

Platform to unite Dutch stakeholders

around

global public goods

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Foreword

This position paper is written in the course of the Advanced Master in International Development (AMID), offered by the Centre for Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN) of Radboud University. The paper is the final assignment of the program. As an AMID trainee I have been working at NCDO for one year. Reflecting on this period, this paper is meant to stimulate discussion about the future orientation of NCDO and might generate new ideas and opportunities for the organization to maneuver in the challenging context of rising global challenges and financial budget cuts in the Netherlands.

Table of contents

1. Voice of global public goods	4
<i>Case study: Reaching the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth</i>	5
2. It is essential	6
Increasing pressure on global public goods	6
Political action lacks behind	7
3. It seems apt.....	8
Growing importance of multi-stakeholder networks.....	8
Possibilities for alternative financing	8
4. It seems feasible	9
Knowledge and skills	9
Spin-in-the-web	10
5. Risk analysis	10
Demand and financial resources	10
Mediating skills	11
Neutrality	11
<i>Case study: Is WWF marrying the environmental sinners?</i>	12
6. Concluding reflections and suggestions	12
References	15

1. Voice of global public goods

Protecting global public goods, such as natural resources, water and food security, is a challenging task. Due to the two characteristics of a global public good, being non-exclusionary and non-rivalry (Went, 2010), managing these goods equals a tragedy of the commons: the benefits of protection by some accrue to people globally, while the costs of protection are carried by the few guardians (Hardin, 1968). Protecting global public goods thus requires some form of global coordination (Hess and Ostrom, 2007; Kaul et al., 1999). The difficult question is who should and would be willing to carry the main responsibility in a world that is becoming more complex every day due to changing global power relations between countries, regions and actors. Should multilateral institutions or governments take up this role? Are non-governmental organizations or knowledge institutes responsible? Is it the duty of the private sector, whose activities and impact increasingly transcend national boundaries due to globalization of mobility, value chains and knowledge? Or should citizens be the change agents? To safeguard global public goods for people worldwide not one actor is responsible, but joint action is needed (AIV, 2013a).

As Dutch knowledge and advisory center for citizenship on global development and international cooperation, NCDO aims to give a vocal sound in Dutch society to the voiceless global public goods. The organization has selected water, food and natural resources as focal global public goods based on their explicit link to Dutch consumption and production. To stimulate global citizenship “that does justice to the principles of mutual dependency in the world, the equality of human beings and the shared responsibility for solving [these] global issues” (Carabain et al., 2012, p. 30) NCDO aims to connect pioneering citizens’ initiatives, civil society organizations, policy, companies and science (NCDO, 2013). There is an undeniable need for multiple voices and multi-actor information on these goods, where top-down and bottom-up processes are brought together. As independent knowledge and advisory center NCDO fulfills an important intermediary role in this process (NCDO, 2013). This position paper argues for a specific interpretation of this role in that:

NCDO should facilitate dialogue among Dutch stakeholders on more sustainable use of global public goods

NCDO is currently going through a process of reorientation, where it is exploring potential alternatives that the organization could and should undertake in the future. In response to external demand the role of facilitator¹ of multi-actor dialogue in Dutch society on more sustainable use of global public goods has been proposed. For instance, Shell has contacted NCDO with the inquiry if the organization can facilitate dialogue on sustainable use of natural resources between stakeholders in the Netherlands, including environmental organizations and government bodies, as previous efforts towards dialogue have failed. Furthermore, following activities of NCDO on natural resources (including the publication of a knowledge dossier, a short ‘explanation’ movie and public events) the Dutch Special Envoy Natural Resources has asked NCDO to facilitate dialogue on natural resources within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and possibly with other stakeholders.

¹ A facilitator is “a helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they pursue their objectives” (Bens, 2012, p.5).

