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GOVERNANCE NETWORKS FOR BELGIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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Introduction

Belgian development cooperation is undergoing multiple reforms towards more integrated actions intending to improve the effectiveness of its interventions. In line with international debates and engagements, more coherent approaches are promoted that include all different channels and actors and involve those best fitted to reach the objectives of Belgian foreign policy. In this context, the research group “Governance for Development” was asked by DGD to study two particular aspects: i) the trend towards a *comprehensive approach* that optimizes “horizontal” cooperation between Development, Diplomatic, Defense and Security and Justice actors (also known as 3D, 3D-LO or 3D - Rule of Law approach); ii) the implementation of an *integrated country policy* (or ICP) for development that optimizes “vertical” collaborations between all actors of Belgian development cooperation around a country intervention strategy.

This paper addresses the issue of governance networks as a conceptual framework to better understand these multiple reforms. It argues that the multiple reforms in Belgian development cooperation are illustrations of a broader evolution towards network modes of governance. The basic idea behind governance networks is that many of the contemporary challenges of our world demand the collaboration of diverse public, private and civil society actors. In other words, governments have no longer the monopoly on public policy and more and more multi-stakeholder partnerships are put in place to deal with societal challenges. This is also the case in the policy domain of development cooperation. The paper will illustrate how the concept of governance networks can help to understand success and failure of such multi-stakeholder partnerships in development policy. More in particular, it will be argued that their added value lays in increasing both effectiveness and legitimacy of development policy.

The paper consists of two parts. The first part briefly synthesizes the academic literature on governance networks. It presents historical, theoretical and empirical evidence and highlights the fact that although there is a large consensus that network modes of governance are on the rise, there is much less consensus on if and how they have positive effects. The second part presents the results of the survey carried out between June and September 2017 with Belgian actors (public, private and civil society) involved in Belgian foreign policy, from development sector to foreign affairs, trade, police, justice, etc. The survey focused on the perceptions, practices, and references of Belgian stakeholders on integrated approaches. Our analysis of the results is centered on a social network analysis that enables us to visualize collaboration and cooperation between different Belgian stakeholders as perceived by the survey respondents. Furthermore, we apply the conceptual framework on governance networks to better understand these different efforts to increase cooperation within the Belgian development sector. At the end of the paper some preliminary conclusions are presented.

Part 1: Evidence on governance networks for development

1. Why does it matter?

Governance networks will play a crucial role in the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. This is both an empirical and a normative statement. Empirically, it can be observed that national and international policy on sustainable development is no longer the monopoly of national governments: during the last decades policies affecting sustainable development around the globe have increasingly been designed and implemented by complex networks of state, societal and economic actors. From a normative point of view, it is argued that these multi-stakeholder networks are indeed a crucial condition in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda, to the extent that SDG 17 has been specifically dedicated to the revitalisation of such a global multi-stakeholder partnership for sustainable development. In other words, sustainable development has become a whole-of-society responsibility. Although there is a large consensus on the empirical question – governance networks are indeed on the rise – there is much less consensus on their effectiveness, i.e. the normative question on how they bring about positive change.

The contribution of governance networks to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda will depend on their capacity to understand sustainable development as a ‘wicked’ problem. Wicked or unstructured problems are characterized by conflict and complexity. Wicked problems are about conflicting worldviews because their solution is value-driven. As a consequence, there is not necessarily agreement on their solution: stakeholders all around the world have different and sometimes contradictory views on how sustainable development should be achieved and how it should look like. Secondly, even if consensus is achieved, these problems are so complex we are unable to know and predict how to bring about their solution. This makes them different from ‘structured’ or ‘tame’ problems: they demand a constant dialogue on how and what goals should be strived for. Thus, governance networks will bring positive change if they are able to support this open and continuous dialogue.

More in particular, it is argued that governance networks have a potential positive impact on the effectiveness and the democratic character of public policy. Through bringing multiple actors together to plan and implement policy, networks can mobilize support and ownership resulting in more legitimate policies on the one hand, while also increasing the effectiveness of policy implementation on the other hand.

2. What’s in a name?

2.1. The Concept

The **common-sense** idea behind governance networks is that many of the contemporary challenges of our world demand the collaboration of diverse public, private and civil society actors.

Of course, within the academic debate more definitional rigor is given. A **definition** that includes most of the features commonly ascribed to governance networks is the following:

[A governance network is a] relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors; who interact through negotiations; which take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary framework; that to a certain extent is self-regulating; and which contributes to the production of public purpose within or across particular policy areas (Sørensen and Torfing 2005: 203).

This definition illustrates the relevance of the concept for development policy. Increasingly aid is delivered by a diversity of interdependent actors, interacting within a regulative international framework (the 2030 Agenda) that to a certain extent is self-regulating, yet always in the shadow of national interests, and which contributes to the production of a public purpose, e.g. the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. And indeed, SDG 17 explicitly refers to this ‘network’ model when it argues that only a global partnership of state, private and civil society actors will be able to achieve the SDG’s.

2.2. States, markets, and networks

The idea of governance networks originated at the beginning of the nineties of the previous century. From a historical perspective we have seen three successive stages of public policy making since the end of the Second World War, each trying to solve the problems created by the previous way of governing society (Torfing and Sørensen 2014, Bevir 2013).

Until the late '70's public policy was the monopoly of **the State**. Based on Keynesian economics the state played a key role in the protection of the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens.

During the '80's, however, faith in the state was replaced by a stronger belief in **the market**. At that time, states were perceived as unresponsive and costly vehicles to meet the demands of the citizens. Based on neo-classical economics neoliberalism reduced the role of the public sector in favour of the private sector. But very soon it became clear that also the market has its disadvantages: amongst others, neoliberal reforms installed an atomisation and fragmentation of public policy into the hands of multiple actors and/or levels, which negatively affected both its effectiveness and democratic character.

Hence, from the '90's onwards, **governance networks** between state, private and societal actors were on the rise to turn back the negative effects of this fragmentation of public policy. In other words, they emerged as a way to deal with the shortcomings of market-led solutions to public policy, while also avoiding the pitfalls of the bureaucratic state model.

What is important to remember from this historical perspective is that **at the heart of the debate is the normative question on who – state, market, civil society – has the democratic legitimacy and capacity to translate the will of the citizens into public policy.**

Figure 2:
Partnering Spaces



Development Policy

Not unsurprisingly, development policy evolved along the same lines. Until the '70's the strong belief in the state was translated into the concept of the 'developmental state' while making reference to the Asian Tigers. From the 80's onwards, the shift from state-led to market-led development policy resulted in the Washington Consensus as propagated by the IMF and World Bank, and concretized in the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Within the development community, the third and last shift towards a network model of governance can be easily linked to the emergence of the good governance agenda in the beginning of the '90's, while SDG 17 now explicitly refers to this 'network' model when it argues for a global partnership.

