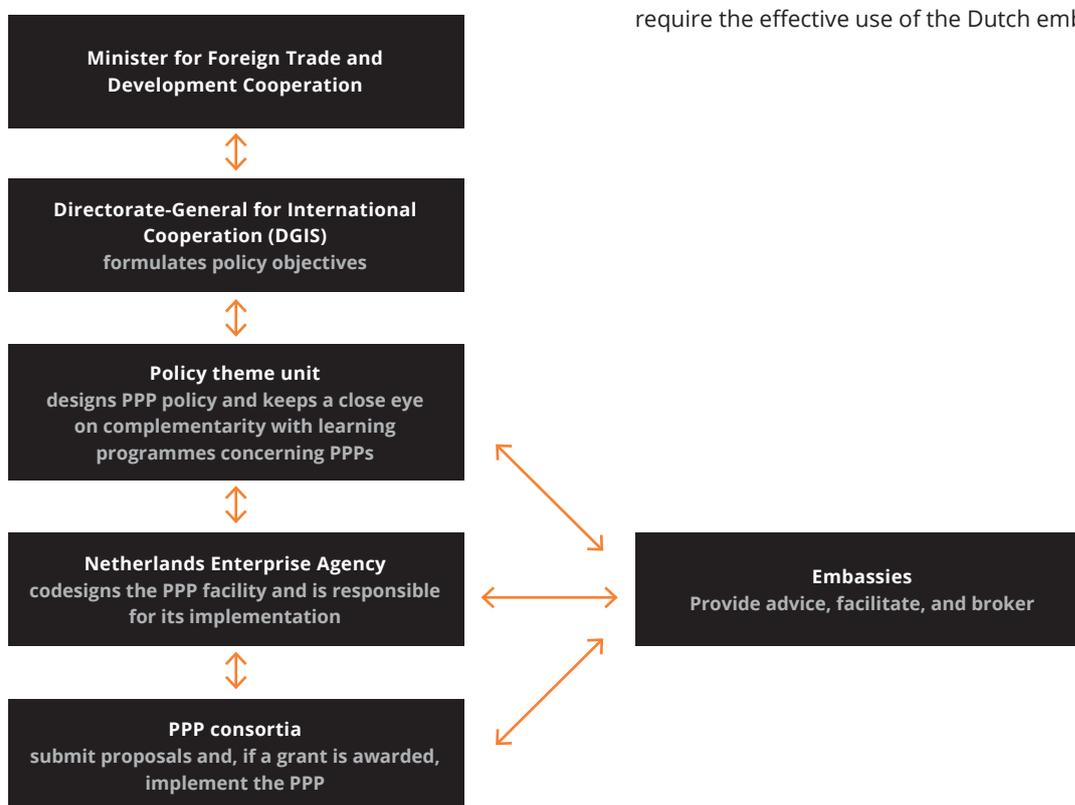


⁶ <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/development-cooperation-partners-and-partnerships/public-private-partnerships> and http://www.ondernemeninontwikkelingslanden.nl/sites/default/files/bijlages/nieuws/01%20BZ_folder_328x264mm_11.pdf ⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010)

1.2 Embassies in Dutch-funded PPPs

8 Most PPP facilities, including those mentioned above, are designed and managed centrally in The Hague. The policies for these PPP Facilities are designed by a policy theme department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The implementation of these instruments is delegated to the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). Apart from managing the PPP facilities, RVO also provides advice to the PPPs: it identifies opportunities for projects and partnerships, conducts analysis to ensure that projects are financially sustainable, and provides access to its network.⁸ In these centrally funded programmes, embassies are asked for their opinion on concept notes and the assessment of applications, as they are able to properly assess whether a proposal matches the local demand and the local policy context in the host countries. The level of embassy involvement in these centrally funded PPPs varies widely, but the embassies are not formally responsible for managing or implementing these programmes (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Organogram of responsibilities of Dutch public actors in centrally funded PPPs



Some embassies, however, have their own bilateral budgets for developing and implementing programmes and projects. Several embassies thus have experience with both (a) centrally funded and managed PPP projects and (b) projects and programmes with private sector involvement that are funded and managed by the embassies themselves.

In the case of both centrally and noncentrally funded and managed programmes and projects, it is assumed that Dutch embassies can play a valuable role in contributing to effective PPPs. This assumption is based on the rationale that embassies know the local political, economic, social, and societal contexts, and can more easily link up with actors on the ground; they can help to embed projects in the local context and increase the chances of achieving transformation beyond the project by linking the partnership project to local networks and other programmes and projects of the embassy.⁹ This is also associated with the understanding that integrating policy areas like trade, foreign relations, support for Dutch companies abroad, and development cooperation require the effective use of the Dutch embassies.¹⁰

⁸ <https://english.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2018/08/Policy%20Framework%20SDGP.pdf> ⁹ Policy of the SDG-P Facility: <https://www.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2018/06/Beleidskader-SDG-Partnerschapfaciliteit.pdf> ¹⁰ Advisory Council on International Affairs (2016)

Box 2: Structure of Dutch development cooperation

In general, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates and carries out the foreign policies of the Dutch government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for Dutch foreign policy and the Ministry's overall leadership. The Minister is assisted by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, who formulates and implements foreign aid and development cooperation policy. The Ministry's five Directorates-General serve the political leaders within specific spheres of foreign policy. The Directorate-General for International Cooperation, for instance, is responsible for development cooperation policy, its coordination, implementation, and funding. Within these directorate-general, policy theme departments have specialist knowledge of certain policy themes (for example, the Inclusive Green Growth Department focuses on access to and sustainable consumption of natural resources, while the Sustainable Economic Development Department aims to stimulate sustainable and inclusive economic development in developing countries). This policy theme knowledge is combined with the local knowledge of the regional departments.

