Engaging the private sector in public-private partnerships in commodity value chains through corporate communication channels

Imme Ruarus
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Evaluator: Per-Anders Langendahl
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IMME RUARUS

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Abstract

Over the past decades the traditional development agenda of a donor-beneficiary model has been replaced by one built on partnerships with mutual benefits. In recent years the paradigms of ‘aid effectiveness’ and ‘development effectiveness’, characterized by a set of new and emerging actors that play an important role in development and a renewed focus on economic growth, have emerged. One of the actors that is becoming more important is the private sector, as they increasingly have the opportunity to take on a new profound role as development driver. While there has been a trend of decreasing government spending for development aid, the private sector has considerable financial assets at their disposal. However, the financial contribution of the private sector in sectors related to the Sustainable Development Goals remains low. Public-private partnerships are seen as a way that can attract the private sector in doing investments in sustainable development. Especially for global agri-food chains, partnerships have the ambition to bring about sustainable change. In order to attract the private sector in such collaborations, an understanding of their information needs regarding public-private partnerships and sustainability is necessary. The focus of this research was to explain those information needs. As part of a case study research, interviews with the private sector were conducted. To gain additional insights, web testing tasks were conducted with the same interviewees. It is found that the two main reasons to join in a partnership for the private partners of this case study are because it is a platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange. Understanding these motivations helps to articulate a message that is seen as valuable. Next, with regard to sustainability interests, these mainly fall under the three pillars of sustainability – economic, environmental, social – but it was also found that the companies can use information on traceability and connecting their work to the Sustainable Development Goals as ways to communicate about their sustainability efforts. Relating this to the findings on information needs and how to communicate about such topics, the main findings suggest that the information should be concrete, result-oriented and proof of impact. In general, the information needs of the private sector all to less or more extent have to do with continuation of the business, while also interest is shown for making sustainability a viable business case and being a thought leader on sustainability topics. These findings are parallel to the dominant paradigms of development effectiveness and aid effectiveness that continue to shape the agenda on development collaboration.

Keywords: Development effectiveness, creating shared value, stakeholder engagement, sustainable development.

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Summary

Over the past decades development aid has changed from a model that has a clear donor and beneficiary, towards a model that is built on partnerships. This new model is called ‘development effectiveness’. In this model, several new actors are starting to play an important role, and also there is a renewed focus on economic growth. One of these new actors is the private sector. The private sector, or the business sector, has significant financial capital that they can invest in development projects. At the same time the financial capital that the public sector, or governments, can invest in development projects worldwide is decreasing. At this moment the amount of money that the private sector invests in projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals is still low. In order to increase the amount of investment made by the private sector, public-private partnerships can play an important role. Especially in international supply chains of agricultural commodities partnerships can greatly improve how sustainable they are. However, to attract private partners in collaborations for sustainable development, their information needs regarding public-private partnerships and sustainability must be understood. This case study research aim to explain what information needs regarding these topics private partners have and also how they want to receive this information. Data was collected through qualitative interviews and web testing tasks. It is found that the private partners of this case study primarily join in a partnership because it is a platform for collaborations and for knowledge exchange. Understanding these motivations helps to create a message that is seen as valuable. Next, with regard sustainability interests, these mainly fall under the three commonly used fields of sustainability, which are economic, environmental and social. However, it is also found that companies are interested in ways that help communicate about sustainability, such as traceability and the Sustainable Development Goals. The findings on how to create the message suggest that information should be concrete, result-oriented and proof of impact. In general, the information needs of the private partners are strongly connected with information on continuation of their business. On the other hand, they are also interested in making sustainability a viable business case and being a leader in sustainability topics. These findings are in line with the dominant models on development aid, which have a big influence on the development agenda.

Keywords: Development effectiveness, creating shared value, stakeholder engagement, sustainable development.

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## Abbreviations

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Societal Organization</td>
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<td>CSR</td>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
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<td>CSV</td>
<td>Creating Shared Value</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLF-4</td>
<td>Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Public-Private Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROI</td>
<td>Return on Investment</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDM</td>
<td>Service Delivery Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFI</td>
<td>Sustainable Floriculture Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNI</td>
<td>Sustainable Nuts Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>Sustainable Spices Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBL</td>
<td>Triple Bottom Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCED</td>
<td>World Commission on Environmental Development</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Since the 1990s both international policymakers and companies have increasingly chosen to participate in public-private partnerships (PPPs) (UN, 2015; Kolk, van Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008; World Bank, 2007; OECD, 2006), as the view that all relevant actors in society should contribute to solving systemic development problems, rather than only governments, gains support (Van Tulder & Fortanier, 2009). Mawdsley, Savage and Kim (2014) observe that from the 1990s until the beginning of the 2000s the dominant ideas about foreign aid were united under the umbrella ‘aid effectiveness’, which focused primarily on poverty reduction and the promotion of good governance. This agenda was formed and set out in 1996 by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) under the report Shaping Development Cooperation in the Twenty-first Century (OECD, 1996). It was a reaction on the development strategy that strongly focused on a principal-agent model of development cooperation, which in the 1990s received increased criticism as evidence piled up that the approach was ineffective (Gore, 2013). The new approach of aid effectiveness was rather based on partnerships between donors and recipients of aid to jointly achieve shared development goals (ibid.). This paradigm strongly connects to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were introduced by the United Nations (UN) in 2000 for the first time as an agenda to mobilize the whole world. Many policymakers and members of civil society see the progress that has been made between 2000 and 2015 against hunger, poverty and disease as a significant step forward (Sachs, 2012). However, the MDGs still strongly enforced the donor-beneficiary model that mainly sets targets for poor countries and relies on the solidarity of rich countries that offer financial aid (ibid.).

At the fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) in Busan, South Korea in 2011 a new paradigm was introduced which is referred to as the ‘development effectiveness’ paradigm (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014; Gore, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2013). Although during the HLF-4 a clear political momentum around the shift from aid effectiveness toward development effectiveness was observed, it was still a paradigm in the process of being established (Eyben & Savage, 2013; Gore, 2013) and aid effectiveness continues to be important in setting the agenda on development too. The development effectiveness paradigm is characterized by a new aid architecture which is significantly more complex including a new set of emerging donors as well as different approaches (Gore, 2013). South-South development starts to play a central role, as the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South-Africa) are becoming more important and influential in the development arena. Likewise, actors including the private sector, private foundations and Civil Societal Organizations (CSOs) play an increasingly important role (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014; Gore, 2013; Kim & Lee 2013). At the same time, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) (an aid architecture with as leading institutions the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the DAC of the OECD) becomes less important as a financier of development in developing countries (Gore, 2013). Furthermore, this new discourse is characterized by a renewed focus on economic growth as well as on productivity and competitiveness (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014; Gore, 2013.), and as such is based on investments and business models. On the other hand especially among developing countries a growing concern is rising that economic growth should be linked to sustainability and inclusivity (UN ECOSOC, 2012), meaning that the goal of development cooperation should therefore be sustainable development.

The new set of development goals that were launched in 2015 by the UN to succeed the MDGs exemplify this shift towards sustainable development. It is important to note here that the global political climate had changed significantly since the introduction of the MDGs, with the global financial crisis and climate change, in turn affecting food security, natural disasters and mass migration, having a significant impact (Kim & Lee, 2013). The new set of 17 goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also referred to as the Global Goals, go further that the MDGs and ask for involvement from all countries - rich, middle-income and poor – to address environmental and development issues and promote prosperity (UN, 2015). The 17 SDGs focus on different social needs that include education, health, social protection, and job opportunities while also addressing climate change and environmental protection (UN, 2015).
The 17th and last Goal is to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. The United Nations emphasize that partnerships are required between government, the private sector and civil society and that urgent action is needed in order to “mobilize, redirect and unlock the transformative power of trillions of dollars of private resources to deliver on sustainable development objectives” (UN, n.d.). In 2017 the United Nations called for an even stronger commitment to partnerships and cooperation in order to be able to reach the Goals set by the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2017). Biermann and Dingwerth (2004) emphasize that different actors are becoming more interdependent due to growing cross-border sustainability challenges and globalization and furthermore mention that governments are not in a position to solve these challenges by themselves. Rather, governments increasingly rely on involvement of other actors beyond government and rest on shared responsibility (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). In particular the private sector is seen as an important player that can take up a new and active role in addressing societal challenges to ensure well-functioning markets and growing economy (Hamann, 2012). For businesses this means that, while they for a long time they have been seen as ‘the enemy’ of development (Bendell, 2005, cited in Bitzer 2012), they now have the opportunity to take on a new profound role as development driver (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014).

From the perspective of trade, a development in sustainable and ethical trade schemes can be observed over the past decades. First introduced in the 1950s these schemes were often focused on goodwill as part of development and relief projects but increasingly their effectiveness was questioned (Tallontire, 2000). At the end of the 20th century the model had evolved to one based on partnerships with mutual benefits for producer and consumer (ibid.). All in all, the discourses of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness are both of importance and continue to shape the agenda of development collaboration, focusing on themes as partnerships, new and emerging actors, and result-oriented approaches.