2.3. Four caveats

When looking at this historical evolution, four caveats should be taken into account. First, governance networks are not new. For example, several European countries have a long tradition of neo-corporatism, in which social partners define public policy. In Belgium, for example, to date the 'Group of Ten' – representing trade unions and employer federations – illustrates how the dialogue between the social partners influences public policy.

Second, the spread of governance networks has of course not been at the same pace around the globe. Based on different contextual settings and political cultures there has been an uneven spread of governance networks (Sørensen and Torfing 2009: 237).

Third, the evolution from state to market to network governance does not necessarily mean that one governance mode has been entirely replaced by another. To the contrary, it is better to speak of a 'multi-level model', whereby state governance has been complemented by a second and third layer, respectively market and network governance. The result of this 'layering' are hybrid modes of governing, in which it is not always clear when a state, market or network logic is followed.

Fourth, there is an aspect of resistance. In many cases a discrepancy is observed between public policy as designed at the top and how it is actually implemented at the bottom of the administration. This is also true for this evolution towards network modes of governance. Although the importance of network models is on the rise and mainstreamed within public policy circles, this is not necessarily (already) reflected in practice, which still is very much working from within silos and does not challenge existing boundaries between policy areas and actors.

In sum, perhaps the best way to describe current governance of public policy is that the **bureaucratic state is still at the centre of much public policy, although market mechanisms have been mainstreamed throughout public policy, whereas the structural inclusion of citizens and civil society in public policy is still in its infancy.**

Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations

Within the particular context of fragile and conflict-affected situations modes of network governance have been a particular challenge. Because of sometimes weak state capacity and/or legitimacy new forms of hybrid governance emerge: increasingly we understand that governance and development in such places is regulated by continuous changing coalitions of state, private and societal actors on the local, national, regional and international level (donors and aid policy becoming part of these hybrid governance networks).

2.4. The political economy of networks

From a theoretical point of view, we can further elaborate on the reasons why network governance has emerged. In the literature four broad explanations are given (Sørensen and Torfing 2009). State, private and societal actors engage in network governance because:

- It is in their **self-interest** to do so: since the achievement of their own interests depends upon the actions of others it is a rational decision to increase interactions and tap into this interdependency (rational choice).
- They are forced to do because of emerging '**wicked problems**': more and more the world is confronted with so-called 'wicked problems', i.e. messy problems that demand the cooperation of a variety of stakeholders to be solved (functionalism).
- It is the **right thing** to do: based on a progressive understanding of what is needed for good public policy, institutional norms change in favour of modes of networked governance (institutionalism).
- They are forced by **politics**: networks are a top-down political response and are used by the state to get back control over public policy (post-structuralism).

This theoretical perspective is important because in many cases diverging perceptions about if and how governance networks are a 'bad' or a 'good' thing can be reduced to disagreement about the motivations behind the creation of the governance networks.

3. What is called for?

There is no doubt about the fact that governance networks have flourished during the last decades. They have come in different types and forms: "self-grown from below or mandated and designed from above; formal or informal; intra- or inter-organizational; open or closed; tightly knit or loosely coupled; short- or long-lived; sector-specific or society-wide; preoccupied either with policy formulation or policy implementation" (Sørensen and Torfing 2009: 231).

One particular way to categorize all these different typologies of networks is to focus on how and by who the network is managed. This is called **meta-governance** and three broad ideal-types of meta-governance can be differentiated (Provan and Kenis 2008):

- **Participant-governed networks**: the network is decentralized and collectively self-governed by its members.
- **Lead Organisation-governed networks**: most major network-level activities and key decisions are coordinated through and by a single participating member, acting as a lead organization.

- **Network Administrative Organisation:** a separate administrative entity is set up specifically to govern the network and its activities.

The crucial issue is of course if governance networks actually work. When trying to answer this question two recurrent dimensions are identified by the literature: effectiveness and legitimacy.

3.1. Effectiveness

There are several good reasons why network effectiveness is difficult to measure with orthodox measures of efficiency (cost-efficiency) and goal-attainment (effectiveness). Governance networks have mainly (Sørensen and Torfing 2009):

- Intangible outputs (joint analysis, common values, more coordination);
- Dispersed outputs (for different actors, at different places);
- Non-attributable outputs (the network is only one of multiple causal relations);
- Dynamic goals (shifting during negotiation process);
- Multiple goals (different actors hold different objectives); and
- Vague and diffuse goals (no blueprint at the beginning of process).

A better way to approach network effectiveness is to assess their added value vis-à-vis other forms of governance (both state and market led). From this perspective, network effectiveness is much more assessed in terms of learning and innovation.

Sørensen and Torfing (2009: 242) systematized evidence on the added value of networks through structuring it according to the different successive phases of the public policy circle. In their view, governance networks are effective when they:

- Produce a clear and **well-informed understanding** of the often complex and cross-cutting policy problems and policy opportunities at hand;
- Generate innovative, proactive and yet feasible **policy options** that match the joint perception of the problems and challenges facing the network actors;
- Reach joint **policy decisions** that go beyond the least common denominator while avoiding excessive costs and unwarranted cost shifting;
- Ensure a relatively smooth **policy implementation** based on a continuous coordination and a high degree of legitimacy and programme responsibility among all the relevant and affected actors, including target groups, client advocacy groups, stake-holder organizations, public administrators and politicians;
- Provide a flexible **adjustment of policy solutions** and public services in the face of changing demands, conditions and preferences;
- Create favorable conditions for **future cooperation** through cognitive, strategic and institutional learning that construct common frameworks, spur the development of interdependency and build mutual trust.

As mentioned, networks are in particular effective when they facilitate learning. Klijn and Koppenjan (2016), for example, further elaborated on this. They start from the assumption that networks will be effective when they are able to deal with three types of complexity:

- **Substantive complexity** stems from the fact that different network actors have different perceptions on the problem, the solution and who should solve the problem.
- **Strategic complexity** arises because of the complex process of interaction that is actually taking place between network partners.
- **Institutional complexity** stems from the fact that all actors join the network with different institutional rules, procedures and norms.

Thus, effective networks should be able to initiate learning on all three levels.

- **Cognitive learning:** measured by joint image building (consensus building, frame alignment, negotiated knowledge) and goal intertwinement between the different actors.
- **Strategic learning:** focuses on process criteria, such as duration, transaction costs, process quality, inclusiveness and the democratic character of the process.
- **Institutional learning:** ultimately results in long-term relationships, perceptions, institutional rules and a higher level of trust between network actors.

In sum, network effectiveness is less about measurable targets or results, and more about increasing the quality of the process leading to these results. In order to do so, governance networks should be assessed on the basis of their capability to facilitate dialogue, consensus, learning, innovation, and ultimately, increased trust between its members.

This approach is also interesting from another point of view: if public policy does not need one of these suggested added values of network governance, there is probably also no need to create or support a network. In other words, the criteria can also be used to decide when not to use a governance network approach.

3.2. Legitimacy

Next to its effectiveness, network legitimacy is a crucial second pillar to assess failure and success of network governance. The relationship between network governance and existing forms of traditional representative democracy is not unambiguous. Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) differentiate between four broad positions.