An important question is how NCDO should respond to these inquiries. Based on internal analysis, a review of (academic) literature and two interviews, this paper argues in favor of the proposed role of facilitating dialogue. The central question of these thematic dialogues should be how sustainable use of global public goods can be promoted in the Netherlands by stimulating production (and consumption) behavior that attests to global citizenship. According to Brousseau and colleagues (2012) the optimal method for facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue on global public goods is by narrowing the scope to one issue, by ensuring that the relevant stakeholders are included and by centrally organizing the decision-making process. Along these lines, NCDO can best organize each dialogue around one of the core themes of NCDO; being natural resources, food and water. Moreover, following the case study of the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth (see text box below) relevant stakeholders to include are civil society, the private sector and government bodies (e.g. Foreign, Internal and Economic Affairs). Depending on the theme the stakeholders to be included might vary in composition and be supplemented with other stakeholders, such as employer’s organizations or unions.

Case study: Reaching the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth

The Social Economic Council (SER) of the Netherlands created and facilitated the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth. After a ten month process the agreement was signed on the 6th of September 2013 by more than forty organizations, including central and local government bodies, employers’ associations and unions, environmental and nature conservation organizations, other civil society organizations and financial institutions. Concrete examples are employers’ organization VNO-NCW, the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV), environmental organizations Natuur & Milieu and Greenpeace, the ministries of Economic Affairs, Infrastructure & Environment and Internal Affairs and the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. The agreement has been based on the long-term vision that a sustainable energy supply is in everyone’s interest, placing the common good above the individual interest. Drawing on this felt need for a common action plan, SER carefully selected representatives of the various stakeholders involved in energy (resources) in the Netherlands. Each stakeholder had a substantial constituency, who they were able to engage with the agreed upon action plan. In the dialogue process SER acted as a neutral facilitator, not as an actor. The process started by pinpointing the most important themes and by identifying the thematic interests of the various actors involved. Around each thematic area SER facilitated a process of discussions and meetings: drafting documents, analyzing strategies and calculating opportunities and risks. Next to the various representatives SER invited thematic experts, for instance from PwC, to critically think along. By this means,



the agreement has been able to set out a growth path that is defined by energy and climate objectives and by realistic and necessary economic gains and prospects (interview Ton van der Wijst, 2013; SER, 2013).

“Expertise and independence are key success factors” Ton van der Wijst (SER)

Facilitating dialogue among Dutch stakeholders is *essential* in the sense that concerns around global public goods are intensifying and require joint solutions. It seems *apt* in that multi-stakeholder initiatives are increasingly put forward as an effective manner to address complex global challenges and provide opportunities for alternative financial resources. It seems *feasible* in that the organization tends to be equipped for the proposed role. The paper elaborates on these arguments, explores the potential risks and advises the organization under what conditions NCDO can best take up the proposed assignment.

2. It is essential...

It is essential for NCDO to bring together stakeholders in the Netherlands to stimulate more sustainable use of global public goods. Two clear arguments for NCDO to take up the proposed role are that worldwide pressure on global public goods is growing, while Dutch political action to sustainably address this burden within the Netherlands seems to be falling behind.

Increasing pressure on global public goods

Problems around global public goods will intensify further in the forthcoming decennia. Not only the global population will rise from seven to over nine billion people in 2050, people will also produce and consume more. Projections of the OECD show a fourfold increase of the world economy over this period (OECD, 2011). This growth can in large part be explained by an expanding middle class in upcoming and developing countries: in 2030 eighty percent of the middle class will live in Africa and Asia (Kharas, 2010). In response to these trends, a recent report of the Transatlantic Academy warns for a global-resource nexus, leading among others to a struggle for land, food, water and minerals (Kamphof, 2013; Andrews-Speed et al., 2012). Without additional policy, by 2050 the global demand for water will have grown with 55 percent and the global use of energy with 60 to 80 percent. Due to growing pollution and intensification of agriculture, biodiversity of land will have decreased with ten percent (OECD, 2011; WRR, 2013).