According to Bitzer (2012) the new development paradigm is especially apparent in global agri-food chains. Partnerships in these chains aim to promote sustainable production practices, increase the market access and revenue for producers and empower smallholder producers (ibid.). There are two important factors that contributed to a more profound role of the private sector in promoting sustainable development in commodity chains. First of all, since the 1990s CSOs have increasingly put pressure on multinational companies to take their responsibility and improve working conditions at the field level (Jerven, 2013). Initially the motivation for many companies to engage in partnerships with CSOs or governments was to protect their business against corporate reputational damage and loss in sales (Dentoni & Peterson, 2011; Schrage & Ewing, 2005) and in addition, to demonstrate leadership in addressing sustainability challenges (Dentoni & Peterson, 2011). However, increasingly corporations see the benefits of partnerships compared to single actor involvement. These benefits include sharing responsibilities and labor among the participating actors (Narrod et al., 2009), more resources, both material and immaterial, and different capabilities are available as parties complement each other (Laasonen, Fougère & Kourula, 2012; Akintoye et al., 2003), and risks can be spread (Ke, Wang & Chan, 2010) related to disease outbreaks, local unstable situations, and weather conditions, in order to secure quality and supply (Laven, 2010).

The second reason that the private sector has a more important role in development in commodity chains is that due to retreating governments there is a financial gap that needs to be filled (Adebayo et al., 2015). In Nigeria in 2015 over 70% of the extension services are provided by the private sector while previously this was a done primarily by the public sector (ibid: 147). A case example in the cocoa sector in Nigeria shows that due to cuts in governmental funding increasingly extension services were delivered by Multi-Trex, a private sector company, to fill gaps left behind by the poorly functioning public extension system (ibid.). This resulted in increasing quality of the cocoa beans and productivity of the cocoa producers (ibid.).

PPPs in commodity supply chains have received criticism mainly for bringing minimal change to the marginalized situation of smallholder producers. Multinational companies are powerful and influential stakeholders in public-private partnerships, compared to others in the value chain such as smallholder producers. For this reason partnerships often favor business related interests, such as maximizing profits, while actually bringing little improvement at the production level (Fuchs, Kalfagianni & Havinga, 2011; Utting & Zammit, 2009; Reed & Reed, 2009). However, on the other hand partnerships have been appraised for offering a market based approach in development, bringing together development objectives and private sector interest (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; London & Anupindi, 2014). Regardless of these views, as multinational companies have considerable influence on how trade is conducted, there is a need to involve
them for any type of chain-wide change to occur (Weidinger & Schmitz-Hoffmann, 2007, cited in Bitzer, 2012; World Bank 2007). Bitzer and Glasbergen (2015) underlines that partnerships in value chains have the ambition to bring about sustainable change in global value chains, though there remains an inconclusive discussion on how this is exactly done. It is accounted for though that partnerships are an important tool for Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and development agencies to influence unsustainable business behaviors in order to improve the environmental and social conditions at the production level (Weidinger & Schmitz-Hoffmann, 2007, cited in Bitzer 2012; Pattberg, 2005).

1.2. Empirical problematization

In the earlier described paradigms of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness, the SDGs as well as PPPs play an important role. PPPs are considered an innovative way to overcome single actor failure in an increasingly globalized world, while delivering on public goods as well as private interests (Biermann, Mansan Chan & Pattberg, 2007; Schäferhoff, Campe & Kaan, 2009). Over the years increased attention has been paid to PPPs and numerous studies have investigated what attributes contribute to a successful PPP (e.g. Provan & Kenis, 2008; Crosby & Stone, 2006; Trafford & Proctor, 2006). Furthermore, attention has been paid to understanding the motivations of different actors in joining a PPP (e.g. Dentoni & Peterson, 2011; Alfen et al., 2009; Kolk, van Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008; Schrage & Ewing, 2005). Looking at the changing roles of different actors in society, especially the role of the private sector has changed considerable due to its evolving responsibilities in society. Furthermore, the private sector plays a more significant role in the unfolding new paradigm of development effectiveness (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014), has considerable influence on value chains (Weidinger and Schmitz-Hoffmann, 2007, cited in Bitzer 2012; World Bank 2007), and can potentially make a significant financial contribution to development projects (UN, n.d.). However, according to Salazar and Katigbak (2016) currently the investments of the private sector in sectors related to the SDGs is relatively low worldwide. One of the reasons for this is the perceived risk of doing investments that may not be returned (ibid.). PPPs are brought forward as one way that governments can attract private sector participants to do investments in sustainable development projects (ibid.).

On the other hand, public-private partnerships are not always successful. Klijn and Teisman (2003) argue real partnerships lack a good division of roles between the public and private parties involved and that partners face problems regarding joint decision-making and organization. These sorts of problems are referred to as stakeholder opposition by El-Gohary, Osman and El-Diraby (2006) and are an important reason that PPPs fail. Stakeholder involvement, and capturing and addressing stakeholder inputs is thus a decisive factor that contributes to the success of a PPP (ibid.). With regard to the private sector it is important to understand how they can be engaged in a PPP and how good relationships can be build and maintained. An essential part of stakeholder engagement and building a stakeholder relationship is communication (Crane & Livesey, 2003; Bendell, 2000). Some investigations seek to understand the role of communication in PPPs, as Trafford and Proctor (2006) propose that good communication and openness are important aspects that characterize a successful PPP. However, according to Foster and Jonker (2005) very little attention has been given to the nature of the communication process involving stakeholders in a working relationship with organizations. Moreover, only few empirical contributions have been made that focus on the effects and opportunities for specific ways of engagement of different stakeholders (Caputo et al., 2016).

This research will further explain what the role of communication is in a public-private partnership to engage private partners. The research is conducted in the contemporary emerging paradigm of development effectiveness and the more established paradigm of aid effectiveness. The perspective of this research is that of a convening party: an independent third party that facilitates in the establishment of public-private partnerships. To further focus the research, one specific field within the communication has been selected, namely communicating with private sector partners through corporate communication channels. This entails the information that is disseminated through the corporate channels and is publicly available, also known as voluntary disclosed information. Personal communication between different actors within the public-private partnership does not fall under this research directly. This choice was made because sharing information through corporate communication channels is a relatively inexpensive way that can have significant reach at the same time. Sharing and transferring information is fundamental to creating alignment and the first step in building a strong collaboration (Bourne, 2012; Del Giudice, Caputo & Evangelista, 2012). Also,
organizations must provide information on their actions and strategies in order to be able to attract stakeholders in an engagement (Cooper & Owen, 2007). It is important thus to understand what the information gaps are in order to minimize information asymmetry between the organization and its stakeholders (Saviano & Caputo, 2013). Also, the provided information must be relevant for the stakeholder, therefore there is a need to understand different stakeholder needs to develop strategies to satisfy them in an effective, efficient and affordable manner (Barile et al., 2013). Moreover, according to Watson, Shrivs and Marston (2002) to create an effective and affordable strategy for voluntary corporate disclosure, it should be understood what information is useful for stakeholders.

In relation to the research this means that in order for a convening party to provide the private sector with relevant information there are several important questions to be answered. What motivations does the private sector have to engage in a public-private partnership? How does the private sector perceive their role in a PPP? What does the private sector consider as important goals to reach in terms of sustainability through collaborating in a PPP? By answering these questions information needs related to these motivations and interests can be formulated, which help to establish and maintain lasting relationships. A contribution will be made to fill the knowledge gap of what information is relevant to the private sector in a PPP context. Ultimately this understanding can lead to better partnerships, helping to reach SDG 17 on partnerships that in turn supports reaching all other SDGs.

1.3. Aim and Research questions

The aim of this research is to further explain what information can be used to engage private sector parties in a public-private relationship. The focus of this research is on the corporate channels that are available. To find which information is of interest, motives to engage in a PPP are identified, and also priorities in sustainability are investigated. With these identified a better understanding of the information needs of the private sector can be formed.

The main research question

What information engages private partners in a public-private partnership in commodity value chains?

Sub questions

- What motives do private sector parties have to engage in a public-private collaboration?
- What are the main priorities of each private sector partner with regarding sustainable challenges?
- In what way do private sector parties want information to be presented?

1.4. Commission IDH

In this research partnership relations between the foundation IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative (hereafter IDH) and private partners are investigated. IDH was founded in 2008 as a multi-stakeholder initiative consisting out of private companies, CSOs, trade unions and the Dutch government. While originally certification was one of the main focus areas for IDH, in recent years it was chosen to move beyond this approach as it was found to have only moderate impact (IDH, 2017a). The key mechanism of IDH’s intervention model at this time is integrating sustainability into the core business of global companies (ibid.). The Ministry of Foreign affairs of the Netherlands (2014) emphasizes the active role of IDH in promoting public-private cooperation and the positive, albeit modest, impact for smallholder producers.

The objective of IDH is to promote sustainability in main international trade chains (IDH, 2017b: 3). This is done by establishing public-private partnerships operating in those chains “that create positive impact and value (from an economic, social and environmental perspective) in developing countries and emerging markets” (IDH, 2017b: 3). In June 2018 IDH runs programs in 12 commodity sectors, 12 landscapes and focuses on five impact themes. These impact themes are the following: smallholder inclusivity, mitigation of deforestation, living wages and working conditions, responsible agrochemical management and gender
equality and empowerment (IDH, 2017a). The three main methods that are used to reach the objective are that IDH (IDH, 2017b: 3):

a) “Convenes result-oriented coalitions of companies, NGOs, trade unions and governments towards joint visions and program agenda’s for sustainable trade;

b) Co-finances programs to improve sustainability of supply chains, leveraging market finance and generating proofs of concept for replication and scaling by the actors in the commodity supply chains;

c) Produces and distributes learnings from important innovations, challenges and experiences in these programs”.