- **Incompatibility:** Governance networks challenge legitimacy and decision rules of representative democratic institutions (= lobby governance).
- **Complementarity:** Governance networks provide democratic institutions with additional linkages to society (= participatory governance).
- **Transitional:** Governance networks offer greater flexibility and efficiency than representative democratic institutions; they will increase as the primary mode of societal decision-making, at the expense of representative democratic institutions (= network governance).
- **Instrumental:** Governance networks provide a means for representative democratic institutions to increase their authority in the face of societal complexity (= instrumental governance).

Only the future will show how this relationship will evolve, but there is a general consensus that governance networks can have both positive and negative effects on the democratic character of the public policy (Sørensen and Torfing 2005: 228):

Positive Effects	Negative Effects
• Establish vertical link between top-down representative and bottom-up participatory democracy • Improve problem-solving through bottom-up participation and negotiated deliberation • Produce just policies through inclusion of affected actors • Serve as a medium for political empowerment • Establish bridges of communication • Widen the scope of political contestation • Transform antagonistic relations into agonistic ones	• Co-optation and instrumentalisation • Lack of publicity and transparency • Reduction of the potential for democratic control and accountability • Atomization and fragmentation of public policy • Unequal patterns of political inclusion, influence and empower • Reduction of the scope of political contestation through the development of strong hegemonic discourses

In order to minimize potential negative effects while simultaneously stimulating potential positive impact on the democratic character of public policy, four basic principles can give guidance to increase the legitimacy of governance networks (Sørensen and Torfing 2009: 244).

- Political monitoring: elected politicians should monitor governance networks, in order to guarantee the link with representative democratic institutions.
- Representative membership: members should be representative for the groups and organizations they claim to represent.
- Principle of affectedness: the network should be accountable to the citizens affected by the decisions of the network, they should have the possibility to publicly contest network actions and enter into dialogue with the network.
- Democratic rules and norms: ensuring the broad inclusion of relevant and affected actors, procedural fairness, and respect among actors perceiving one another as legitimate adversaries rather than enemies.

Part 2: The Belgian network

1. The Survey

A survey was commissioned by the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) to collect perceptions and experiences from Belgian stakeholders with respect to two concrete initiatives that aim at increasing the effectiveness of Belgian development cooperation through the use of more networked modes of governance. A first initiative has been the reflection on integrated country approaches: is it desirable and feasible to integrate/align all interventions of Belgian development actors in a particular partner country around a common country strategy? Second, there was also the reflection on a more comprehensive approach, in which further coordination between Belgian development actors and other relevant policy areas (Diplomacy, Defence, Migration, Trade, etc.) is envisaged.

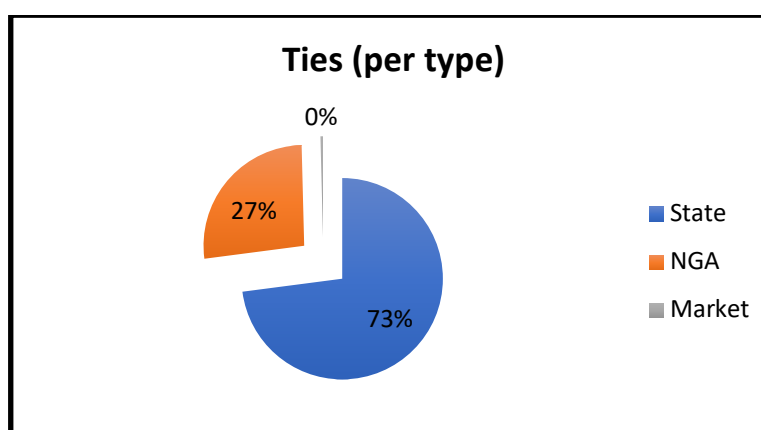
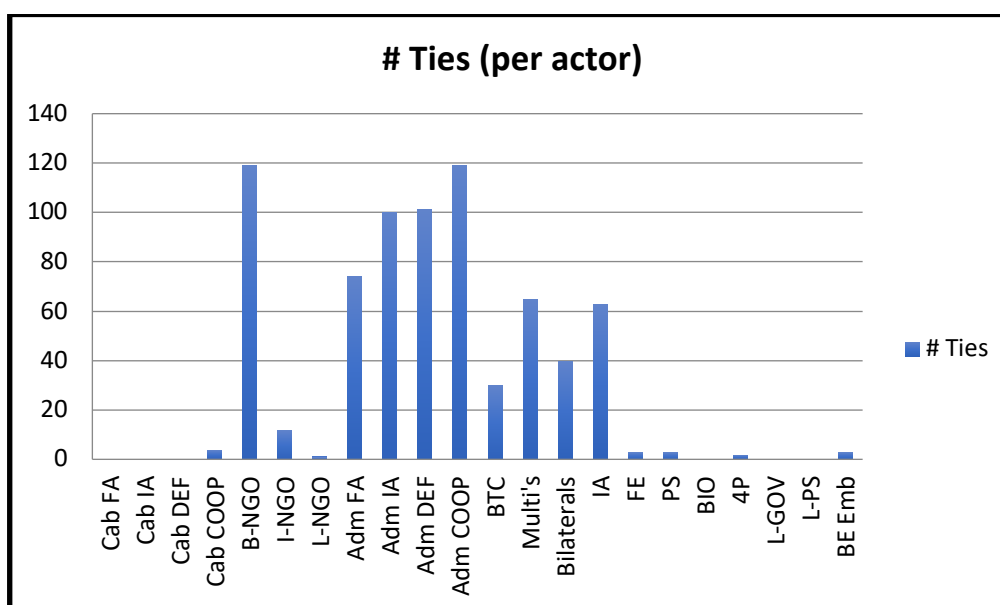
This section presents a graphic visualisation of the survey responses on one particular question: *can you share relevant experiences that can contribute to an integrated country approach or comprehensive approach?* This question gave us information on existing experiences of different kinds of networks between different kinds of actors for different kinds of purposes. In other words, it gave us information about the kind of networks that currently exist. However, it does not enable us to make an exhaustive graph of all existing networks (therefore, the question should have been to list all possible existing networks). Our aim was to focus more specifically on those networks that are perceived as relevant examples for a more integrated and comprehensive approach of Belgian development policy. This is what the network does visualize: the existing networks that are perceived by the survey respondents as relevant experiences for a more comprehensive and integrated approach.