In the Netherlands we also have our responsibility to contribute to a solution for these rising grand challenges. Taking up this duty is also in Dutch self-interest. While developing and upcoming countries have been most directly affected by rising global challenges with less resources to address them, taking into account these alarming numbers countries worldwide will increasingly feel the consequences if no action is taken. Even if stakeholders do not act from solidarity, the individual interests will align more and more with the common good of preserving the planet (AIV, 2013a en b). Following this undeniable need, the Netherlands should direct more attention toward greening the own production and consumption patterns. According to the projected ecological footprint of the Netherlands in 2020 by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, the Dutch costs to compensate for its own pollution will rise to an estimated three billion euros (AIV, 2013b). Based on the expertise and standing network of NCDO the organization will be able to substantially contribute to more sustainable use of global public goods such as natural resources, food and water in the Netherlands by initiating multi-actor dialogue.

Political action lacks behind

A second reason why NCDO should facilitate dialogue in Dutch society on global public goods is that national political action seems to be falling behind. Dutch politics, currently lead in parliament by the liberal party VVD and the social-democratic party PvdA, do not seem eager to address complex and wicked global challenges. Since the start of the economic crisis in 2008 citizens have become more critical towards their political leaders, which has spurred the importance of accountability for political choices and actions (Spitz et al., 2013). Progress on global public goods only shows after years of long-term investment and cannot be attributed to one single party due to the involvement of many actors and states. Concrete and attributed results are thus hard to define, especially within a political term of four years (AIV, 2013a). Moreover, in light of the economic crisis and the liberal domination politics seems to have given priority to the recovery of Dutch economy at the expense of international development, sustainability and global public goods (Bieckmann, 2012). As Marjan



Minnesma, director of Urgenda Foundation and frontrunner in the Dutch Sustainability Top 100, conveyed to the newspaper *Trouw* on Dutch political involvement in climate change: *"I only see the situation worsening. Therefore, we started a lawsuit against the state to enforce climate measures. But also in the rest of the country the gravity of the situation still has to percolate"* (Bezemer, 2013, par. 14). Although the opposition, especially GroenLinks, presses for a greener and more fair Dutch and global economy, its voice has been less heard (GroenLinks, 2012).

Against this political background, the Dutch government has formulated policy on global public goods. For instance, the Ministry of Economic Affairs aims to strengthen various so-called Dutch 'top-sectors' (such as food and agriculture, water and energy) by public-private cooperation. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports five knowledge platforms, where a wide set of actors from the Netherlands and from developing countries are encouraged to share and produce knowledge on inclusive development and the four policy spearheads, including global food and water issues (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013a en b). However, the Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT, 2013) warns that global societal challenges are only marginally included in both policy directions and do not serve as central guiding objectives. Dutch economic interest seems to be the primary objective. Moreover, both policies fail to specifically target sustainable production and consumption behavior in the Netherlands. To better safeguard global public goods the advisory bodies such as PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) and the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) argue that stimulating sustainable and development-friendly behavior on global public goods should be given more emphasis on the Dutch policy agenda and better coordinated between the various ministries (AIV, 2013b).

NCDO can play an important role in this process by facilitating dialogue among various stakeholders in Dutch society on how to make Dutch production (and consumption) patterns more sustainable. Involving Dutch producers in the solution seems to fit the political context, which increasingly emphasizes the responsibility and participation of the wider Dutch society in addressing societal dilemmas. As King Willem-Alexander conveyed in his royal speech on *Prinsjesdag* in September 2013: *“The classical welfare state gradually changes into a participation society. Everyone who is capable is asked to take responsibility for his or her own life and environment”* (Rijksoverheid, 2013, par. 6).

3. It seems apt...

It seems apt for NCDO to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue in the Netherlands. This seems to be supported by the finding that multi-actor initiatives are increasingly put forward as an effective manner to solve global issues and also generate opportunities for alternative financial inflow.