1.5. Delimitations

The research investigates one form of addressing and dealing with sustainability challenges, namely by forming PPPs. This choice was made because currently PPPs are seen by many organizations as a preferred form to tackle sustainability challenges and are therefore an interesting contemporary phenomenon to investigate. Second, the private sector was chosen as a focus of this research rather than the government or NGOs. The reasons to focus on the private sector were earlier explained and are because the private sector: 1) plays a more significant role in the unfolding new paradigm of development effectiveness (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014), 2) has considerable influence on value chains (Weidinger & Schmitz-Hoffmann, 2007, cited in Bitzer, 2012; World Bank 2007), and 3) can potentially make a significant financial contribution to development projects (UN, n.d.), while the financial contribution to SDG related sectors is currently still low (Salazar & Katigbak, 2016).

A single case study was conducted on the basis of ethical considerations that an investigation in multiple corporations would intricate relations and could potentially lead to non-disclosure of information. Interviewees were picked based on a list of contacts provided by IDH. This list was used for a survey for the Annual Report of 2017 and had recently been updated. The interviewees picked were primarily located in the Netherlands. This was done in order to have the possibility to conduct face-to-face interviews to assure the quality of the interviews as explained by Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003). However, eventually this was not possible in all cases due to difficulty with organizing interviews because of the busy schedule of interviewees. The candidates for the interviews were chosen in accordance with the Head of Communications and chosen by a set of criteria further specified in the research design which could influence the outcome of the interviews. The data gathering through interviews might have varied if the interviews were conducted in different or multiple geographic areas based on for example different cultural influences. The conceptual model used to analyze the collected data is an adaption from Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2007), cited in Kolk, Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008), with additional input from the literature. The original model also proposed two criteria for evaluation. In this research the evaluation criteria are not taken into, however to test and validate the findings of this research the evaluation criteria could be used after the findings are implemented. The scope of this research does not include an implementation phase however, but it could potentially be an interesting and valuable contribution to the research to also test the findings. The above factors should be taken into account and it should be noted that the findings must be interpreted within this particular context.

1.6. Outline

In table 1 an overview of the main chapters is presented. Chapter two builds the theoretical framework of sustainable development, corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder theory and PPPs and helps to understand the context of this research, structure the analysis of the collected data and helps interpret the findings. Chapter three describes the design of the research, including the selected context and unit of analysis, the methods used for data collection and analyzing, and the measures taken to ensure the quality of the research. In chapter four the results are presented and in chapter five the results are analyzed, discussed and compared to the literature. Last, in chapter six the conclusion is presented answering the main
research question and furthermore recommendations are made for future research.

Table 1: Outline of the research paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework and literature review</th>
<th>Theories and earlier researches related to this paper.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>The methods used for collecting data and the limitations.</td>
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<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td>The results that were gathered through the interviews and web testing.</td>
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<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Analysis and Discussion</td>
<td>An analysis of the results, connecting it to the theoretical framework and literature review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>The main findings of the research in relation to the research question and recommendations for further research.</td>
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2. Theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter contains an overview of several theories and concepts. As was established in the introduction, a new paradigm of development is currently forming described as development effectiveness and is closely related to the SDGs and public-private partnerships. In the following chapter a number of concepts are further explored that explain the context of the research and guide the analyzing and interpretation of the collected data. First, the evolvement of the concept sustainable development will be investigated. Then, to form a better understanding of the changing role of businesses in society and as a player in development, CSR is further investigated. As part of this investigation Creating Shared Value (CSV) is included which in recent years has received considerable attention. Stakeholder theory and engagement are further explored to gain deeper understanding of the role of different stakeholders and how to communicate and engage with them. In the context of this research special focus is laid upon corporate communication and voluntary information disclosure. Finally, public-private partnerships are further explored, and the conceptual framework is presented.

2.1. Sustainable Development

Over the past thirty years sustainable development has become the leading discourse of environmental concern (Dryzek, 2013) and was notably popularized with the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. The ideas of sustainability have been proposed long before the Brundtland Report though, for example in 1848 John Stuart Mill already described the idea of a stationary state and the notion that that increase in wealth cannot be boundless (Caradonna, 2014). Environmental discourse finds its roots in industrial society and therefore must be considered in the context of the discourse of industrialism, which emphasizes growth in terms of goods and services as well as the material wellbeing that growth brings, but not take these as a given (Dryzek, 2013). According to Dryzek (2013) the environmental discourses and the policies in relation to this have changed over the past decades. A shift was made from a focus on wilderness preservation and population growth towards energy supply, anthropogenic climate change and food security (ibid.). Characteristic for the earlier period are for example the work of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot in the late 19th century, seen as two of the founders of conservationism. Muir had fierce criticism on the Western expansion as well as the stress that industrialism put on the natural environment (Caradonna, 2014). Muir was especially driven in protecting natural reserves and utilize them for leisure activities, not resource exploitation (ibid.). Pinchot, on the other hand, argued for land protection strategies from the perspective of sustainable resource consumption (ibid.). This view has much in common with the business oriented approach to environmental policy that dominated much of the 20th century (ibid.). Moving forward to the 1970s, the book ‘Limits to Growth’ was published by the Club of Rome in 1972 (Meadows et al., 1972). Limits to Growth presents several models predicting that if the trends of growing population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion would continue, this would lead to a collapse of the system within 100 years (Meadows et al., 1972: 23). Although the book drove the debate on infinite economic growth, it had little actual influence on the dominant economic views at the time (Caradonna, 2014).

The publication of ‘Our Common Future’ prepared by the Brundtland Commission – the UN sponsored World Commission on Environmental Development (WCED) – in 1987 did have considerable influence. In it the term ‘sustainable development’ was coined. The report marks a significant turning point in the ideas on environment, development and governance (Hedlund-de Witt, 2014), as it acknowledges that the world is facing global challenges that interlink a wide range of problems and envisions the reinforcement of economic growth, environmental improvement, population stabilization, peace, and global equity maintained in the long-term (WCED, 1987). In 2000 the Millennium Development Goals were launched, targeted to meet the needs of the poorest people in the world by 2015. This set of goals was succeeded in 2015 by the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim to complete what was not achieved with the MDGs (UN, 2015). 17 SDGs (figure 1), are divided into 169 targets, which are integrated and interlinked, and make up the 2030 Agenda (ibid.).
Key in the implementation of this Agenda is Goal 17: “a revitalized Global Partnership”, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations and other actors, to create ‘win-win’ cooperation. Under this goal there are 19 targets, with a few of these particularly focused on the role of private partners and trade in sustainable development (UN, n.d.). Included are the mobilization of additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources (UN, 2015). These additional financial resources do not fall under Government’s official development assistance commitments (ibid.). A second target is to significantly increase exports of developing countries (ibid.). Third, it is aimed to enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries (ibid.). Last, public-private and civil society partnerships are encouraged (ibid.). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity and that businesses can play an important role in solving sustainable development challenges (ibid.). Likewise for international trade, it is said this is a spill in inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction and that multilateral trade and meaningful trade liberalization are promoted (ibid.).

While sustainable development has become a leading concept in policy making to tackle global problems regarding social, environmental and economic topics (Caradonna, 2014; Dryzek, 2013; Kates, Parris & Leiserowitz, 2005), there is no consensus on what it exactly is or how it could be reached (Dryzek, 2013). Sustainable development in ‘Our Common Future’, is famously defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (WCED, 1987: 43), a definition that is widely used and by many perceived as the standard (Hedlund-de Witt, 2014; Kates, Parris & Leiserowitz, 2005). However, this is a definition that leaves room for a broad set of interpretations that are used inconsistently (Hedlund-de Witt, 2014). Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz (2005) concluded that it is hard to give a specific definition of sustainable development but often it is explained as development linked to environment and equity. Because of the vagueness and multitude of definitions and perspectives on sustainable development it can serve as an umbrella term which allows for a broad range of actors to engage in the conversation uniting different views to reach one common goal (Waas et al., 2011; Kemp & Martens, 2007). On the other hand Hedlund-de Witt (2014) warns that polarized views on how to achieve sustainable development, and even more fundamentally what sustainable development is, are problematic for reaching more sustainable societies.
One of the key challenges of sustainable development is to measure its progress. The progress can be assessed through identifying a number of indicators (Wiedmann & Lenzen, 2009). Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz (2005) warn though that with an elaborate list of stakeholders involved it can be hard to achieve consensus over the indicators that should be chosen. The three pillar model, representing economy, environment and society, is a commonly used way to divide and categorize sustainability efforts. The three pillars are often visualized as a Venn diagram (figure 2), where a ‘win-win-win’ situation is reached at the confluence of the three circles and stands for true sustainability.

![Three pillar model of sustainable development.](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/sustainability-society-and-you/0/steps/4618)

This conceptual model aims to equally fulfill all three values and is favored in the international arena (Littig & Griessler, 2005). According to Littig and Griessler (2005) the problem with categorizing in these conceptual models is that it is not realistic as it fails to address the integrality of sustainable development. Nonetheless, the three pillar model remains a popular way to account for sustainability. Building on the three pillar model, in 1994 John Elkington introduced the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), an accounting framework to measure financial, social and environmental performance of the corporation. It aims to report beyond the traditional financial ‘bottom line’ and also includes social and environmental considerations into this. Also, TBL reporting can reduce risks a company faces and improve corporate reputation (Wiedmann & Lenzen, 2009). The commitment to the TBL fit into the broader strategies of companies with regard to corporate social responsibility.