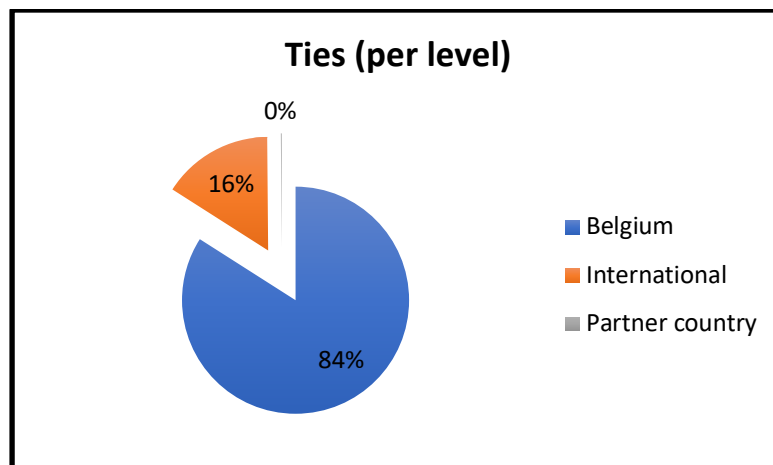
In order to arrive at our network visualisation N-Vivo software was first used to code and categorize the answers. As already mentioned, the respondents described their experiences with existing networks of actors. Through coding of the answers, we were able to categorize all mentioned actors into 16 different typologies. In addition, we added 6 extra actors: although they were not mentioned in the survey results, we identified them as important stakeholders, based on our analytical framework. It concerns the Cabinet of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, and Defence, BIO, the administration of the partner country, and the private sector in the partner country. This total of 22 types of actors could be further subdivided into three broad categories (state, market and non-governmental actors - NGA) and levels (Belgium, international or partner country actors). The table in below lists all 22 types: their full name, their label (as used in the graph), the number of times they were mentioned (their importance in the network), their category (state, market or civil society actor), and their level (Belgian, international or partner country actor).

Id	Full Name	Abbr.	# Ties	Type	Level
1	Cabinet Foreign Affairs	Cab FA	0	State	Belgium
2	Cabinet Internal Affairs	Cab IA	0	State	Belgium
3	Cabinet Defence	Cab DEF	0	State	Belgium
4	Cabinet Cooperation	Cab COOP	4	State	Belgium
5	Belgian NGO	B-NGO	119	NGA	Belgium
6	International NGO	I-NGO	12	NGA	International
7	Local NGO	L-NGO	1	NGA	Partner country
8	Administration Foreign Affairs	Adm FA	74	State	Belgium
9	Administration Internal Affairs	Adm IA	100	State	Belgium
10	Administration Defence	Adm DEF	101	State	Belgium
11	Administration Cooperation	Adm COOP	119	State	Belgium
12	Belgian Development Agency	BTC	30	State	Belgium
13	Multilateral institutions	Multi's	65	State	International
14	Bilateral donors	Bilaterals	40	State	International

15	Institutional Actors	IA	63	NGA	Belgium
16	Federated Entities	FE	3	State	Belgium
17	Private Sector	PS	3	Market	Belgium
18	Belgian Investment Company	BIO	0	Market	Belgium
19	4th Pillar Initiatives	4P	2	NGA	Belgium
20	Local Administration	L-GOV	0	State	Partner country
21	Local Private Sector	L-PS	0	Market	Partner country
22	Belgian Embassy	BE Emb	3	State	Belgium
TOTAL TIES			739		

In addition, three charts illustrate more in detail the importance of the actors within the network. This is based on their degree, i.e. the sum of all ties of a particular actor. In other words, a higher degree means that an actor has more incoming and outgoing links with other actors, which is a measure for the importance of that actor in the network. The first graph gives the number of ties for all 22 categories of actors, the second and third paragraph gives percentages for the three broad categories (state, market or civil society actor) and levels (Belgian, international or partner country actor).

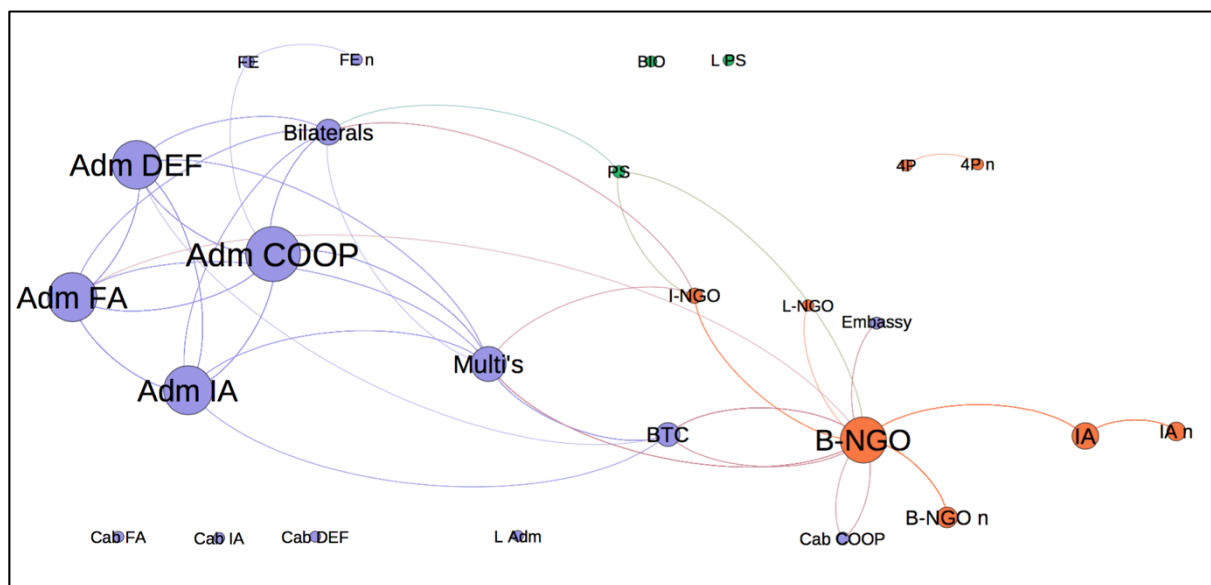




2. Findings

2.1. The network

Once we coded all answers, Gephi software was used to visualize the network. A network consists of nodes (actors – circles) and edges (ties – lines).



Three basic aspects make it easy to start the interpretation of the network. First, the colour of the circles refers to three broad categories of actors, i.e. state (purple), private (green), and civil society (orange) actors. Second, the size of the circle explains the importance of the actor, i.e. the size of the circle relates to the number of incoming and outgoing edges (or links). In other words, a larger circle means that the actor is more connected to other actors in the network; a smaller circle explains the actor is less connected. Second, the distance between nodes (actors) explains the strength of ties between different actors, i.e. the stronger the relationship between two actors, the closer they are to each other. In other words, actors with strong ties form clusters, while actors with weaker ties are pushed away from each other.