Growing importance of multi-stakeholder networks

In global and Dutch international development policy multi-stakeholder partnerships are increasingly put forward as a promising manner to address complex challenges relating to sustainability and international development (AIV, 2013a). As mentioned in the introduction, a growing number of players are involved in safeguarding (and endangering) global public goods worldwide. Bringing these actors together in multi-stakeholder dialogue is a challenging, but necessary task: not one actor can address such complex issues alone, but joint efforts are needed. The current political agenda in the Netherlands seeks and encourages joint action between public and private stakeholders. However, as mentioned above, Dutch political action in stimulating sustainable production of stakeholders in the Netherlands seems to be falling behind. Dialogue among Dutch stakeholders on better protecting global public goods, created and facilitated by NCDO, can potentially bridge this gap and complement the Dutch international policy geared at upcoming and developing countries.

Possibilities for alternative financing

The participation of the private sector in multi-stakeholder initiatives might open up new possibilities to attract alternative forms of finance. As the Dutch government has announced it will end the subsidy relation with NCDO after 2015, being able to find alternative financial resources is important for the organization. Anticipating on this forthcoming budget cut and to decrease the dependency on the government, NCDO aims to become a more hybrid organization by attracting diverse forms of funding from various parties. Creating and enabling dialogue between a wide variety of Dutch stakeholders, including the private sector, can provide alternative ways to attract financial resources. It might be a promising project to attract funding from the Dutch government and European or multilateral institutions. But more so, NCDO can request companies to pay a financial contribution to join the dialogue process.

But it cuts both ways; by becoming a hybrid organization less dependent on government funding NCDO will also be better able to adopt a more neutral and independent position in such a multi-stakeholder process.

According to Ton van der Wijst of the Social Economic Council (SER), who chaired and facilitated the ground-breaking Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth, independence is a key success factor for facilitating a multi-stakeholder process (Interview Ton van der Wijst, 2013; Bens, 2012). The previous text box on page 5 gives more insight into the process of the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth; a case study that can serve as an instructive example for NCDO.

4. It seems feasible...

It tends to be feasible for NCDO to create dialogue on natural resources, food and water as global public goods and be a bridging partner between various stakeholders in the Dutch playing field. The organization seems to be well equipped for the proposed role; it has the required thematic knowledge and the expertise for facilitating multi-stakeholder processes and it already fulfils a bridging function in a number of networks.

Knowledge and skills

Next to independence Ton van der Wijst referred to expertise or knowledge as one of the key success factors for the initiation and facilitation of dialogue among multiple stakeholders. This is also supported by literature. Brousseau and colleagues (2012) argue for the importance of knowledge in addressing issues around global public goods. They state that it is problematic that collective goals or solutions around global public goods are unknown due to the lack of knowledge about what issues are at stake and how it impacts the own situation, the situation of others and those of future generations. Global issues such as security of food and natural resources are complex and conceptual issues, which makes it difficult to define the impact on individual or group level. NCDO can fill this knowledge gap by providing relevant information to the participating stakeholders.

The research department of NCDO, for instance, produces accessible Dutch knowledge dossiers, which give insight into the most important issues and debates relating to global public goods and suggest opportunities for Dutch stakeholders to address the issues. Moreover, the ability of NCDO to conduct opinion research also opens up opportunities to gather information that might be of relevance for the dialogue process. For example, NCDO can collect data about the perceptions and actions of Dutch citizens with regard to specific global public goods and their opinions on how various Dutch stakeholders are handling the issues. By taking the public opinion into consideration in the dialogue process the voices of Dutch citizens are better heard and stakeholders can better take their perspectives and demands into account. Moreover, if desired NCDO can share the process and results of the dialogues with Dutch citizens via its media platform OneWorld. Besides this ability to collect and share knowledge, NCDO has a training department with professionals skilled to facilitate group processes. This department has been facilitating various training programs, such as trainings on global citizenship and on partnership brokering, and coordinated a number of networks (see the next paragraph). The combined expertise of NCDO in research and facilitation provides a promising basis for constructive dialogue based on grounded knowledge.