### 2.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

The role of business and its responsibilities has changed significantly over the past decades. In the introduction several external influences were identified that influence the responsibility of businesses in society, including pressure from CSOs on corporations and developments in international organizations, for example the United Nation’s (nonbinding) commitment to the MDGs and SDGs and their growing efforts to establish partnerships with the private sector. Also private motivations were identified with regard to taking responsibilities that could have as outcome for example to secure supply or decrease risks. In order to gain further understanding of the development of business’ responsibilities in society the concept of CSR is investigated. This foremost gives insight in the efforts of businesses to act responsibly and the evolving ideas of that responsibility is for businesses according to numerous scholars.
The publication of Bowen’s (1953) book ‘Social Responsibilities of the Businessman’ is commonly accepted as the ground laying idea of CSR. Bowen (1953: 6) defines CSR as “the obligations of businessmen to pursue those politics, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of society.” During the 1960s CSR was most profoundly manifested as philanthropy (Murphy, 1978). During the same time one of the biggest criticisms against CSR was brought forward by Friedman (1962) arguing that corporate manager’s primary responsibility is to maximize profits for shareholders rather than incorporating social responsibility. Increasingly however, CSR gained support and was seen as a business strategy generating opportunities, rather than mere philanthropy. Johnson (1971) opposed Friedman’s viewpoints and proposed instead that a responsible enterprise would also take into account interests of employees, suppliers, dealers, local communities and the nation as a whole. This was the foundation that would later form into stakeholder theory.

Archie Carroll, an influential and widely-cited writer on the topic of CSR (Masoud, 2017; Baden, 2016), proposed a first conceptual model for CSR. This three-dimensional model includes corporate responsibilities, social issues of business and corporate actions (Carroll, 1979). These corporate responsibilities are divided into four types: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic (Ibid.). Social issues of business embody topics including labor standards, human rights, environmental protection and anti-corruption (Ibid.). Last, corporate actions are generalized modes of responses such as reactive, defensive, accommodative and proactive (Ibid.).

Throughout the 1980s the understanding of CSR was further developed and the operationalization of CSR quickly gained attention (Carroll, 1999). Central to this was the investigation into the financial profitability of social responsible firms (Ibid.). A much heard criticism at this time was that CSR efforts were not embedded into core business. An example is Freeman’s (1984) criticism claiming that CSR is still too often seen as an extra ‘add on’, if corporations can afford it. Freeman (1984) introduces stakeholder theory and argues that the complex interconnections between economic and social forces need to be understood and that theories that consider only isolated aspects do not portray an accurate view of the business world. In line with this, Carroll (1991), building on his conceptual model of 1979, proposes the Pyramid of CSR (figure 3) in which the four responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic need to be fulfilled simultaneously. However, the economic responsibility of making a profit is prioritized as it is “the foundation on which all others rest” (Carroll, 1991: 42).

![The Pyramid of Social Corporate Responsibility](image)

*Figure 3: The Pyramid of Social Corporate Responsibility (Carroll, 1991: 42)*
With the start of the 21st century measuring the impacts of CSR initiatives through empirical studies has gained interest and the focus shifted towards implementation of CSR initiatives (Carroll, 2008). Outside of the theoretical scope CSR gained momentum in both public policy arenas as well as within companies and organizations (Cornelissen, 2005).

Nowadays CSR is a concept that is widely used and accepted, however a single definition lacks (Masoud, 2017). Many scholars consider CSR as a highly subjective, intangible term (e.g. Okoye, 2009; Frankental, 2001). It has been criticized for meaning anything to anyone dependent on their bias (Dahlsrud, 2008; Frankental, 2001). A more recent attempt to define CSR has been made by Visser (2011: 1) defining CSR as: “the way in which business consistently creates shared value in society through economic development, good governance, stakeholder responsiveness and environmental improvement”. This definition gives a holistic understanding of the different dimensions CSR is concerned with and assumes more complexity than merely philanthropic motivations or even exclusively forms of responsibilities. Finally, in the work of Masoud (2017) some consensus can be found on what CSR entails, as most models dealing with CSR accept the notion that economic considerations are prioritized over environmental ones as well as that most models focus on the economic motive as the primary priority of a business. This offers support to Carroll’s earlier definition of the Pyramid of CSR and the prioritization of economic responsibilities. The discussion on prioritizing responsibilities continues though. For example, Baden (2016: 12) stresses that CSR in the 21st century “needs to provide a moral counter-balance to the dominance of economic values pervading the rest of the management discourse and business school curriculum”.

With regard to the effectiveness of CSR efforts a strategy integrating CSR in core business activities that adds value to the corporate success is seen as more effective because integrated CSR has a greater impact on society than isolated CSR programs (Newell & Fynes, 2007). Often though, part of the reason to implement a CSR strategy is for the positive effects on reputation and it is hard to distinguish between a truly moral motivation and a reputational strategy to appear moral (Windsor, 2001). Porter and Kramer (2011) come to the same conclusion arguing that CSR initiatives are mostly used for building reputation while they have only limited connection to the business. Building on this criticism Porter and Kramer (2011) introduced the concept of Creating Shared Value (CSV) which was well-received, especially in the business community. It must be noted though that while introduced as a new concept by Porter and Kramer, for example Corazza, Scagnelli and Mio (2017) see CSV as not completely unrelated to CSR, but rather label CSV as a shift from a strategic view of sustainability toward an inclusive stakeholder-oriented model of value creation.

2.2.1. Creating Shared Value

CSV is defined by Porter and Kramer (2011: 4) as: “policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates”. Moreover, they argue that businesses should be leading the social progress by using their skills, resources and management capabilities (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Three levels on which shared value can be created are identified: First, value is created by reconceiving products and markets that were previously not served which increases revenue and profits while also bringing environmental, social, or economic development benefits to those communities (ibid.). Second, redefining productivity in the value chain creates shared value aiming for better use of resources and thus saving resources and costs and also limiting externalities causing less pollution (ibid.). Also relations with stakeholders such as employees and suppliers are approached from a long-lasting perspective which offers more security for both sides (ibid.). Third, value is created by enabling cluster development in concentrated geographical areas, as companies (and other organizations such as standardization organizations and trade organizations) work together and profit from each other’s success (ibid.). For example this can be through co-investments that strengthen local infrastructure or local institutions (ibid.). Besides the three levels on which shared value is created, an important contribution of CSV compared to CSR is the active role for governments. While most CSR literature does not emphasize a profound role for governments in CSV the role for governments is more established (Crane et al., 2014). CSV blurs the lines of what were traditionally seen as responsibilities of governments, businesses and civil society as it looks at the end benefit rather than where the input comes from (Porter & Kramer, 2011). As such, the actor – or collaboration of actors - with
the most impact is most suitable (ibid.).

Likewise to CSR, CSV has received criticism that the approaches of different companies vary significantly (Corazza, Scagnelli & Mio, 2017), making it hard to define. Furthermore, CSV was criticized for not properly addressing the responsibilities of businesses as the role of business in society remains to make a profit and social needs are only addressed for this reason (Crane et al., 2014; Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014). According to Porter and Kramer (in Crane et al. 2014: 150) “the reason that creating shared value has gained so much traction and led to real change is exactly because it aligns social progress with corporate self-interest in a concrete and highly tangible way”. Crane et al. (2014) acknowledge that CSV has been able to attract wide industry attention and put social questions on the corporate agenda and by doing so has made an important contribution in the marketability of making responsibility interesting for business. This leaves the debate open what should and what should not be included in responsibility of businesses.

2.3. Stakeholder theory

According to Cornelissen (2005) stakeholder theory is the preferred, if not the standard, thinking in business in the early 21st century due to greater social claims for corporate citizenship and continuous pressure on corporations from governments and the international community. Stakeholder theory was popularized by Edward Freeman in 1984 and is a fundamental part of CSR (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Freeman, 1984). According to Freeman (1984: 46) “a stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives.” Stakeholder theory entails that organizations are not solely dependent on investors and consumers but rather on various sorts of relationships as these have the power to influence the achievements of the organization (ibid.). The aim is to identify groups and individuals that are in a relationship with the business and intends to assume more responsibilities than only ensuring maximum profits for shareholders (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Cornelissen (2005) explains that all organizations are economically and socially dependent on their stakeholders and therefore need to establish positive and lasting relationships with them. This dual dependency moves away from a purely neo-classical economic theory towards a more social-economic oriented theory (ibid.).

When it comes to the classification of stakeholders, there are many different ways of grouping stakeholders according to their expectations of the organization (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Clarkson (1995) makes the distinction between primary and secondary stakeholders and emphasizes that firms tend to focus on primary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders in this case include shareholders, investors, employees, customers and suppliers, whereas secondary stakeholders include media, interest groups, competitors and society at large (ibid.). Stakeholders could also be categorized as internal and external (Benn & Bolton, 2011). Internal stakeholders then include shareholders and employees, while external stakeholders are government, suppliers, environment, media, competitors, customers, competitors, and even future generations (ibid.).

With regard to the prioritization of stakeholders Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) propose three attributes that can serve as a guideline:

- **Power** means the power that a stakeholder holds over an organization.
- **Legitimacy** stands for the legitimacy of the claim laid upon the organization by the stakeholder.
- **Urgency** entails the degree in which immediate action is needed towards the stakeholder.

Stakeholder theory has been criticized for centralizing the firm, where all other stakeholders are grouped around the business. In this approach the business is placed in a superior position that ascribes them with power and control (Banerjee, 2008). Increasingly another approach is gaining popularity in which the business is solely one of the actors in solving a problem. This ‘issue-focused’ approach relies on a network of stakeholders that address a shared problem and is particularly useful in a global context (Roloff, 2008; Svendsen & Laberge, 2005).
2.3.1. Stakeholder engagement and corporate communication

Stakeholder engagement refers to the process of involving stakeholders and their needs in business operations and decisions (Visser et al., 2007). The stakeholder engagement process is a way for organizations to share values, information and knowledge and to create trust which are important preconditions for common understandings to build strong collaborations (Caputo et al., 2016). Along these lines, Visser et al. (2007) identified multiple benefits of stakeholder engagement including risk mitigation, conflict solving, creating more sustainable solutions, pooling of resources and mutual learning and education.