Unique among Dutch ministries, Foreign Affairs has two parts: the Ministry headquarters in The Hague and the missions abroad. Around the world, the Ministry has more than 150 embassies, consulates-general, consulates, and permanent missions to international organisations, also known as 'missions'. The missions promote the interests of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and of Dutch people abroad.

"Dutch diplomats are the antenna and mouthpiece of the Netherlands worldwide. Diplomacy makes our country safer and prosperous. Diplomats are committed to a fair and sustainable world, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. They convey our political and economic interests. [...] The missions provide access to local authorities and local networks. They are government-wide service-providers with a global presence for the benefits of our citizens and businesses." (Ministrie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018:2)

Source: <https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/organisational-structure>

1.3 Design of this exploration

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This exploration aims to gain a deeper understanding of the role of embassies and the process by which they facilitate partnerships and collaborative projects with private sector involvement. While some insights relating to donor experiences with PPPs in development policy have recently emerged, less is known about the roles of embassies in PPPs, about the factors that affect their roles and engagement, and about the challenges and tensions they face in facilitating PPPs. Ultimately, these insights support a finer-grained understanding of embassies' involvement in PPPs.

This research followed an explorative approach to capture and explain the reality of the embassies' roles and experiences with PPPs in Dutch development policy. The insights are based on interviews with Dutch embassy representatives in eleven countries: Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Burundi, Mozambique, Mali, Rwanda, South Africa, the Philippines, and India. Apart from the experiences of embassy staff, the research includes insights into the role of embassies from the perspective of the Dutch policymakers responsible for (and involved in) the policy and implementation of PPP instruments in The Hague. In total, 28 people were interviewed for the study.

This study does not aim to be representative, but provides the perspectives of a broad range of countries, covering all three key relationship types of Dutch development cooperation: aid relation, transition relation, and trade relation. Most countries are in a transition relation. Some countries still receive development assistance funding (such as Rwanda, Benin, and Ethiopia), while in others aid has almost been phased out (these include Kenya and Ghana). Countries that have a trade relation - such as South Africa, India, or the Philippines - no longer receive aid, and the programmes with private sector involvement rely mainly on the instruments managed by RVO. This wide range of embassies provides insights into whether there are differences when embassies work with the private sector in partnerships in the context of the 'from aid to trade' policy.

Additionally, both FDW and FDOV projects are or were operated in almost all the investigated countries. In some cases, it was possible to gain additional insights into whether there is a difference for embassies working in PPPs in the water or the agriculture sector. Apart from this, it was possible to explore whether there are differences when embassies work on centrally funded and managed instruments and on those programmes and projects developed by themselves.

The data is based on interviews and online available material. We also include insights gathered during a public event organized by the PPPLab on the role of the Dutch government in PPPs for the SDGs.¹¹ The analysis identifies major themes and uses illustrative quotes where possible. In addition, we use the existing literature on donor engagement in PPPs to triangulate the data.

The remainder is structured around the exploration's three key questions. Chapter 2 provides insights into the roles of Dutch embassies in PPPs. Chapter 3 explores the factors that affect the intensity of Dutch embassy involvement in PPPs. Chapter 4 investigates the challenges and tensions that Dutch embassies encounter when working in partnerships with the private sector, and describes how they deal with these. Chapter 5 discusses the lessons for partnering with embassy involvement, following a framework of essential questions: Why partner? What role is required? When to partner? How to partner?¹²

¹¹ <https://ppplab.org/2018/07/looking-at-the-role-of-the-dutch-government-in-sdg-partnerships/> ¹² This follows the research line of the PPPLab Partnering with Governments programme. See its key publications at <https://ppplab.org/topic/partnering/?type=publications>

2. The roles of Dutch embassies in partnerships

11 **PPPs in development policy are expected to be based on shared responsibilities, resources, and the division of roles; the partners learn from each other and produce new knowledge. These characteristics require different roles from the public actors when they are engaged in a partnership, than when they are in contracting-out relationships or in diplomatic relationships with other governments.**

“Our role in partnerships is to broker: matching people, asking questions, and helping solve problems. The content is similar to our usual work, but the level of intensity and proactivity is different”

Dutch embassy staff describe their key roles in partnerships as ‘brokering’ and ‘facilitating’. But what do embassies do when they ‘broker’ or ‘facilitate’? Such questions elicit many more contributions, support, and activities of embassies (see Table 1). The roles are based on the type of contribution or support that embassies provide to partnerships themselves or to the environment in which partnerships operate. Such activities include matching actors, providing ideas and local expertise for project proposals, determining whether project ideas fit the local context, convening meetings, providing access to governments of the partner country, joining steering committees, taking part in field visits, convening and mediating issues and problems between partners, and aligning projects to local needs and embassy strategy. Beyond being involved in the process of a partnership, embassies also have a key function in facilitating the supporting environment for PPPs in the country and sector.