Spin-in-the-web

As spin-in-the-web organization NCDO has also initiated and facilitated various networks. Food Guerrilla is an example of a network which connects more than 150 sustainable food initiatives in the Netherlands. The aim of the network is to jointly stimulate awareness in Dutch society on food waste and sustainable food use and to support the individual initiatives by connecting them. Another example is the platform MyWorld, a network which connects Dutch citizens active in developing countries. The platform links Dutch private initiatives globally and offers training and advice. In the context of this paper the Worldconnectors might be the most relevant network initiated and facilitated by NCDO, made up of prominent and engaged opinion leaders in the Netherlands from different professional backgrounds who commit themselves to a sustainable, just and peaceful world. The worldconnectors meet four times a year and formulate joint agenda's and action plans in different thematic working groups. In setting up the dialogues NCDO can use this network to find relevant stakeholders and experts. Next to various networks, over the years NCDO has been working together with a large number of partners from science, government, civil society, private funds, banks and business.

5. Risk analysis

To successfully take up the proposed role, it is important for NCDO to be aware of the potential drawbacks and risks. There are a number of critical questions which need to be posed. Are the demand and the opportunities for financial resources high enough? Are the knowledge and skills of NCDO to facilitate and mediate complex multi-stakeholder dialogues sufficient? Can NCDO assume neutrality and is it considered by others to be a neutral player in the field? This chapter reflects on these questions.

Demand and financial resources

There seems to be a certain demand for multi-stakeholder dialogue in the Netherlands on more sustainable use of global public goods, as mentioned above. However, NCDO needs to conduct a thorough stakeholder analysis to check whether this demand is sufficient to engage in the process of facilitating such dialogue. In the stakeholder analysis NCDO also needs to assess whether it is financially viable for NCDO to engage in the process. For a multi-stakeholder platform to be a neutral space, it seems paramount that it does not financially depend on one subsidy body for more than fifty percent. To safeguard neutrality and financial sustainability it should be based on multiple sources of financial inflow. As suggested above, NCDO could ask for a financial contribution of the various stakeholders included. Therefore, an important question to pose in the stakeholder analysis is whether partnering organizations, such as the private sector or ministries, would be willing to contribute a certain stipend depending on their ability to pay. NCDO should also explore possibilities with national and international funding agencies.

An important side note is that NCDO still largely depends on government subsidies. At least until 2015 the organization will receive a substantial financial contribution from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, NCDO needs to assess whether the new proposed role is in line with the activities the government is willing to subsidize in the coming two years. Moreover, to be able to survive the organization aspires to also attract some

government funding after 2015. To live up to this aspiration two key questions need to be posed. The first question is whether the facilitation of multi-stakeholder dialogue on global public goods fits the role minister Ploumen foresees for ngo's; to be a critical watchdog or an innovative partner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013a). In line with this question, NCDO should assess if the Ministry would be willing to financially contribute to the platform (for less than fifty percent), either from the Innovation Fund or from the Fund for Strategic Partnerships (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013b). The second key question is how this new role of NCDO to facilitate dialogue on global public goods in the Netherlands will influence, either positively or negatively, the willingness of the minister to support other NCDO activities after 2015.

Mediating skills

As mentioned above, NCDO has professionals who are skilled in guiding and facilitating group processes, such as trainings and networks. However, NCDO has less experience in facilitating complex multi-stakeholder processes. This might require additional skills. Brousseau and colleagues (2012) argue that a facilitator should be capable of collecting the preferences and underlying interests of various stakeholders involved. One can only make balanced choices if stakeholders' preferences around the global public issue are known and can make more efficient choices if the available solutions and their conditions for implementation are identified. Moreover, Forester (2006) argues that a facilitator should mediate a multi-stakeholder process instead of moderating it. "Moderating turns argument toward counter-argument, and so it encourages and risks escalating debate, [while] mediating turns parties toward their multiple and diverse interests, and so it encourages practical proposals to negotiate" (Forester, 2006, p. 452). It is essential for NCDO to assess whether its professionals have the skills to mediate between stakeholders with diverging interests. If the skills are insufficient NCDO might consider, following the example of the Energy Agreement for Sustainable Growth, to invite independent experts, who can assist with mediating the process or who can give their critical feedback and reflection on the specific thematic issue on the table.