Mathur, Price and Austin (2008) identified three perspectives on stakeholder engagement in sustainability projects which are a strategic management perspective, an ethical perspective and a forum for dialogue perspective to facilitate mutual social learning. The strategic management perspective emphasizes identifying which persons or groups are important (ibid.). The stakeholder classifications and prioritization literature are closely connected to this perspective. The ethical perspective is based on democratic values where the stakeholders are considered as citizens that have the right to participate in and influence the project. The third approach is a forum for dialogue that facilitates mutual social learning (ibid.). This perspective is explained by Healey (1997) as an opportunity for the involved stakeholders to build trust and knowledge which function as a foundation for a collaboration. All three perspectives must be integrated to reach effective stakeholder engagement for sustainability, however often emphasis is put on the strategic management perspective (Mathur, Price & Austin, 2008).

This research focuses on what corporate information the organization can provide that helps to build lasting relationships with its stakeholders. Such strategies for informing and communicating with stakeholders fall under the corporate communication strategies of an organization. Corporate communications is a management function that is used in a strategic and instrumental way to position the organization, create identity and maintain reputation (Cornelissen, 2005). According to Cornelissen (2005) the future of many organizations depends on how it is viewed by its stakeholders and as such in the 1990s corporate communications became a preferred way to build and manage relationships with stakeholders. Originally, these communication efforts were generally divided into marketing and public relations however, with the ideas of stakeholder theory gaining attention their complementarity and overlap were noticed and the two disciplines were often integrated under corporate communications (ibid.). Specifically for the business to business context, a positive reputation is of crucial importance in starting new relationships because it helps build trust prior to the collaboration (La Rocca et al., 2016).

Corporate information can include information on the financial situation of a company, the activities that an organization undertakes, information on current situation as well as future objectives to reach (Alvarez, Sánchez & Domínguez, 2008). It is the information that is publicly available and that forms the expectations and behaviors stakeholders have towards the company (Alvarez, Sánchez & Domínguez, 2008). The disclosure of such corporate information is either compulsory or voluntary, where compulsory disclosure included information that must be made public by law, while the main purpose of voluntarily sharing information is because it benefits company image. One example of voluntary corporate disclosure is social reports that give insight in organizational activities, outputs and goals otherwise not easily observable. These reports support the transfer of information from an organization to its stakeholders and are perceived as more credible than other sources (Dervitisiotis, 2003). Voluntary information disclosure can be considered one of the more effective ways to offer information to stakeholders (Caputo et al., 2016). An important reason to choose to voluntarily share information is brought forward by Kaymak and Bektas (2017) who found that multinational corporation increasingly face pressure to disclose information relating to ethics, accountability and transparency issues, while simultaneously globalization and unhindered spread of information lay additional expectations on organizations. Though the research is focused on multinational corporations, in general accountability and transparency are increasingly of importance to all organizations. Likewise, all sorts of organizations deal with a fast changing environment regarding the sharing of information.

Cornelissen (2005) emphasizes that information should be transparent in terms of readability and understandability. Furthermore, the ways in which the information is communicated is important (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Scholes & James, 1998). Information channels that an organization has at its disposal
include traditional channels such as reports and press releases, and ‘new’ or digital channels including website, blogs, newsletters via e-mail, social media and mobile apps. Especially the disclosure of information via online channels has grown considerably over past years (Alvarez, Sánchez and Domínguez, 2008). Scholars point out that new media can improve the image stakeholders have of organizations, attract more attentions and interest, and contribute to the reduction of information asymmetry (Zhang, 2015; Prokofieva, 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Schmidt, 2007). Furthermore, compared to traditional channels such as printed reports, an organization can better control the context which the information appears in and transmission is faster, less costly and to a mass audience (Alvarez, Sánchez & Domínguez, 2008). Campbell et al. (2003) argued that information provision via the digital channels may be the most powerful means of providing targeted information and that it should be perceived as a legitimate strategy.

Especially social media gives organizations more control over dissemination of information, compared to traditional channels, and allows wider reach and frequency of disclosure (Debreceny & Rahman, 2005). Furthermore it has capabilities of a two-way communication channel. This means that the traditional roles of sender and receiver blurred and a receiver of a message can also send a message back. A two-way dialogue and extensive interaction between actors helps build a strong relationship (Håkansson et al., 2009; Foster & Jonker, 2005). However, though social media are increasingly used by organizations for external communication, they are typically only used for one-way communication, rather than dialogic communication (Maxwell & Carboni, 2014).

Tallontire (2000) found that initial connections were made at a conference that later developed into a business relationship. This exemplifies the need for trust and getting to know the partner prior to starting the relationship. Likewise, information acquisition to make informed decisions and ‘opportunity enabling’, strategically interact with relevant parties in the network, are important behaviors in organizational networking (Thornton et al. 2013).

2.4. Public-Private Partnership

A Public-Private Partnership is a collaboration between actors from two or more sectors, being either governments, companies or civil-society organizations, where they jointly try to tackle challenges (Stadtler, 2012; Schäferhoff, Campe & Kaan, 2009). According to McQuaid (2002) a partnership is defined by a number of characteristics including: the potential for synergy, the development of a commonly agreed upon goal (for which actors have varying involvement on different stages), and the fact that the public sector is not purely driven by commercial objectives. Especially the role of the private sector and the government and their responsibilities towards societies as a whole and sustainability challenges in specific. Several factors can be pointed out that have contributed to this change.

The 1950s and 1960 were characterized by heavy involvement of the state to cope with a wide range of economic and social issues, supported by public budgets (Carroll & Steane, 2002). During this time the government took a profound role in dealing with such issues. In the 1970s and 1980s this changed when major OECD countries faced budgetary cutbacks in combination with stagflation (Carroll & Steane, 2002). As a reaction, new ideas on public management drastically changed the political landscape (Drewry, 2002). These ideas were characterized as “a movement towards ‘marketizing’ the state sector by way of privatization, decentralization of functions and responsibilities, contracting out services (...) and the promotion of partnerships of one kind or another between the state sector and the private and voluntary sectors” (Drewry, 2002: 57). More and more tasks that were traditionally the responsibility of the government were now delivered by external agencies (McQuaid, 2002). This meant that tasks that previously were carried out by one overarching organization were now fragmented. To effectively deal with such multifaceted issues, partnerships became an important instrument (ibid.). At the same time, also international and intergovernmental organizations started to pay more attention to public-private partnerships, especially with regard to development aid (McQuaid, 2002). Especially those organizations of which a significant amount of members are from OECD countries use their influence to steer towards PPPs (McQuaid, 2002). From the 1980s onwards development aid started to be increasingly organized through public-private partnerships, rather than its traditional organization through public sector aid agencies (Hailey, 2002). Because of this changing relationship and a shift in the involved parties in such development
aid schemes, gradually more emphasis was put on reporting as well as cost-effectiveness and accountability (ibid.). Increasingly both multilateral and bilateral donors started to recognize the importance of such organizations, leading to increase in funding and building institutional capacity (ibid.). Nonetheless, Carroll and Steane (2002) emphasizes that at the beginning of this Millennium a shift towards structures based completely on PPPs had not yet taken place.

Several important benefits of partnerships are identified. McQuaid (2002) proposes that through partnerships an increased amount of resources is available, effectiveness and efficiency are improved and greater legitimacy is reached. These three different benefits are further explained below:

- **Increasing the amount of available resources.** Also opening up the pool on types of resources. This includes information and expertise, legislative power, financial assets, alternative perspectives, connections and network (McQuaid, 2002). Added by Akintoye et al. (2003) to this is that not only there are more resources available, but also each actor can offer a different set of resources. Thus both the quantity as well as the diversity of resources increases. Ke, Wang and Chan (2010) add that sharing risks among participating parties is also an important consideration in joining in partnerships.

- **Increase effectiveness and efficiency.** Important is to have good coordination in the process between the different organizations to create synergy and avoid wasteful duplication (McQuaid, 2002). This can lead to greater outcomes and cost savings (ibid.). Also more effective in the long-term, because partnerships create stability, minimizing risks for partners and potential investors, while also being a way to build local capacity, and local control (ibid.).

- **Greater legitimacy.** by involving local communities directly. According to McQuaid (1993), cited in McQuaid (2002), reasons for local authorities to engage in a partnership include the potential of extra resources brought to the area (e.g. funding, property, expertise, links to national support schemes, etc.), avoidance of duplication, replication of good practice seen from other initiatives, which thus means more effective and efficient development of policies as well as implementation. The local authorities in return provide also resources, statutory powers and democratic legitimacy.