Finally, one particularity is important to mention. For four actors – Belgian NGOs (B-NGO), Institutional Actors (IA), the federated entities (FE), and 4th pillar initiatives (4P) – we added a second node (combination of 'name' + n). This is because these four groups of actors also referred to internal ties between group members, e.g. Belgian NGOs working together (tie between 'B-NGO' and 'B-NGO n') or

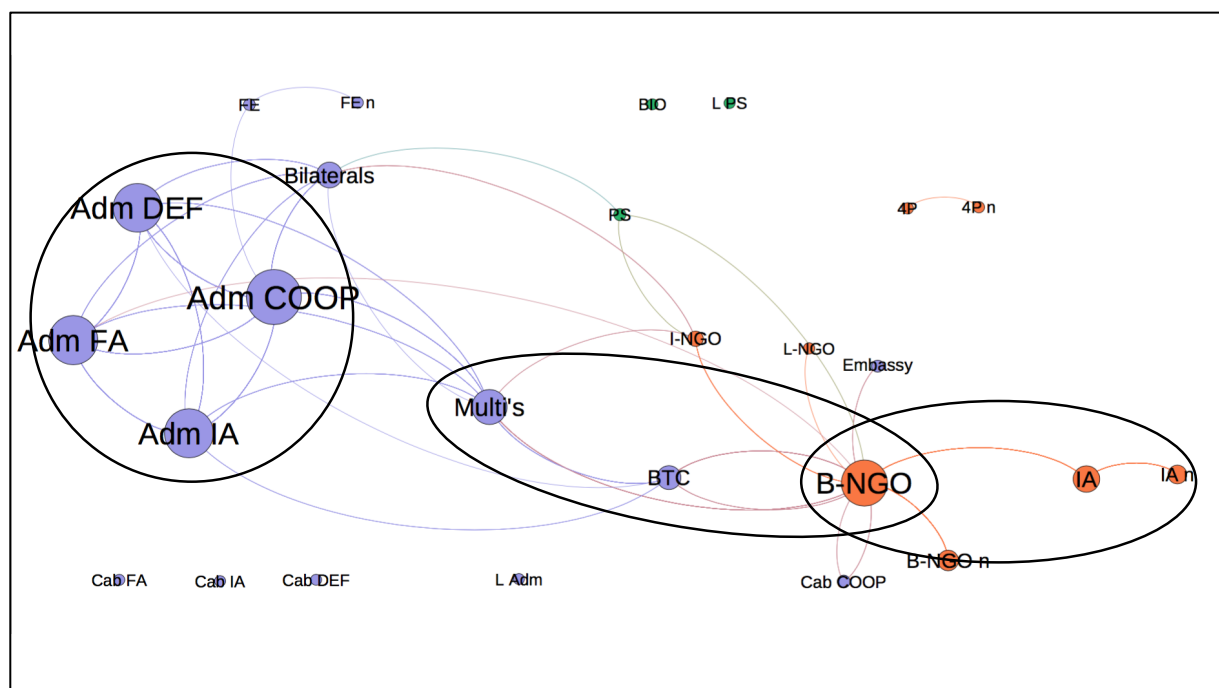
Institutional Actors working together (tie between 'IA' and 'IA n'). In other words, by adding these additional nodes it was also possible to visualize internal collaboration within these groups.

2.2. State, private, and civil society actors

The categorization into state, private and civil society actors is to a certain extent arbitrary. State actors (purple) regroup the following actors: the different cabinets and administrations on the Belgian level, federated Belgian entities, other bilateral and multilateral actors (being or representing state actors), BTC (as the Belgian Development Agency), the Embassy (representing the Belgian state in the partner country) and the local administration (representing the state in the partner country). Civil society actors (orange) refer to Belgian NGO's and IA's (the so-called Non-Governmental Actors – NGAs), Local NGO and civil society organizations, 4th pillar initiatives, International NGO's and civil society organizations. Lastly, private sector actors (green) regroup both Belgian as partner country private sector actors, and also BIO (as the Belgian Investment Company for Developing countries).

It is immediately clear that certain actors do not easily fit the categorization. For example, it could be argued that the Institutional Actors (IAs) do not belong to the civil society stricto sensu, but on the other hand, it is also difficult to categorize them as state actors, since they have a certain autonomy and are not part of the state administration. Similar arguments can be made on the mixed or hybrid character of BTC and BIO. However, the categorization does give an idea of how the three broad categories are represented in the survey responses.

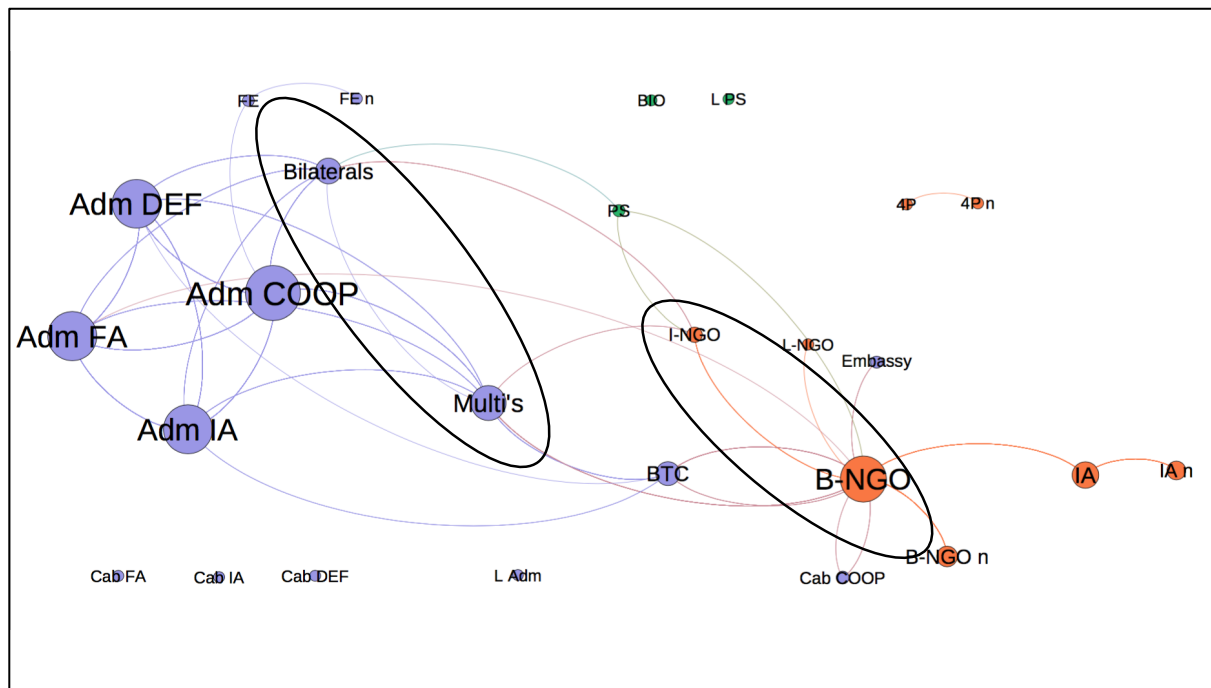
2.3. Belgian links



When further analysing the network graph three particular Belgian network experiences come at the foreground. First, on the left, close interactions between the different state administrations visualize experiences with respect to the comprehensive approach. It is clear that this is a state-centred network, with only different administrations involved. Second, on the right, close interactions between B-NGOs and IAs reflect the Joint Context Analysis (JCA) and Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) exercises that have been imposed in preparation of new funding by the Belgian government. This reflects a civil-society centred network, with dense interactions between NGOs and IAs, and within both groups. Third, in the middle an interesting network can be observed: the Belgian Fund for Food Security (BFFS). This illustrates a network that brings together different types of actors, i.e. BTC (as the executive branch of

Belgian bilateral development cooperation), Belgian NGO's and multilateral organisations. Indeed, the BFFS was highly cited as an innovative network approach bringing together complementary partners from different backgrounds with a real added value.