Embassies most often highlight that they play multiple roles and that their roles are not mutually exclusive. They emphasize that working with collaborative projects involving the private sector means that embassies are more proactively involved in identifying opportunities and in dialogues on diverse levels. When embassies are involved in PPPs, the perception of the risk involved in a project or investment may be lower on the part of partners and external stakeholders.

Table 1: Overview of various roles of Dutch embassies in PPPs

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Role	Contribution to PPP	
Supply and incentivize	Provide resources	Resources are an obvious comparative advantage of donors. These resources incentivize projects and enable both a scale of development work would otherwise be impossible and the potential to replicate partnership successes. Embassies that have delegated funds consider themselves as funders.
	Stimulate service provision and build capacity	Dutch embassies are not directly involved in institutional capacity building or providing technical assistance in the development, implementation, or evaluation of PPPs. This is because Dutch embassies have not the mandate to implement or direct capacity building. However capacity building and service provision can be facilitated through funding of, for instance, consultants or project partners.
	Provide knowledge and development expertise	Embassies provide knowledge and expertise to PPPs to further improve the processes of the project or partnership. They have expertise in certain sectors (e.g., water or food security), as well as in the local context. They actively provide these insights to PPPs. Apart from this, embassies make projects aware of development priorities and the focus on certain target groups.
Enable and embed	Facilitating a supportive environment	Embassies have no policy-making power in the partner countries, but they do possess a certain level of bargaining power, in particular with governments. This can be an important mechanism for negotiating a supportive environment, approval, or a support system for PPPs (e.g., in terms of rules and regulations). In addition, embassies can exert pressure to promote transparency, and to stimulate public-private dialogue in a country.
	Ensure fit to local context	Embassies have a critical knowledge of the territorial, political, and societal context in a country. That puts them into the position to ensure that partnership projects fit to the local context.
Facilitate and convene	Convene stakeholders, facilitate contacts and relationships	Embassies have significant convening power; they have the potential capacity to bring stakeholders to the table, even in highly conflicted situations. They have an extensive social network composed of their political connections with central, regional, and local authorities; business connections with the private sector; and connections with other key actors, such as CSOs, knowledge institutes, and so on. This vast social network can open doors for businesses and other stakeholders. Embassies can play a crucial role in brokering partnerships' external relationships. At the interface of two countries, they help to bridge cultural differences between Dutch partners and organizations from the partner country.
	Bring legitimacy and credibility	In some cases, embassies highlight that they can bring a certain level of legitimacy to a partnership. This can take place through, say, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are represented; being present at a partnership event, and so on. Approval and funding from embassies generates trust, credibility, and reputation for PPPs. This may provide the PPP with further (business) opportunities and legitimacy.

Table 1: Overview of various roles of Dutch embassies in PPPs

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Role	Contribution to PPP	
Promote and coordinate	Promote PPPs	Some embassies emphasize that they promote PPPs as a new way of addressing development challenges. They are also involved in making stakeholders aware of certain Dutch PPP instruments and the respective funding opportunity. Embassies use, for example, seminars and roadshows as possible formats.
	Coordinate key actors, stakeholders and programmes; ensure coherence	Some embassies emphasize that they coordinate between actors, instruments, programmes, and development agencies to maximize the effectiveness of the intervention while aligning with, and supporting, the priorities of their own government, key stakeholders, or the host countries' government. This can happen, for instance, by investing in platforms to share their experiences around partnerships. This function helps to identify synergies and prevents duplication.
Steer, guide, account and learn	Monitor the process and agreed results	Embassies highlighted that they play a certain role in monitoring and overseeing projects. This means that they oversee the data provided by project partners or consultants and determine whether the project is still on track towards its goals. This can happen by receiving regular updates and progress reports or, in some cases, by joining a visit to the project side.
	Give direction for process and outcomes	Embassies may take part in steering committees of partnerships. Even if the embassy has only observer status (no decision-making power), it can provide advice and therefore have an indirect influence on the direction for process and outcomes.
	Solve conflicts	Embassies need to become involved in solving conflicts between partners, or between partners and the government, on a regular basis. Balancing power between partners and safeguarding the independence and negotiating position of weaker partners can be part of embassies' involvement in PPPs.

3. Factors affecting embassies' roles and engagement intensity

14 **Although embassies report similar roles and contributions to partnerships, the level of intensity of embassy engagement varies widely. The research has identified a number of often interrelated organizational and external factors that can affect the specific role and intensity of an embassy's engagement in partnerships with the private sector.**

3.1 Organizational factors

Organizational factors relate to issues that are linked to how Dutch development cooperation is organized - such as the country classification, the type of relationship that contracts and grants specify, or whether it is a centrally funded project or not; or factors that have directly to do with the embassy, such as the fit of the PPP to the embassy's strategy.

Type of relationship

Most of the embassies we investigated highlighted that they themselves do not have partnership programmes or projects; they are instead involved in some form of funding or facilitating collaborations with the private sector. How embassy staff define the term 'partnership' varies widely, but comes down to a minimal definition, such as *"positive interaction between public and private sector"*. A more elaborate understanding is that *"real partnership is when each partner commits and contributes (including financially) to the collaboration, and where added value is created - the 1+1 =3 formula"*. In this context, it is highlighted that risks should not be fully covered by public funding, because the private sector is then providing a service that is rather like a transactional relationship.