Besides adequate mediating skills, it is essential that the multi-stakeholder dialogues are based on grounded knowledge and research. Although on paper the training and research team have to work together and in the near future will most likely be integrated into one department, in reality the cooperation between the two teams is less well developed. In order for NCDO to successfully mediate dialogue on sustainable use of global public goods, stronger cooperation between the two teams is essential.

Neutrality

As previously mentioned, next to expertise neutrality is an essential aspect of facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue. NCDO considers itself to be the spokespersons for global public goods in the Netherlands and works towards a more sustainable and responsible Dutch society. Based on this perspective, NCDO needs to assess whether it can be a neutral mediating partner between stakeholders who hold diverging interests that might not be in line with the standpoint of NCDO. Moreover, although NCDO aspires to be a more hybrid

organization, the coming two years it will still depend on government funding for a sizable part. How does this financial dependency on the government influence the neutrality of the position the organization holds?

A related question is whether external stakeholders perceive NCDO as a capable, neutral and independent party. Two issues seem to be at play here. The first concern is whether NCDO is known with external stakeholders and if known if it is assessed as a capable player. Although the organization has worked together with a large number of partners and contributed to a large number of projects and networks in the Netherlands, the organization has generally paid little attention to its visibility over the past years. This low visibility might negatively impact the reputation of NCDO.

Another point of attention is that independence and neutrality are essential for a neutral facilitator to not be judged on the actions of other participating stakeholders in the dialogue. The organization should be aware of the risk that a bad reputation of, for instance, Shell can reflect on NCDO and damage the credibility and reputation of the organization. The case study of WWF reveals this inherent risk of working together with less sustainably progressive partners. To mediate this risk it is important that NCDO clearly communicates its independent position in the dialogue process to the outer world.

Case study: Is WWF marrying the environmental sinners?

As an international non-governmental organization the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) cooperates with companies worldwide to help them improve their environmental performance. Examples include Volvo, IKEA, Coca-Cola, Avon, Shell and Monsanto. WWF sees business, trade and industry as having an important role to play in supporting conservation efforts and promoting greater environmental sustainability worldwide ([Website WWF](#)). However, critics do not agree with the WWF's approach of cooperating with the 'environmental sinners of the world' ([Quaile, 2012](#)). They believe that the WWF logo misleadingly boosts the green reputation of these companies and masks the environmental scandals of the respective companies.