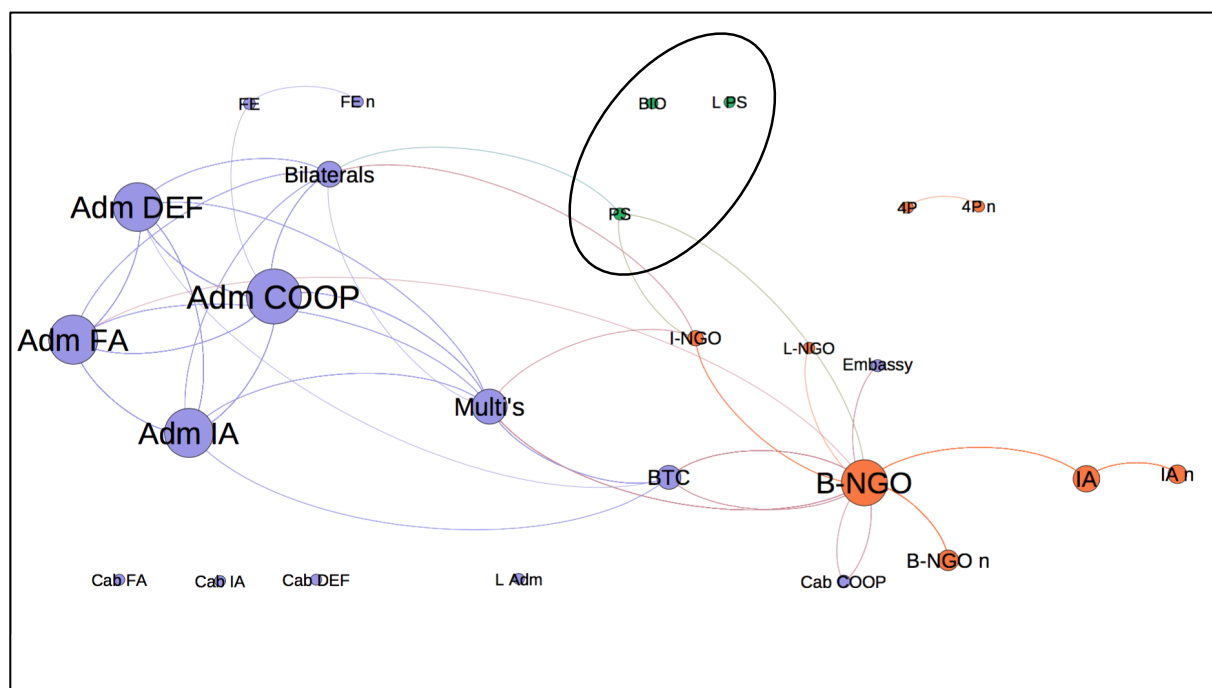
2.4. Two international links



A second observation is that Belgian actors do search for linking up with international actors. On the one hand Belgian state actors defined alignment with other bilateral and multilateral donors as a priority, more in particular within the EU framework.

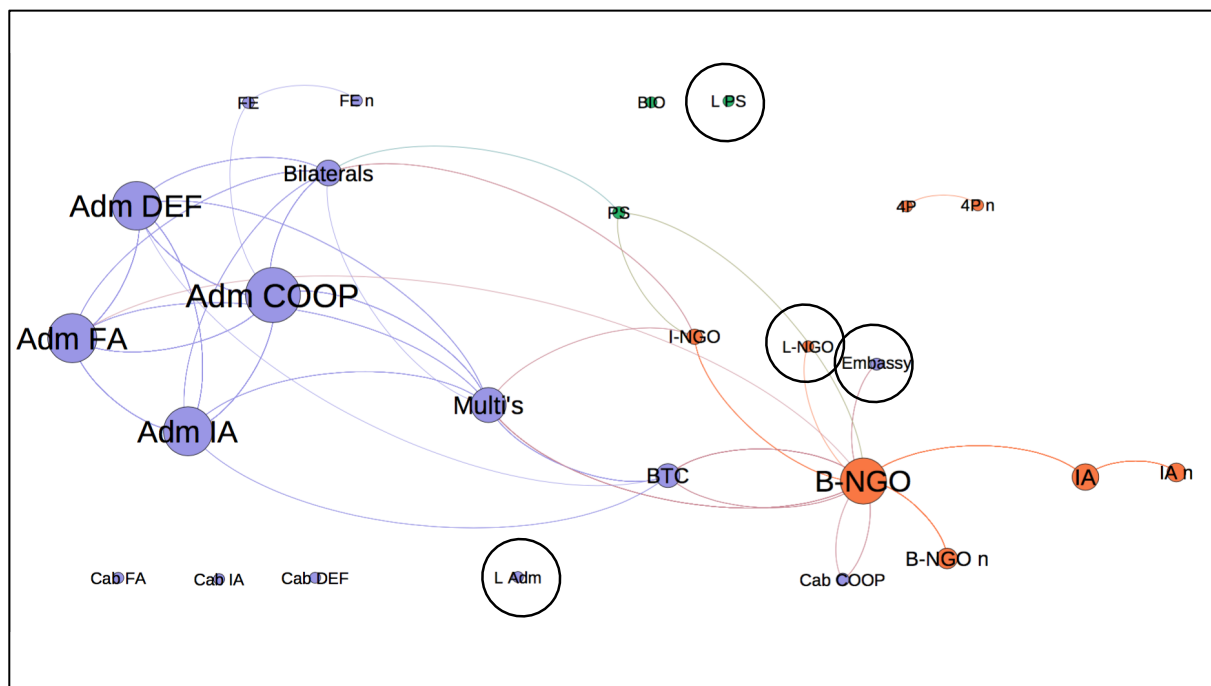
Another international link was the interaction between Belgian NGO's and their international families (e.g. Oxfam, Red Cross, etc.). For Belgian NGOs that are member of such an international family, this interaction is highly appreciated. Also, other civil society organizations see an added value in linking up with similar or umbrella organisations on the international level.