Furthermore, increasingly individual actors are realizing that they need to partake in such collaborations because they are not capable of tackling global challenges by themselves (Schäferhoff, Campe & Kaan, 2009; Kolk, van Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008). To do this the public-private partnership can function as an institutionalized platform where public and private actors jointly work on projects and in that process both serve the public good as well as gain private interest (Biermann, Man-san Chan & Pattberg, 2007; Schäferhoff, Campe & Kaan, 2009). A collaboration involving all three parties, government, business and NGOs, is a tripartite partnerships and are typically formed when dealing with a retreating government and weak governance structures (Van Tulder & Van der Zwart, 2006). Van Tulder and Fortanier (2009) identified three specific types of failures that extended partnerships can overcome compared to a situation where only one actor would take action. First, governments are often bureaucratic and top down institutions which leads them to be less flexible and adaptive. Because of this they may fail to address development problems. This type of failure is referred to as governance failure. Moreover, according to Haas (2004), private actors have become involved in governance processes in order to counteract this perceived ‘governance gap’. Second, market failure describes the inability of companies to act ethically responsible and create sustainable business models that provide public goods for improvised people in developing countries. Last, ‘bottom up’ development efforts by NGOs do not always have the intended results and in some cases are actually little effective when implemented, leaving the poorest parts of the population without any benefit. This failure is described as civic failure. This means that if one of these failures happens there is a clear gap to fill by an organization that is more fit to take act in that particular situation.

Besides the actors that are most suitable to be taking action in specific situations, each actor also has their own specific motivations to take part in a partnership. Governments particularly may take part in a PPP because they lack financial resources for a project and also because it is a means by which they can counter public inefficiency (Alfen et al., 2009). An exemplary case of this is that in many developing countries the public sector used to be the primary provider of agricultural extension services, however, due to cuts in governmental funding, new investors have to be attracted (Adebayo et al., 2015). Second, governments engage in PPPs because this may broaden development activities, especially in areas that are usually ignored
by companies (Kolk, van Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008). Third, especially in the case of global supply chains, multinational corporations are a key player in the supply chain (Weidinger & Schmitz-Hoffmann, 2007, cited in Bitzer, 2012) and governments cannot act without their involvement.

For the private sector on the other hand, besides the before mentioned benefits of sharing risks and resources for example, an important reason to engage in a PPP is for a positive reputational image. The leading interest for companies to take part in a PPP, according to Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008) is the corporate interest and that the cooperation must contribute to corporate profitability, either directly or through reputational benefits. Likewise, Knorringa and Helmsing (2008) argue that corporations only engage in development initiatives to the extent to which this is this is desired by their stakeholders. The above findings suggest that although public and private partnerships share some of the benefits and motivations to take part in a public-private partnership, still Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008) found that the general consensus of companies is that governments should accept the leading corporate interests.

The involved parties and the goals that are determined by these parties to be reached during the partnership are two of the dimensions that form the partnership. McQuaid (2002) in total identify 5 dimensions that determine what the partnership looks like.

McQuaid (2002) identifies five dimensions that determine what the partnership looks like. Based on these dimensions partnerships can vary greatly.

- **The goal of the partnership.** This is the most important dimension that determines in which direction the whole partnership will move. One important distinction that influences the goals of the partnership is mentioned by McQuaid (2002) and entails whether the partnership is strategic or program/project driven. A strategic partnership typically deals with a major long-term issue and is concerned with the broad aims of the involved organizations, while a program or project driven partnership is often much more narrowly oriented and deals with a single or closely connected topics.

- **The involved parties.** These are the key actors that are involved in the partnership. Generally often a distinction between public and private partners is made, although every single organization is of course unique and has its own motives to join the partnership. The number of involved parties is also a factor that plays a role.

- **The stages or development of the partnership, and changing roles of actors involved.** During the pre-development stage the problem and reasons for a partnership are evaluated. In this stage trust between potential partners is critical and needs to be developed in order to create a working relation. Then in the next stage strategy and the formation will be agreed upon. This includes agreeing on the strategy and official agreements, as well as project and implementation mechanisms. The following stage is the actual implementation process. Last the ex-post evaluation, which is a mechanism for feedback and improving the strategy. This is also the moment to decide on continuing, modifying or ending the partnership

- **The geographical area.** The place where the partnership is situated in also influences what it looks like. A partnership could be concerned with a local project, but also be an international operation, such as a partnership throughout a commodity chain with multiple areas and countries involved.

- **Implementation mechanisms** or the way in which the activities are carried out. This entails a division of which party has which responsibilities, provides which resources and who takes the final decisions (controls the process).

Next to these dimensions of which every partnership is made up, there is a wide variety of attributes that make partnerships more or less successful. In the first place, Provan and Kenis (2008) propose a number of factors that influence the effectiveness of a collaboration and most importantly conclude that trust is a key aspect in a partnership and that goal consensus between the partners is of major importance. Trafford and Proctor (2006) identified five key characteristics that contribute to a successful public-private partnership: good communication, openness, effective planning, ethos and direction. These are similar to the findings of Bryson, Crosby & Stone (2006) whom argue that in a successful partnership the partners must find alignment in shared goals, rules, standard operation, and division of tasks, risks and responsibilities. Considering all these different aspects that influence how a partnership is functioning, broadly three
categories can be identified: 1) alignment and agreement on direction and goals, 2) trust and openness, in a sense that partners are included in communication and share information among each other, and 3) an understanding of the different responsibilities and competencies each partner has for division of tasks. Additionally, Ismail (2013) found one significant difference between what public and private participants perceive as critical success factors in a PPP. Private sector views available financial market as highly important, while this is only of average importance for the public sector. Ismail (2013) proposes that a possible explanation could be that in a PPP construct the private sector is primarily responsible to obtain finance and thus see it as more important to ensure the success of the PPP. Opposite to the success factors, a number of factors can be identified that negatively affect the partnership and influence its outcomes or could even potentially threaten its existence. These include: unclear goals, resource costs, unequal power distribution or cliquing (where a number of dominant actors group together), and organizational problems including the coordination of the project (McQuaid, 2002).

2.5. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is used to guide the analysis of the collected data. The model of van Tulder and Kostwinder (2007), cited in Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008: 271) was adapted, and integrated with the three pillars of sustainability and the motivations for PPPs described by McQuoid (2002). First the original model is presented (figure 4), which is a tool to analyze a partnerships for development. Then, the conceptual framework for this project will be presented and explained.

![Figure 4: Framework for analysis of partnerships (Van Tulder & Kostwinder, 2007, cited in Kolk, van Tulder & Kostwinder, 2008: 271)](image)

The framework of Tulder and Kostwinder (2007), cited in Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008: 271) identifies four aspects in a partnership by which it can be analyzed. These aspects are input, throughput, output and outcome. Additionally, two evaluation criteria are proposed which are efficiency and effectiveness.

- **Input** relates to the material and immaterial resources necessary to carry out the process. The envisioned goals and motives of each partner are influenced by the nature of the organization (public or private). When partners are already aware of the specific failures before starting the partnership, the willingness to take part is higher and the chances of success are higher. In this phase it is important to establish why partners engage in the partnership and what their expected return on it is. Furthermore do companies see the partnership as part of corporate social responsibility or is purely a business-related consideration to engage?
- **Throughput** entails execution and implementation process of the partnership as well as the dynamics within the partnership. Factors that influence this are the number of participants in a partnership, the nature of each partnership (public or private) and the role they have in the partnership, and what the mutual dependencies are.
- **Outputs** are the results in the project in terms of services and goods delivered by the partner which can be measured by the objectives met or redefined throughout the process. The sustainability of
the project is also taken into account in this point in terms of the possibilities for scaling-up, and the possibility for certain actors to exit.

- **Outcomes** relate to the changes, benefits and results that the partnership established in the wider societal context. Tulder and Kostwinder (2007) propose to mirror the outcomes to the MDGs. At this time a relevant framework to measure them to would then logically be the SDGs.

- **Efficiency** can be seen as the internal value added through the partnership in terms for example investment of time or financial resources of each partner.

- **Effectiveness** entails what additional value the partnership delivers when compared to a single-actor initiative. Related to the SDGs the evaluation then investigates whether the partnership provided additional ways of achieving the SDGs, that could not be fulfilled otherwise.

Based on the original framework presented above, a conceptual framework for this project was constructed that will help analyzing the findings presented in the result chapter. The conceptual framework is presented in figure 5.

![Figure 5: Framework for analyzing information needs partners in partnerships. Adaptation from Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2007), cited in Kolk, Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008: 271)](image)

Instead of focusing on the partnership, with this framework an analysis of information needs and information execution can be conducted. Two sorts of main information inputs are identified which are motivations for joining in a partnership and goals and interests to be achieved related to sustainability targets. The throughput which is described in Van Tulder and Kostwinder’s (2007), cited in Kolk, Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008: 271) model corresponds with the execution of information in the conceptual framework. It entails the design of how to present information and is divided into the channel used (for example social media channels and website) and format in which the information is presented (for example infographics, videos and case studies). These two parts of the model are situated within the orange box and form the basis of analysis for this research. The output envisioned is more relevant information for the private partners. This in turn, as established in the literature, leads to better engagement and ultimately to better partnerships. Finally, through being able to establish better partnership relations, the outcome is that SDG 17 can better be reached, which is a fundamental support in reaching all the SDGs.
The measurements could be taken into account in terms of efficient communication (cost and time saving) and effective communication (whether the information provision has actually resulted in reaching goals). These latter two fall outside of the scope of this research as only information needs and information execution strategy will be analyzed. However, after implementing the findings of the analysis these evaluation criteria could be used to compare the new situation to the previous one and see if efficiency and effectiveness have indeed increased.
3. Research Design

While on one hand a good research design is clearly defined and has the best chance to lead to valid and reliable data, on the other hand especially social research deals with many unknown factors (Lewis, 2003). As the research design a flexible approach was chosen that allows to make adaptations throughout the process. This was done as theory and data collection influence each other through the research (Lewis, 2003). The aim of this research is to explain what information engages private partners in a public-private partnership. The research is conducted in the form of a single case study. A case study approach is appropriate when a research aims to study a contemporary phenomenon with a real-life context (Robson, 2011; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, specifically in the business-to-business marketing context, a case study can provide effective insights into the nature of the phenomena observed (Easton, 2010). In this case study the communication strategy of IDH is investigated with the aim to explain how private sector partners can be engaged. This is a topical phenomenon as the interest in public-private partnerships continues to grow among private sector and public sector alike. Furthermore the phenomenon needs to be investigated in a real-life context because it deals with motivations and priorities of organizations which cannot be studied in isolation of the context that they are situated in. Yin (2009) explains that a case study research starts with an in-depth literature review that frames the research question. Furthermore, the design of the research and procedures should be clearly stated and explained thoroughly to ensure validity (Yin, 2009). The strength of the case study is that it allows to include many different sources of information including interviews, observations and documents (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989). One of the main critiques on the case study approach is that it is hard to generalize from a single case study. However, through finding similarities in wider literature a case study can become more generalizable (Eisenhardt, 1989). Another possible problem with case study research it that it is more prone than other forms of research to bias from the researcher. To ensure objectivity it is therefore proposed by Yin (2009) and Robson (2011) to keep audit trails such as a case study protocol.