The projects falling under the PPP facilities managed by RVO are predominantly considered real *partnerships*. However, some doubts were raised as whether they are real *public-private partnerships*, because some do not engage the local public sector, but instead represent NGO-business relationships.

Most embassy projects and programmes are based on grants to an organization that has a specific plan. If an embassy is the funder, it experiences more control by ensuring that the project targets are achieved and that the partnerships stay on track. In most cases, embassies consider this relationship not a partnership, but a funding relationship.

Own-funded project or centrally funded project

In PPPs that are centrally funded and managed, such as those that are part of FDOV and FDW, embassy engagement varies widely, from rather passive to active brokering. Embassies are usually involved in advising on project proposals (e.g., whether the proposal fits the local conditions and whether it is a promising approach in the context it aims to operate in), but the decision on funding is in hands of RVO. Apart from this, embassies can facilitate and advise RVO whenever needed. They often support, and may join, RVO staff field visits to PPP project sides. Embassies are important advisers for RVO in terms of PPP development in specific contexts. Embassies also can help solve challenging issues that PPPs face locally. There are many different ways in which embassies are involved in the process of individual partnerships, including joining the steering committees of a project. The exact role of the embassy in centrally steered projects and partnerships also depends on what the individual projects need and how actively they communicate with the embassy. Apart from advising and supporting RVO with individual PPPs, embassies have a role in facilitating the supportive environment for centrally funded programmes. Embassies are also involved in promoting programmes such as FDOV and FDW in their countries, together with RVO, in roadshows and similar events.

"The embassy is the Dutch government's eyes and ears on the ground"

No major difference in the role of embassies was identified for programme design of centrally funded programmes. For instance, in FDOV, the Dutch government was supposed to be a 'partner' in the PPP project. Most embassies hardly considered themselves partners in FDOV projects, like their

15 water colleagues who facilitate FDW.

One difference was however mentioned when embassy staff work in their own funded projects. Some embassies emphasized that they were more actively engaged because they have more insights into what happens in the project, on account of their regular contact and monitoring of progress reports submitted by the project's implementers. Embassy representatives mentioned that they can provide more guidance to their own funded projects and programmes, and it is therefore possible to try out different things, to steer when necessary and to be more flexible. In their own projects and programmes, embassies have more opportunities to financially support partners in further developing promising ideas.

"We are not really hands-on with regards to these centrally funded projects, compared with our involvement in our own embassy-funded projects"

"We're used as brokers in FDOV projects. In contrast, in our own projects, we're donors, and we're much more focused on whether the money is spent effectively and whether deadlines are achieved"

"We've full control in our own programmes"

Fit to embassy strategy and priorities

Embassies have several motivations to be engaged in partnerships with the private sector, including to stimulate sustainability, to represent and facilitate the implementation of Dutch policy, and to create 'real change' and innovation. Innovative financing is a key objective of embassies in transition: the question is how to leverage as much as possible using own financial contributions, and even to achieve additionality. Involving the private sector is here considered a key issue for generating innovation and change.

"If a project is in line with our priorities and strategic choices, we'll try to be actively involved in it. With all other projects - and there are many around - we're passive, unless there is a specific request from an organization that we should be involved. Then we can check how well the project links with our priorities"

It is key for embassies that programmes and projects are aligned with their key priorities and strategies. When a centrally funded PPP does not fit the embassy's strategic plans and does not contribute to the embassy's priorities, the level of the embassy's involvement might be less. In Mozambique, for instance, the embassy tries to generate synergy when projects are implemented in a region where they have an embassy programme running. A key priority for embassies in transition is to see how individual projects and programmes and their results can be scaled¹³ to accelerating development in the country. When there is a good fit to the strategy, then centrally funded projects are considered complementary to the Embassy programme, and both should reinforce each other.

Classification of country

Embassies have similar roles in partnerships with the private sector, whether they work in a country that is still receiving Dutch aid or whether the embassy is purely dependent on centrally steered instruments. Countries that are further on the way towards a trade relationship need to identify innovative financing mechanisms. The

¹³ More information on PPP scaling is available as part of PPPLab's Scaling research programme: <https://ppplab.org/topic/scaling/>

16 Netherlands embassy in Ghana, for example, has been mobilizing private funds through leverage since 2013. Most of the programmes are financed on the basis of business models or PPPs. The roles of embassies remain however the same: matching partners, facilitating and supporting the development of an enabling environment. What seems to be a difference is the time available to support projects in those countries where the administration of funds and of delegated budgets is no longer a regular part of the embassy's operations - as the case in countries with pure trade relations.

“Since the transition trajectory has started, we’ve stopped looking at ourselves as donors. We’ve had to see how to leverage the development aid funds that we put in our projects, and that’s why we’ve started considering ourselves ‘public investors’ and have begun focusing more on PPPs.”