2.5. Absent Market



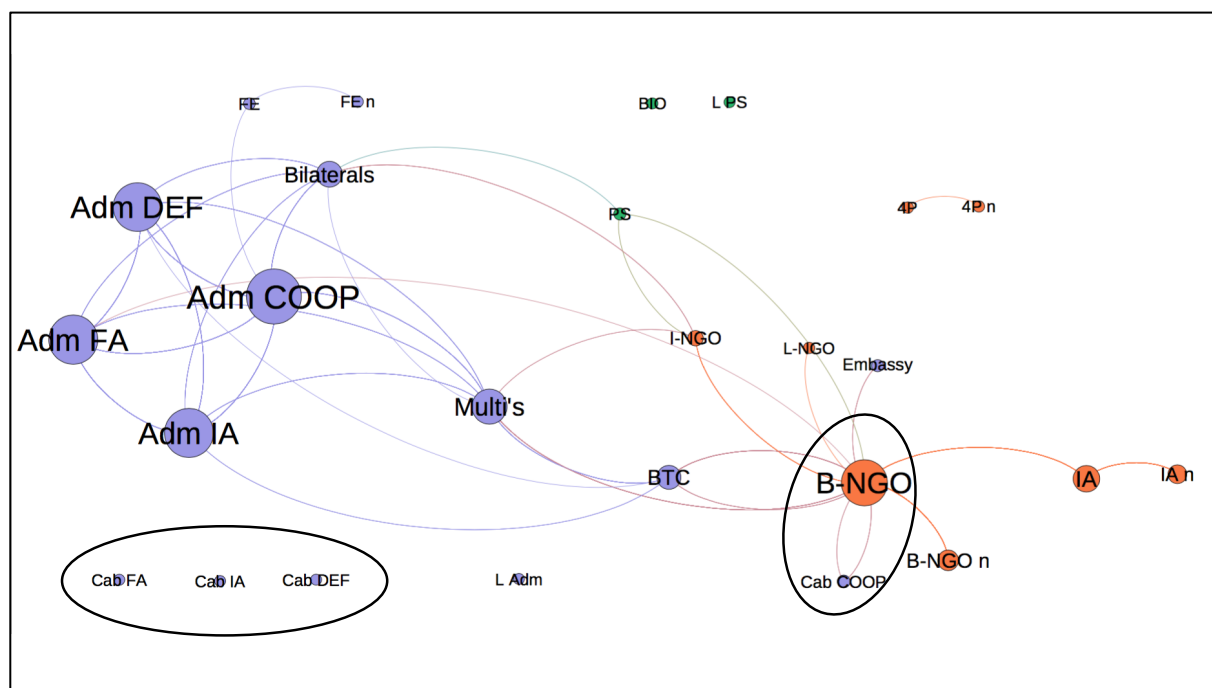
The private sector was rarely mentioned. However, this should be nuanced. Partly this is due because private actors were underrepresented among the survey respondents. But on the other hand, it also reflects the fact that other actors – both state and civil society – did not have the private sector in mind when they listed experiences of existing networks that could contribute to a more integrated or comprehensive approach for the Belgian development cooperation. On the one hand, this can be explained by the fact that the comprehensive approach for most is strictly defined as a 3D policy (Development, Diplomacy, Defence) excluding trade policies. On the other hand, when it concerns a more integrated approach among development actors both state and civil society actors mentioned almost no collaborative experiences with private actors. For example, BIO was not mentioned once, and there was only one Belgian NGO that shared an experience with working together with private sector actors. Also the local private sector in the partner countries was not mentioned in the survey answers.

2.6. Absent local links



Another interesting observation is that local partners – i.e. state, private and civil society actors in the partner countries of Belgian development cooperation – are not well connected to the network. For example, actors from the Belgian administrations stressed the importance of alignment with other donor and multilateral policies, yet alignment with national policies of the partner country was not mentioned once (somehow related to this is the observation that interaction with the Belgian Embassies was much less highlighted than interaction between the different administrative Head Quarters in Brussels). Similar, and perhaps more surprising, also Belgian NGOs only mentioned very few times their linkages with their local counter parts. Furthermore, also the local private sector was also not mentioned once. As such, the survey and this network analysis seems to support the general reflection that existing efforts to support a more comprehensive and integrated approach for development cooperation is limited to a Belgo-Belge exercise, or at least, has a blind spot for local alignment with policies of the partner country.

2.7. Political links

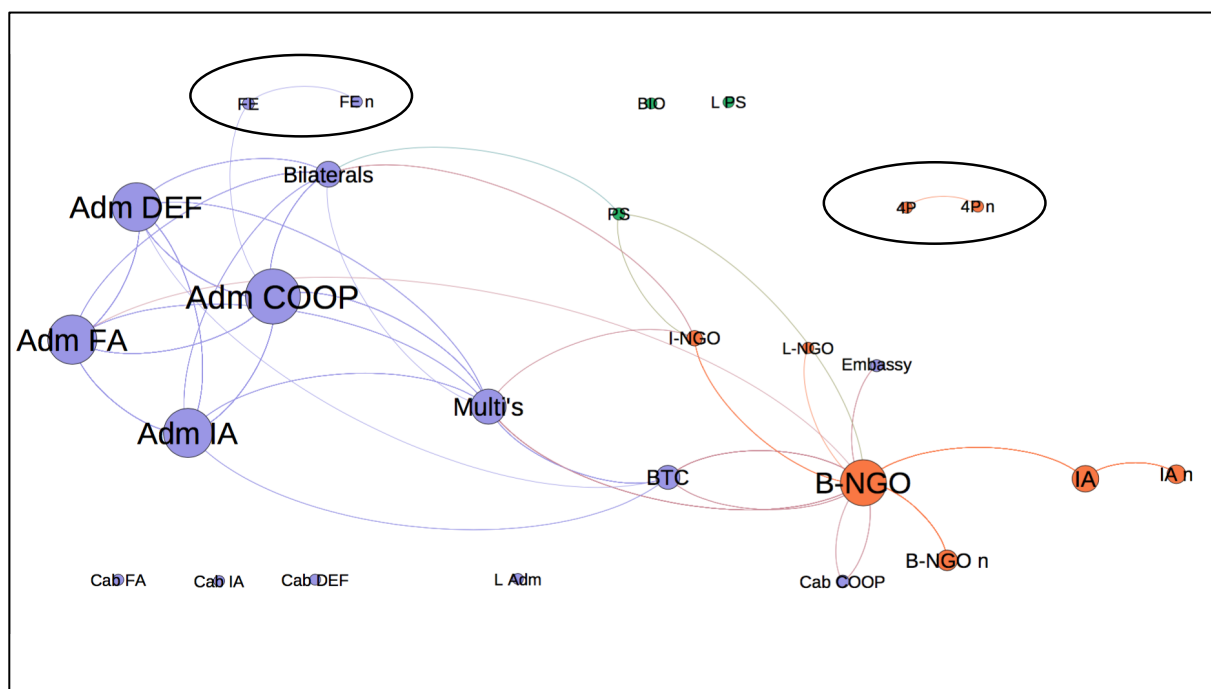


An interesting aspect of the network is the fact that almost no links were mentioned with political actors, translated into linkages to the different Belgian Ministers and their Cabinets. This seems to indicate that existing efforts for a more comprehensive and integrated approach of Belgian development policy has been focusing on the operational and technical level of policy implementation, while neglecting (i) the more strategic level of policy design – on the level of Ministers – and (ii) the potential role of political actors while implementing policy.