3.1. Choice of case

The focus that was chosen to study is the public-private partnership and how to engage private sector partners in this. The specific case that is investigated is a number of relationships that IDH has with private sector companies. There are two reasons that were of particular importance for this choice. First of all, public-private partnerships have grown in popularity over the past decades and are a contemporary phenomenon which is of particular interest to study. Second, IDH is within the Netherlands one of the leading parties that facilitates public-private partnerships. It works in over 50 countries with more than 500 partners.

3.2. Unit of analysis

Existing partnerships of IDH with private sector partners are investigated as the focus of this study is to gain better understanding of the motivations, priorities and interests of private partners to engage in public-private partnerships. The unit of analysis therefore is the relationship that IDH fosters with a private partner contact. A list of partner contacts was provided by IDH that had recently been updated for a survey for the Annual Report 2017. From this list a selection of 20 contacts was made according to a number of criteria to ensure a diverse group of interviewees. By having a pool of diverse interviewees a broad range the chances are bigger that each will bring different and new perspectives to the research. The criteria that were used to compile the list included commodity sector the private company is active in, country the company is established in, and the position of the person within the company. Primarily candidates based in the Netherlands were selected to allow for face-to-face interviews. A range of different commodities was selected, because this can influence the reasons for joining the partnerships and the priorities of the company regarding sustainability. A selection of different positions within the company was made because the level of authority may play a role in the answers that are provided. Out of the list of 20 contact eventually four contacts could be interviewed of which two were conducted face-to-face while the other two interviews were conducted via Zoom, an online telecommunication service comparable to Zoom. Each interview lasted
between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. The details of the conducted interviews are presented in Table 2.

### Table 2: Interview details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date interview</th>
<th>Validated</th>
<th>Personal or via Zoom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee A</td>
<td>Spices</td>
<td>Sustainability Director</td>
<td>11-04-2018</td>
<td>Sent transcript via e-mail. Through interview technique during interview.</td>
<td>In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee C</td>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>Coordinator Sustainability</td>
<td>18-04-2018</td>
<td>Sent transcript via e-mail. Through interview technique during interview.</td>
<td>In Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee D</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Head Agronomy – Coffee Plantations</td>
<td>30-04-2018</td>
<td>Sent results with highlighted quotes via e-mail. Through interview technique during interview.</td>
<td>Via Zoom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.3. Data collection

Multiple methods of data collection were used for this research, which is also referred to as triangulation. Benefits of this approach are that it can validate qualitative evidence and that it provides additional perspectives and by doing so deepens the understanding on the phenomenon under investigation (Ritchie, 2003). Also, by using multiple sources it is easier to avoid bias (Robson, 2011). Using triangulation is especially helpful in a flexible design research to increase credibility (Yin, 2013). The different methods that were used in this research to collect data include a literature review, interviews and web testing exercises. These can be divided into primary data and secondary data.

#### 3.3.1. Primary data

**Interviews**

Two forms of primary data were collected which are interviews and website tests. Four semi-structured open end interviews were conducted. According to Yin (2013) interviews are a crucial information source when conducting a case study. There are a number of features of open ended in-depth interviews that make it suitable for answering the research questions. In-depth interviews offer structure with flexibility as a topic agenda will be set with the possibility to explore further in specific relevant issues (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). This allows greater freedom than is the case with structured interviews and also gives the opportunity to continue to gather data in accordance to the changing theoretical framework (Robson, 2011). In depth interviews are particularly useful to conduct a detailed investigation on a person’s personal perspectives (Yin, 2009) and to gain understanding of motivations and decisions, or to explore impacts. The research conducted was focused on personal motivations and decisions, making the choice for open ended interview questions a suitable one. Furthermore, one of the main benefits of interviews is that a deeper understanding of the interviewee’s meaning or clarification of the interviewers question can be derived through the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee which allows to fully explore answers in terms of reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). These key features of in-depth interviews best come to justice in face-to-face interviews (ibid.). To make the most use of interviews as data...
collection method it is however important that the interview is well-prepared and that the interview is well documented as well (Leech, 2002).

The questions were formed based on the literature review. The questions asked during the interviews funneled from a broader understanding of the context to a more specific understanding of certain choices made by the interviewee. This choice was made to ensure that questions in the beginning of the interview would not lead the interviewee in a certain direction, for example when thinking of the communication channels they use. First, the motivations of the partner to engage in a collaboration with IDH are established, then questions about engaging the partner follow, and finally the questions narrow down to specific channels and content preferences. Questions have been formulated and tested in accordance with multiple colleagues from the communications team. The interviews were transcribed, using the tool otranscribe.com. Robson (2011) emphasizes the importance of transcribing interviews.

Website testing

A number of website tests are a way to collect data on the behaviors of people. In the context of this research these interactions were examined to understand how people interact with the website. After the interview was conducted the interviewee was asked to do a number of website tests on the website www.idhsustainabletrade.com. Tasks had been drawn up before the testing, but the testing followed a flexible design since each participant ran into different problems, visited different pages on the website and was interested in different aspects of the website. During the tests notes were made by the researcher describing the activities that the interviewee carried out, while the dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee was recorded. The notes included information on activities that the interviewee carried out and also on the comments that were made during this process. During the two interviews that took place in person, the researcher could look at the screen together with the interviewee, while during the interviews via Zoom the screen was shared with the researcher.

3.3.2. Secondary data

A literature review consists out of an analysis of articles, books, dissertations and other reports that the research problem is concerned with (Robson, 2011). An extensive literature review was conducted exploring different concepts and theories related to the research. This has helped to understand the context of the research, base the interview questions on and through the created conceptual framework was a guide to interpret the collected data. Finally, the literature review has also been used to find similarities with the data collected from the interviews. According to Eisenhardt (1989) this is important because by discussing similar findings in the literature and the results from the primary collected data underlying similarities in phenomena that are normally not associated with each other can be discovered. In this way it serves as an internal validation for the findings and can contribute to making the findings more generalizable (ibid.).

3.4. Data Analysis

Through a qualitative content analysis the collected data of the interviews was analyzed. A content analysis is appropriate for both interviews and print media (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1278) define content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns.” The goal of a qualitative content analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992: 314). A conventional content analysis was conducted. This approach is generally used to describe a phenomenon and is usually appropriate when existing theory or research literature of a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This is an inductive research approach where there are no categories formed before the analysis of the data, but rather these emerge from doing the analysis (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

Parts of the theoretical framework were integrated in the conceptual model based on the work of Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2007), cited in Kolk, Van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008), which was the basic guide in structuring the answers provided by the interviewees. At its most basic the answers were divided into a
A number of categories which are: reasons for PPP, sustainability priorities, information, in accordance with the research questions posed in the introduction. Furthermore the analysis of the interviews was compared to the broader literature study to find differences and similarities that indicate new insights as well as support for existing findings.

The notes of the web testing were analyzed. A list of the specific actions and comments that the participants made was written up and of each action or comment its relevance was decided by the researcher.

### 3.5. Quality assurance

Assuring the quality of the research is vital to the whole research and a key concern in the research process (Robson, 2011). Yin (2009) explains that a main critique on case study research is that it is often conducted with a lack of rigor, resulting in not following systematic procedures and biased views that influence the findings and conclusions. To assure trustworthiness of the research it is important that it is conducted without bias (as much as possible, as the researcher can never be completely objective), and that clear and research practices are followed (Robson, 2011). In order to ensure the validity of the research Kidder and Judd (1968), cited in Yin (2009), propose four quality controls for social science. In addition, for each of these controls Yin (2009) has identified several indicators specific to test the quality of a case study research. These four validity controls were taken into account for this research. First each quality control and the specific tests concerning case study research are presented, then the measures taken in this research are explained.

**Construct validity** helps to identify the correct operational measures to be studied. Yin (2009) emphasizes that during the data collection phase multiple sources of evidence should be collected, as well as a chain of evidence.

- For this case study research the primary data was collected through qualitative interviews. As part of these interviews a number of website tests were conducted. The reason for this is that through this method first the interviewee gets open ended questions to which they can answer freely. In the second part – the web testing – examples are provided in the form of different webpages to which the interviewee can comment. This provides two types of information that can complement each other and it can also be used as a way to build a chain of evidence. Additionally, to ensure validity during the interviews answers were summarized and repeated or additional questions were asked to confirm what had been said. Furthermore, the transcripts of the interviews was sent to three of the four interviewees, while the last interviewee received the results with the specific parts highlighted that concerned the interviewee, including quotes. Two of the four interviewees responded that they had received the transcript. Last, the collected primary data was compared to findings from the literature to find similarities and differences, further building the chain of evidence.