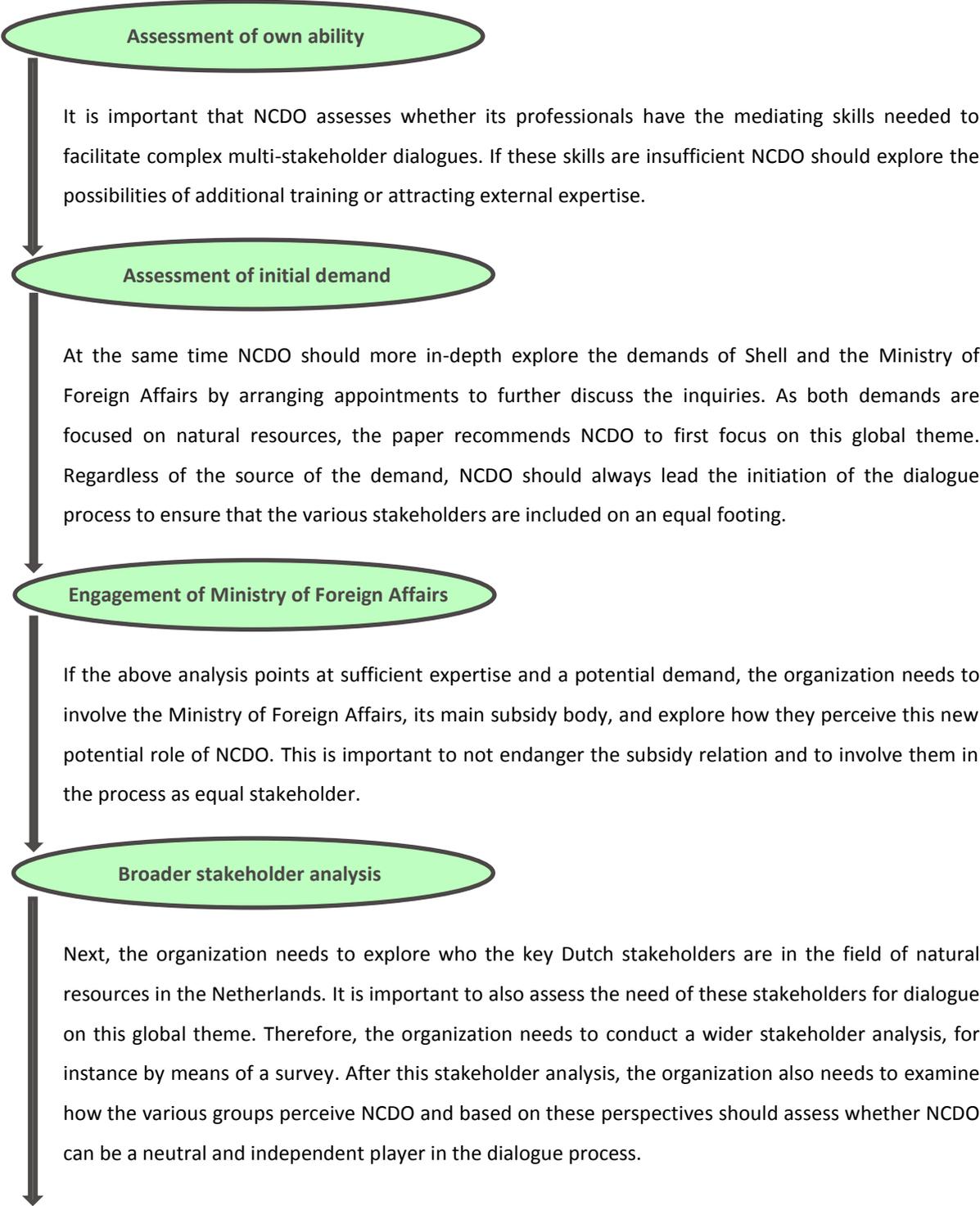


Concluding reflections and suggestions

This position paper put forward various legitimate reasons why NCDO should take up the role of facilitator and bring together the interests of relevant and sometimes opposed stakeholders in the Netherlands to protect natural resources, food or water as global public goods. Issues around these global public goods are more pressing than ever before and political action tends to fall behind, especially on stimulating sustainable production and consumption of these goods in the Netherlands. Multi-stakeholder dialogue is increasingly put forward in Dutch and international policy as an effective manner to address the complex issues around global public goods. Moreover, facilitating dialogue among multiple stakeholders provides NCDO with opportunities to attract alternative financing, which in times of increasing budget cuts is important for the organization to be able to endure. NCDO seems to be well equipped to facilitate dialogue among Dutch stakeholders on natural resources, food and water; it can feed the dialogue process with grounded knowledge on global issues and with

public opinion data, it has skills to facilitate group processes and as spin-in-the-web organization has a large number of networks and relevant partners in place.

However, to be able to successfully take up the role of facilitating dialogue among Dutch stakeholders on more sustainable use of global public goods certain steps and conditions need to critically be taken into consideration:



Selection procedure

Then, following the Energy Agreement on Sustainable Growth, NCDO should start the selection procedure. If the demand exceeds the number of available places in the dialogue platform, the organization is geared with the task to carefully select the stakeholders to be included. In this selection procedure the organization should ensure that the stakeholders form a good representation of the different interests at stake in the Netherlands and each represent a significant constituency. The advice is to start with a small number of stakeholders.

Launch of dialogue

If all the above conditions are met, NCDO as neutral facilitator needs to mediate the process in which participating Dutch stakeholders identify their issues and interests relating to natural resources. This should lead to a topic list, which will serve as the basis for constructive dialogue among Dutch stakeholders on more sustainable use of natural resources. If successful, the process could also be applied for global themes of food and water.

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