One additional observation is that the type of ‘partnering’ instruments available change in the context of more trade-related countries, and with the type of partner as well. In countries without aid programmes, knowledge institutes become more relevant partners and less opportunities (in particular for funding) are available to NGOs. Embassies make use of different types of collaborative instruments, such as the *Partnerships for International Business*¹⁴ programme managed by RVO.

¹⁴ The *Partners for International Business* programme aims to position the top Dutch sectors in promising international markets. A collaboration between the Dutch government, Dutch companies, and knowledge institutes works together in a structured approach to achieve this. Dutch embassies have a key role in facilitating the PIB programme. More information: <https://www.rvo.nl/subsidies-regelingen/partners-international-business-pib> (01 September 2018).

3.2 External factors

17 External factors are those that have no direct organizational influence on the Dutch government or embassies and relate instead to issues pertinent in the country itself, such as sector influences, public sector roles and policies, and also the private sector's strength and availability in a certain country and sector.

Sector influences

Is there a difference in the role embassies play in PPPs related to water as opposed to agriculture? In principle, it seems that the main roles are similar (matching, advising, and facilitating), and no major difference between the instrument design of FDW and FDOV and the role of the embassy was identified. In some countries, water, agriculture, and food security experts have experienced slightly different roles, due to the sector's characteristics and development, as well as the capacity of the public sector in the country. In some countries the agricultural sector provides good opportunities for partnerships with private sector engagement. In the water sector, the question is also more about which private sector to get on board and how to achieve this. In most countries, the water sector is under strict government control, which means that partnerships often need to engage public actors.

Private sector availability and strength

Some countries are heavily dependent on aid and face the challenge that private sector actors are barely available or have very limited capacity. If Dutch companies or organizations become involved in countries with low levels of local capacity and insufficient local support for the project, embassies might be required to play a proactive role in facilitating them in the process of partnering, as well as promoting conditions in the context where PPPs operate. However, embassies here face the challenge of not advantaging one company over another.

This is in stark contrast to, for instance, countries that are in a trade relationship, where the commercial private sector is strong and well developed in certain industries. These companies know their way around the specific context in which they operate. A key task for embassies here is to

promote the Dutch PPP instruments.

Public sector's role and policies and regulations on PPPs

The embassies are very clear that they are not the public partner in a PPP - that is the government of the partner country. Embassies need to use their convening power to facilitate a supportive environment. In the case of governments that prefer to implement policies by themselves, the embassies try to support a dialogue with them to create more leeway for nonstate actors. Yet they also help the private sector become more sensitive about working with governments. In some instances, it is not possible to assign critical policy topics, such as building democracy, to a project for the private sector. The public sector or government of the host country should be responsible for these issues. This requires that the embassy facilitate dialogue between public and private actors on sensitive issues, in order to support a better understanding.

Some governments seem to have less willingness or capacity to participate in PPPs. This requires embassies to search for public actors on different levels (such as locally or provincially) and match them with programmes and initiatives. It also requires coordination with host governments to share information about interventions and initiatives set up by the Dutch government.

"We have a facilitating role. The government knows it's a Dutch-funded project and they trust our bilateral relations. They open up to these arrangements."

In some countries, the type of PPP is dependent on the country policy and the PPP model facilitated by the country's government. In some cases, engaging the partner country's governments is key for the success of the project, but providing financial commitment for PPPs seems to be rather challenging in many cases.¹⁵ Dutch embassies are active in introducing an understanding that partnerships are more than a transactional relationship. The political context and interest is thereby often key to take into consideration.

¹⁵ See, for example, PPPLab exploration No. 5: How to Partner with Governments?

4. Challenges and Tensions

18 Recent studies have emphasized that partnerships for development face challenges in terms of accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, risk sharing, monitoring and evaluation, and ownership.¹⁶ Another study claims that donors face limiting constraints (capacities, resources, and incentives) and sometimes they lack experience and understanding of partnering processes. This in turn is at risk of resulting in a too-passive type of formal approach to supporting partnerships, which is far from exploiting the large palette of resources and capabilities of donor agencies.¹⁷

In the following, four key tensions are discussed: the issue of working directly with the private sector; the issue of double (and perhaps even contradictory) roles; the issue of ensuring local embeddedness with limited capacity; and the tension of achieving flexibility while ensuring accountability in a partnership. How do Dutch embassy representatives experience these challenges, and how do they deal with them?

4.1 Working directly with the private sector

Embassies often do not work one-on-one with companies, even when the trade agenda favours private for-profit partners as key actors. Direct work with a private partner does not support a level playing field for different ideas from different companies. In contrast, it would increase the risk of market distortion. Embassies and governments in general are at risk of a lack of transparency regarding reasons for entering into a partnership with a specific company. Directly financing a business requires a very thorough analysis, and public tenders often make these processes rather slow and burdensome. Moreover, transformative partnerships have the ambition to create value beyond the partners.

“Companies are part of our portfolio, but not in a direct way”

Quite often, an NGO or consultant frames a project idea, develops a project proposal, and becomes the lead partner in an embassy-funded project. Such project proposals include businesses, but it is rather unusual that a for-profit organization takes the project lead. This is also because companies in general and SMEs in particular often do not have the capacity to develop project proposals and manage this type of complex project. In this sense, NGOs play an important role as ‘intermediaries’ between policy priorities, funding management, the language of policymakers, and interests of business partners. When NGOs are the direct partner, public funding does not go directly to the company. Some embassy representatives perceive this as a way to ensure that the public interest is represented in the collaboration. This does not come without challenges: First, some embassies highlight that they consider that most of these projects to be written from a NGO perspective, and not from a business development perspective, and they question the underlying business case. Second, NGOs in particular, and businesses too, can have different interests, approaches, and modus operandi, which may lead to situations where embassies need to facilitate between the partners.