With respect to the first issue, policy design, it is observed that to date there is no clear policy on an integrated country approach or any other form of integrated approach. On the other hand, the recently adopted strategy note on the comprehensive approach is a step in the good direction and will hopefully offer a more strategic framework that can guide policy implementation in the future (the survey was conducted before the new strategy note was adopted).

Secondly, the potential role of political actors in policy implementation is only briefly mentioned. Two particular cases were reported. One positive case in which Belgian civil society actors and the Minister of Development Cooperation were able to make complementary statements on political issues in Palestine, which increased the effectiveness and the coherence of Belgian involvement. On the other hand, the case of Burundi was reported as one where Belgian political statements were sometimes counterproductive for the work of Belgian NGOs in Burundi. Despite the success or failure, both cases illustrate the potential important role of Belgian political actors, not only in designing policies that increase integration, comprehensiveness and coherence, but also in the actual implementation of policy on the field.

2.8. Satellite links



Finally, we can briefly mention two other Belgian ‘satellite’ links that are not strongly connected to the overall network. The first one is the federated entities, which were not mentioned once by the federal counter parts, but indicated themselves that there are indeed platforms in which federal and federated entities have formal consultations. The second one is the so-called 4th Pillar initiatives, assembling all kinds of small voluntary initiatives for development cooperation. They interact amongst each other, primarily through the ‘4th Pillar Steunpunt’, but are isolated from the rest of the network.

Conclusions

1. Network Structure

If we solely focus on the structural features of the network we can already briefly mention three core reflections. A first aspect is **homophily**. In social network analysis (SNA) homophily refers to the tendency of individuals or organizations to associate and bond with similar others. It is possible to argue that in the Belgian network there is indeed a high degree of homophily: NGOs work most closely together with NGOs, government agencies work most closely with other government actors, and so on. In addition, links between unsimilar organizations are less present (links between state, civil society and private sector actors). In other words, the silos are still very much a reality.

Second, and as a consequence of the foregoing, there are several '**structural holes**' in the network. A structural hole (Burt 2001) means that actors or groups of actors with complementary information or resources are not linked within the network. In other words, reducing this gap between these actors or group of actors can be highly beneficial because it will make available new information or resources that were not already present for both actors or groups of actors before. When translated to the Belgian network, this means that most potential lays in bridging the gaps between unsimilar and not yet linked actors or groups of actors. The BFFS has been a clear example that exactly aimed at bridging these structural holes between NGO's, Belgian bilateral cooperation, and multilateral organisations.

Another way to reflect on the network structure is in terms of social capital, while differentiating between **bonding, bridging and linking social capital** (Vervisch 2010). While bonding social capital refers to strong bonds with similar actors (e.g. interaction between NGO's or interaction between government agencies), bridging social capital refers to building bridges towards more unsimilar actors (e.g. interaction between NGOs and government agencies). Whereas both bonding and bridging social capital illustrate horizontal relations between more or less equivalent partners, linking social capital refers to vertical relationships with authority structures. This reflects the importance of political links as mentioned in the previous section. Even if bonds between NGO's, government agencies and private sector actors are reinforced, and even if strong bridges between these different groups have been created, it remains crucial to link up to the political level in order to have political ownership and buy-in to realize the desired policy changes. From this perspective, it is always crucial to keep in mind the need for a balanced network and strengthening both bonding, bridging and linking social capital.

2. Network Governance

One step further is to evaluate the Belgian case against the two basic dimensions that the literature on governance networks offers us, i.e. do these networks increase the effectiveness and democratic legitimacy of public policy?

We focus on the three Belgian cases that were mentioned most by survey respondents, i.e. the comprehensive approach, the JCAs and JSFs, and the BFFS. We rely on the framework offered by Sørensen and Torfing (2017: 832) to describe their potential effects on effectiveness and legitimacy. This framework asks three basic questions: who should be involved, what should they do, and what impact should be achieved to increase effectiveness and legitimacy. In below we give a brief explorative description of the three Belgian cases according to these questions.

Q1	EFFECTIVENESS	LEGITIMACY
WHO	Complementary Actors	Affected Actors
C.A.	Complementarity limited to Government Actors (GA), common goals still to be defined, clear willingness	Intention to involve broader stakeholders (Non-Government Actors NGA, universities), absent link with affected constituencies

JCA / JSF	Complementarity limited to NGA, broad list of goals, mixed willingness (top-down)	Consultation of affected constituencies (limited to local NGA partners), but no priority
BFFS	Complementarity between GA, NGA, and international agencies, clearly defined common goal, higher willingness (bottom-up)	Both local GA and NGA are involved as affected constituencies

Q2	EFFECTIVENESS	LEGITIMACY
WHAT	Exchange, pool, coordinate resources	Mobilize support
C.A.	Too early, but focus on information sharing, negative coordination, alignment (national/international, less focus on innovation)	Too early to assess, but no intention to mobilize support from affected constituencies (belgo-belge)
JCA / JSF	Information sharing, negative coordination, more mapping than innovation, learning fund	Consultation of affected constituencies (limited to local partners, belgo-belge)
BFFS	Pooling resources, positive coordination, sometimes higher transaction costs / duration	Mobilize support through local GA and NGA

Q3	EFFECTIVENESS	LEGITIMACY
IMPACT	Aligned policies	Legitimate policies
C.A.	Too early to assess	Too early to assess (but strengthening legitimacy through representative / participatory democracy no priority)
JCA / JSF	Minimal alignment	Minimal effect (focus exercise was Belgo-Belge)
BFFS	Aligned policies and service provision through joint programming	Potential effect by bringing GA and NGA together

The main conclusion for all three cases is the fact that they are biased towards increasing effectiveness. The focus is on how to increase the effectiveness of policy through multi-stakeholder partnerships. However, the fact that both the CA and the JCA/JSF only take advantage of a limited complementarity of actors within their proper silo's (government agencies versus non-governmental actors) resonates with the earlier observation that there is a high degree of homophily in the network. Only the BFFS was able to bridge between governmental, non-governmental and multilateral actors.

In addition, legitimacy is a blind spot. Too a much lesser extent the three cases have been designed to increase legitimacy and the democratic character of decision-making and implementation. More in particular, it seems that the principle of affectedness – affected constituencies should be able to influence policies that shape their lives – has not been a priority and/or is difficult to achieve. Furthermore, the cases resonate with the more general fact that multi-stakeholder partnerships are more easily promoted as vehicles to increase effective implementation once policy has been decided, rather than using them to create a political platform for open dialogue to define what policies should be implemented. In such cases, the added value of network modes of governance is limited to increasing effectiveness with taking much less into account legitimacy aspects public policy.

This paper is part of a series that includes two other papers (on a comprehensive approach and on an integrated country policy for Belgian development cooperation – see our website: <https://www.governance4development.org>) and is the first step of a research process, which lays the theoretical bases and draws preliminary lessons for our future work. In particular, a green paper is expected at the end of the project (end 2018) which will provide with more operational elements (principles, indicators, and actions) related to the development and implementation of a comprehensive approach within Belgian development cooperation.

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