¹⁶ Pfisterer (2017). ¹⁷ Karki & Medinilla (2016).

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Another issue is the question of who is the private sector to work with? It is observed that consultancy companies are involved in developing risk mitigation for the project management - in particular when a PPP should be developed or implemented with the local government.

4.2 Wearing two possibly contradictory hats

Working in partnerships means having multiple roles, and often at the same time. In 2016, the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs observed that the combination of the roles of grant provider and partner of the Dutch government could be improved in PPPs. In practice, these roles are often mixed together.¹⁸ In general, the tension between being a funder and a partner was not really experienced by the interviewed embassy staff. One reason is that, in Dutch centrally funded programmes, the tension is prevented by splitting the roles between RVO as manager and controller of the programmes and the embassies. Another way of preventing conflicting roles is to split the responsibilities of individuals; policy advisors and financial experts, for instance, work closely together but each has his or her own responsibilities in the PPP. The general tenor of past research and interviewees is that a double role as both controller and partner, such as in FDOV, where the Dutch government was originally considered as partner in the projects, brings confusion and should be avoided¹⁹ (see Box 3). The underlying argument is that when both roles are mixed, issues related to integrity and responsibility can emerge.

Box 3: The double role of the Dutch government in FDOV

In the Fund for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Food Security (FDOV), the Dutch government was formally a partner in all PPPs. A midterm review of the FDOV highlighted that, in practice, the role of the Dutch government was in stark contrast to its ambitions. DGIS in The Hague was considered a finance provider but did not assume an active role in partnerships. The link with Dutch embassies was perceived to be stronger by PPPs, but a mixed picture was still observed by the time of the midterm review. The review therefore concluded that the dual role of the Dutch government as funder and partner has not worked out well in practice. The report advised that a more pronounced and coherent role of Dutch embassies would include (1) acting as a learning platform (facilitating learning between FDOV PPPs and relevant development interventions by the embassies themselves), and (2) brokering between PPPs and local government agencies. Together, these two functions are expected to create deeper impact through enhanced learning, synergy, and local embeddedness.

Source: KIT (2016).

A recent study identified a gap related to the low degree of involvement of donor agencies beyond financing, highlighting that donors often limit themselves to financing partnerships, and thus miss the opportunity to exploit nonfinancial resources, such as their broad social networks, links to companies, or knowledge and expertise.²⁰ In our research on embassies, we see the trend that embassies operate at arm's length from the partnership project they fund, while they also have a clear interest in intervening and influencing the project.

“Our role is at arm’s length; ‘makelen en schakelen’ [brokering and matching]; but we want to be able to have an independent look at the partnership’s content and implementation”

¹⁸ Advisory Council on International Affairs (2016). ¹⁹ KIT (2016). ²⁰ Karaki & Medinilla (2016).

In particular in countries where there is no own budget, centrally funded PPP instruments can provide a certain leverage mechanism and show the financial commitment of the Dutch government to the partner government. Dutch embassies do not consider themselves only as the funder. Involvement happens in diverse ways - for instance, embassies may engage with organizations upfront before the proposal is even finalized. This allows them to ensure that a high-quality proposal is design and lets them be more involved in the partnership. Another way is to influence through governance structure. For example, in some cases embassy representative is invited to join steering committees of partnerships to provide advice. For embassy staff, these positions provide a way of monitoring what is happening in the partnership and to understand how things are going in the field.

Having a broader role than funding implies discussing progress with partners, trying to improve activities, and look for synergies and complementarities with development agencies. This is done by means of a 'participative approach', where not just one side decides; it is also called cocreation.

"Our role as donor is to create possibilities for this kind of project. So I don't recognize that there's a tension here. We explore together whether something works or not and how far we can go with a proposal or activity. I don't consider it a problem to be a donor and a partner in a project"

"This is a challenge: on one hand, as the embassy, we want to be part of the partnership, but on the other hand we want to keep distance when necessary"

While most respondents do not consider this to be an issue, some recognize that a paradoxical challenge is involved when both hats are being worn. In some cases partners actually want the embassy to play a more proactive partner role. This would imply that embassies have responsibilities for certain components of the project - that they can become a co-owner of the partnership. Due to capacity issues, and the 'arms-length approach' when funding is involved, formal co-ownership is hardly possible. However, some embassy

representatives feel that they are actually co-owners, since they are involved and the projects directly contribute to the strategic objectives of the embassy.

"If co-ownership were defined as 'feeling committed and aligned to the project, but involved at arm's-length', then I would subscribe to it"

Box 4: Wearing two hats: The WaterWorX Programme

In the case of the WaterWorX programme - in which Dutch water supply companies set up Water Operator Partnerships (WOPs) with water utilities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to support them in reducing nonrevenue water and improving financial and administrative systems - the Dutch government cofunds the initiative, but is also a partner. It provides strong support in the field of local policy, laws, and regulations, and local water utilities are encouraged to function properly. In some countries, the Dutch government is responsible for the development and implementation of a component that aims to improve the enabling environment. The effort is made to link up as much as possible with ongoing initiatives of other donors and institutions, in order to multiply effects, avoid duplication and create an efficient approach.

More information:

<https://www.dutchwatersector.com/news-events/news/24309-dutch-water-utilities-launch-waterworx-programme-at-celebration-of-world-water.html>

4.3 Ensuring local embeddedness with limited capacity

21 PPPs in development policy are mainly operated in a partner country; they take place in a specific political, economic, social, and societal context, and they need to be fully embedded within it to be effective and produce sustainable solutions. Embassies have an important bridging role in this respect. They should help to secure the local embeddedness of partnerships.

“There’s no substitute for a local presence when it comes to effectively influencing foreign governments and opening doors for Dutch business. This requires maintaining direct contact with government representatives and networks of local players. This can’t be done at a distance, from The Hague.” (AIV 2017:7).

Dutch embassies are undergoing major changes. Their tasks have become far broader and more complex in recent years;²¹ however, since 2012, embassies have experienced major cutbacks. Many embassies highlighted that they do not have the capacity to manage complex partnership projects, or even facilities. They therefore prefer that PPPs are centrally managed by RVO. However, ensuring the local embeddedness of partnership initiatives that are developed by organizations in The Netherlands is considered a challenge, in particular when it does not fit the embassy’s strategy.

Promoting and supporting partnerships is a complex process requiring considerable financial, knowledge, and time resources. The experience of individual embassy staff in working with partnerships and knowing the instruments also gives an advantage in effectively facilitating partners and their projects. For PPPs, this implies having a clear understanding of how business and business processes work.²² Partnering needs specific skills that differ considerably from the traditional project management and administration skills of public servants. It also requires close attention to the interests, incentives, and power relations between potential partners and key stakeholders. Most embassy representatives learn on the job how to support partnerships; the embassy in Mozambique, for instance, had partnership training. The newly acquired knowledge helped the training participants to better

understand the different interests of partners and how partnerships work.

The budget cuts have however stimulated creativity and learning on the part of embassies. It demands new ways of doing things, having policy priorities implemented, and searching for innovative financing. Linking up diverse initiatives is key to this. One option is to find a middle way, as in the case of the Ghana Wash Window (see Box 5).

Box 5: Ghana Wash Window

One key challenge that centrally designed and managed programmes and projects face is that they may struggle to really be locally embedded and fit the local context. However, since embassies have major capacity constraints, the solution may lie in the middle. This is what happened in Ghana when the Embassy set up the Ghana Wash Window as part of the Netherlands–Ghana Water Partnership. This programme was designed by the embassy and received funding from it, but the administration and management is in the hands of RVO. Local embeddedness is ensured through, for example, the involvement of the Ghanaian government in the steering committee. The Ghanaian government and the Dutch embassy jointly advised on project proposals for RVO.

Source: <https://english.rvo.nl/subsidies-programmes/gww-ghana-wash-window>

²¹ AIV (2017). ²² Kamphoff & Melissen (2018).

4.4 Flexibility while remaining publically accountability

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Partnerships operate in complex environments and, in some cases, they need to adapt to changing circumstances; perhaps the chosen approach needs to be corrected. Flexibility is a balancing act - it ensures that the partnership follows its original ambition and goals, while at the same time remaining sufficiently flexible to adapt to changing circumstances and contexts. To do so requires a couple of issues from embassies.

“We have a strategic role: it’s about trying to make most use of the effects and results of a project. If the results are in danger, we need to do something. In the same vein, if there are new opportunities, we also need to actively provide advice”.

First, directly Embassy funded programmes are considered more flexible than centrally funded projects. It is key that embassy representatives keep in contact on a very regular basis, in order to understand what is going on in the project. It also requires being flexible and opportunity-driven: Where can the project be aligned with other initiatives? What are promising cross-links and possibilities for the project to enhance its effectiveness? It is important that such decisions about what is possible and realistic are taken in collaboration with the partners, and are not imposed by the embassy.

“The way we’re working with our partners makes our bilateral funded projects more flexible. We’re very engaged in our projects. We’re not controlling and we don’t manage the project from a distance. We’re very close with our partners. If things need to be changed, we can change them in time, because we are there.”

Second, each partnership is different and a light-handed approach is most relevant. In the ideal case, embassies would need to provide differentiated support to partnerships, according to their level of complexity. By doing so, embassies become the missing piece of the puzzle in collaborations.

Third, steering towards the objective of the partnership, and not the organizational form, would be the most ideal form of flexibility. However, this contrasts with the accountability requirements when public funding is involved. Since embassies, like all public actors, have accountabilities, they might face constraints when it comes to the kind of flexibility and openness required for partnership work.

5. Lessons for partnering

23 **The insights into the roles and factors that affect embassies' involvement in partnership projects, and the challenges they encounter when engaging in collaborative projects, allow us to better understand how embassies currently work and experience partnerships with private sector involvement. This understanding can be used by potential PPPs.**

5.1 Why? Defining the essence of 'partnering'

The current focus on funding is so prominent that many partnerships are at risk of engaging in short-term, risk-averse, easier-to-quantify approaches instead of interventions that are based on an analysis of the complexity of the problem, with a more transformative nature and longer time horizons. Setting up a partnership is best begun from an understanding of the complexity of the problem to be addressed. This requires that partnerships are not predominantly considered as funding opportunities, but as opportunities to jointly address complex problems, as no partner can do so based on its bilateral relations. Initiatives do indeed require money; instruments such as the SDG-P provide the ability to match financing to certain project ideas. But the types of collaboration and associated embassy roles range from nonfinancial involvement to funding. Interestingly, some embassy respondents highlighted that they feel like partners in an intervention, even when they are not involved in any financial way; it is more about how the project or intervention contributes to both the core vision and strategy of the PPP partners and the embassy. Finding a synergy between the aspiration of the PPP and how it links to the embassy vision and strategy is key. Open and transparent dialogue between partnership partners and embassy is essential.

5.2 What? The right piece in the puzzle

The required role of the embassy for the PPP - whether within the process of a partnership or in an environment where a partnership operates - becomes clearer with a good understanding of what the partnership aims to achieve, whether there is synergy between the PPP's aspiration and the embassy's strategy, and whether there is even a need for the embassy to have a role related to the PPP. The trend of involving more private actors in development cooperation implies a new role for donor governments and for embassies, shifting from traditional financiers to being partners alongside other players in the development efforts.²³ It can be questioned whether the term 'donor' is still appropriate in the current Dutch policy context. One of the underlying notions of the 'from aid to trade' agenda highlights the transition of the relationship with the partner country from being a 'receiver' to being a 'partner'. This way of thinking emphasizes equity in the relationship between partners and is also a key concept for partnering. Embassies that are in transition particularly notice that their own relationship changes from a rather 'transactional' aid or donor relationship towards a more complex combination of diverse relationships with diverse actors on diverse levels. Considering the complexity of problems addressed by PPPs and the flexibility required in the context where partnerships operate, embassies may play multiple roles (see Table 1) and change throughout the partnership's lifecycle. The recurring question is: How can embassies be the right piece in the puzzle? Flexibility, openness to expectations, but also realism about what is possible and is necessary from both PPPs and embassies.

²³ KIT (2016).

5.3 When? The varying intensity of relationships

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In centrally funded PPPs, embassies can usually chose to play an active role in the development stage by advising potential partnerships and by possibly facilitating activities. Indeed, embassies here highlighted that they are mainly actively engaged in the start-up of a project or collaboration; they help to match actors and provide knowledge, ideas, and advice about the project plan.

"I think we should be considered very closely when a partnership is developed and set up. That's when we have the best opportunity for influencing. As soon as the partnership is formalized, we should best stay at a distance"

In the further course of the partnership, the embassies' engagement is more related to monitoring, but also to supporting the PPP where necessary. The level and type of engagement in the end phase of a PPP can vary; in some cases, centrally funded partnership initiatives demonstrated their approach and were scaled into new embassy programmes. In other cases, partnership initiatives can inform embassies of their achievements and provide, for example, a list of suggestions to the embassy to be taken further into consideration in their work. Embassies need to know what is required by PPPs in order to adequately anticipate the developments in, of, and around a PPP. This requires regular and efficient communication between embassies and the PPP, so that all involved can learn and adapt to the roles, if necessary.

5.4 How? Develop creative partnering approaches

Current global challenges provide an additional level of complexity and interconnectedness to the topics that PPPs and embassies need to tackle. An embassy's key work is identifying opportunities and making the best use of them. However, active partnering can be challenging with limited capacity.²⁴ Approaching PPPs with 'smart' pragmatism - dealing with the problem

in a sensible, adaptive and effective way that suits the conditions that really exist - could fit the 'Dutch approach', as perceived by embassies (see Box 6). This requires from both PPPs and embassies the courage to try out new approaches, and a willingness to change direction or end an intervention if it is not working as planned. It also requires learning from successes and failures, an understanding of flexibility, and a knowledge of which types of responsibilities can feasibly be involved in a PPP.

Box 6: Typically Dutch? Embassies' perceptions

The Dutch 'partnering approach' combines private sector development with broader development impact, while also aiming to link this to Dutch businesses and other 'diamond partners'. This is considered a rather unique approach by some embassy representatives. The following characteristics were highlighted:

- 'The Dutch' are ascribed certain values, such as being trustworthy, having no hidden agenda, being well organized, and so on.
- The 'from aid to trade' agenda communicates a more adult relationship towards partner countries.
- Dutch development cooperation is rather 'compact', which allows for a good facilitation, including when compared to larger development agencies.
- The direct link to policy makes it rather easy to navigate quickly.

In contrast, despite the trade ambition in Dutch development cooperation, embassies experience that there are other countries that offer a much broader palette of financing options, including more blended financing and microfinancing through banks. There are also huge differences in terms of capacity; development agencies such as e.g. GIZ have specific set-ups that allow them to be much more engaged in projects and programmes in terms of content.

²⁴ The capacity constraints and their implications have recently been recognized as a critical threat to the ability of Dutch missions to promote fundamental values and effectively advance Dutch interests (AIV, 2017). Recently, the Dutch government decided to financially strengthen Dutch embassies (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018).

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