**Internal validity** seeks to establish a causal relationship.

- During the data analysis a content analysis was used. First each important finding of the research was highlighted and coded. Later these codes were revised. Then the codes were sorted into groups which are further explained in the results section. In the analysis common findings and differences are compared with each other and further explained.

**External validity** defines the domain to which a study’s findings can be generalized. For this research the goal is not to generalize but rather to find the specific context-bound factors determining the conditions for a public-private partnership. Yin (2009) proposes that theory should be used in a single-case study to assess external validity.

- As mentioned, during the case study research information from multiple literature sources, including scientific papers and reports, is collected which is used to validate the empirical findings.
Reliability ensures that a study can be repeated with the same end results. During the data collection phase a protocol should be used, as well as keeping a database (Yin, 2009).

- To insure reliability a number of measures were taken. First of all, each step of the method is explained in this chapter. Second, the sources used for the literature are documented in the reference list. And third, the interviews are recorded and transcribed. In the appendix 1 the research questions can be found.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Lewis (2003) emphasizes the importance of taking ethical considerations into account especially in qualitative research where certain issues may not always be anticipated. It is emphasized that informed consent must be given prior to participating in the research and that information on the purpose of the study, research and use of the data is shared with the participants beforehand (ibid.). Also, if participants will be identifiable in the report they must give their consent beforehand (ibid.).

In this research the participants were e-mailed with a request to conduct an interview. In the e-mail the purpose of the research was explained and also the request was posed to record and transcribe the interview and add a copy of the transcription to the final thesis document. This request was in each case accepted by the participants. However, after consideration it was chosen not to include the transcripts of the interviews in the final report, but rather only include the interview questions and the empirical results, in which may of the quotes are processed.

3.7. Limitations

The main limitation of this research lays in the number of interviews that have been conducted. During the data collection phase it became clear that it was significantly harder to organize interviews than was foreseen. 20 e-mail requests were sent out to a private partners. Eventually five responses came in with a positive reply, five people responded they could not participate and another ten did not reply to the request after two invitations. With the five people that had sent a positive reply interviews were planned. One of the potential interviewees rescheduled three times and eventually did not respond to e-mail contact anymore and was thus deleted from the list eventually. This meant that eventually four interviews could be conducted over a period of three weeks. The limitation to this research therefore is that only a limited amount of quantitative data could be collected through interviews. On the other hand, each interview was very in-depth lasting between 45 minutes and 1.5 hour and has provided very detailed answers. Additional sources of information to complement and validate the interviews are the following: web testing exercises with the same persons as the interviews, and the conducted literature review including a research conducted by IDH in 2017. With this combination of different sources of information the research question was answered.

Second, when the list was composed, companies of different sectors were selected. Also attention was paid to selecting interviewees with different positions within the company and an equal male/female ratio. The research was successful in including different sectors – four different sectors were interviewed. Also, the male/female ratio was equal with two males and two females, and all interviewees have a different position within the company with different level of authority. It is likely that a different set of interviewees would have resulted in a different outcome. Therefore the results from this research are highly context-bound and aim to gain a detailed understanding of the specific phenomenon that is studied.

Third, originally it was intended to do all interviews in person to facilitate the process and have a natural flow between interviewee and interviewer. However due to travel distance only two interviews were eventually conducted in person. The other interviews were conducted via Zoom, an online communication services comparable to Skype, and recorded. During the first interview that was conducted in person technical difficulties with the mouse pad influenced the web testing, as the ability to scroll on pages was limited. Also, in one case the screen was not shared while web testing, thus only notes of the comments were made in this case.
4. Results

In this section all the data that was collected during the research is presented. For a case study it is common to use different data sets to come to an answer on the research question. For this case study interviews and information through web testing activities were collected. The conceptual framework of 19 was used to structure the results.

4.1. Benefits of engaging in a multi-stakeholder collaboration

By understanding the reasons of private partners to engage in a multi-stakeholder collaborating, insights were gained on what are perceived as the most important benefits, and thus which aspects of a multi-stakeholder collaboration are of most value to private partners. In general two important themes are mentioned which are 1) a platform for collaboration and 2) a platform for knowledge exchange. With regard to the duration of the process of forming and being engaged in a multi-stakeholder collaboration it was mentioned that a multi-stakeholder collaboration can take up a lot of time due to the different parties involved, which all have different agenda’s, priorities and goals (Interviewee B, pers. com., 18-04-2018; Interviewee C, pers. com., 18-04-2018).

4.1.1. Platform for collaboration

First, and mentioned by all interviewees, the partnership is seen as a platform for collaboration. Several reasons were brought forward that explain the benefits of a shared collaboration: to increase impact, share risks and resources, and to increase transparency in the value chain.

By joining in a multi-stakeholder collaboration more impact can be created, opposed to a situation where only one actor would be involved. This is perceived as an important reason to engage in a PPP. “Different parties that are too small by themselves can work together to have more impact” (Interviewee A, pers. com., 11-04-2018). Likewise, Interviewee B (pers. com., 18-04-2018) said: “I think all the parties are too small to make a real impact, so you have to join others to drive impact.” The sort of impact referred to is the sustainable change that can be generated in the value chain the company works in.

A second important aspect of joining in a partnership is that the risks as well as resources can be shared among the involved parties. Often projects around sustainability are long-term, which requires long-term investment of the different involved actors, both in terms of activity as well as resources that are dedicated to the project. “When you start implementing these sustainability aspects, many of these goals or objectives are very long-term and they require a type of investment or activity outside of your direct comfort zone” (Interviewee D, pers. com., 30-04-2018). Furthermore, Interviewee D explains that it helps to team up with more sustainability partners, like NGOs and the public sector so that risks can be shared. Moreover, by including a number of different stakeholders, co-investments can be made which lower the risks and set a common agenda. Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018): “So if we team up, basically the public sector gets something that they want: increased services and hopefully productivity and profitability for the smallholder farmers. And we basically get reduced risks or investments in the pre-competitive environment. So team up basically can help you achieve the common goals.”

Connected to the point above on managing risks it is mentioned by Interviewee B (pers. com., 18-04-2018) that a partnership also helps with gaining more transparency in the rest of your supply chain. This also helps with understanding the risks. “We want to manage our own risks but also the risks of the sector and the only way we can do that is to collaborate with other stakeholders within the supply chain but also with the government for example.” (Interviewee B, pers. com., 18-05-2018).

4.1.2. Platform for knowledge exchange

Second, a multi-stakeholder collaboration functions as a discussion platform for sharing and staying informed on the sustainability debate. It was brought forward that staying informed on the developments in
the industry and in sustainability is good for the survival of the business. Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) explains that a multi-stakeholder collaboration helps to understand “what is currently the debate, what is the discourse, what are the concepts?” He adds that this information is important for business survival.

4.2. Benefits of IDH in PPP process

In order to understand what the most important added value of IDH in the process is, the interviewees were asked to explain which reasons they have for collaborating with IDH specifically, and also what in their opinion could further improve the added value. First the establishment of the contact is briefly touched upon, then the main benefits of IDH in the PPP process are set out. These are IDH’s convening role including the network it has, the knowledge and expertise it has of sustainability and partnerships and the funding capacity. Last, the interviewees were asked to elaborate on what they see as potential added values. These findings are

Looking at the start of the collaboration, in most cases it was mentioned that IDH was the one that started the initial contact (Interviewee C, pers. com., 18-04-2018; Interviewee B, pers. com., 18-04-2018). “We were asked to be part of the cashew value chain. It’s now called the SNI. Our involvement was to be part of that group as a think tank and the discussion.” (Interviewee C, pers. com., 18-04-2018). Although there was also a case where the company was the one that started the contact with IDH. Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) mentions that her company was the one seeking contact with IDH in order to start a sustainable project in the spices industry and that she was introduced to Joost, the CEO of IDH, through a mutual contact.

4.2.1. Role as convener

With regard to the benefits of IDH in the PPP, in the first place all interviewees mention the convening role of IDH in reaching sustainable goals. Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) refers to SDG 17 on partnerships, and adds that you need IDH for this: “I strongly believe in SDG 17, so then you need IDH”. The convening role of IDH is referred to as a facilitating role, offering support and being a broker. Interviewee D: “I think IDH is primarily a broker and a thought leader in terms of sustainable development and sustainability targets” In each case IDH is referred to as a convening party that brings together different actors and helps in establishing relationships. Most respondents accounted that the benefit of IDH’s involvement in the process is the fact that IDH can facilitate a dialogue with other actors in the value chain in a pre-competitive environment. Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018): “You are helping the public and private sector partners to engage in debates on what is sustainable development, what are sustainable value chains and then you help and create for them a space where they can co-invest in taking actions to achieve these common goals”. Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) adds to this that of special importance of fulfilling this role as a broker is the independent or ‘neutral’ position that IDH has: “If the private sector wants to make sustainable changes, they have to cooperate. And to cooperate you need independent third parties, to facilitate, to make everyone work nicely together. And I think that’s the role of IDH.”

On the other hand, Interviewee C (pers. com., 18-04-2018) accounts that he finds the role of IDH more difficult to understand: “Maybe that’s the pre-competitive environment that I don’t really connect with or understand.” He explains that this is the case because of a recent project he has been involved in where the goals of the participating partners were not aligned anymore after some time. “I don’t want to say it’s a lost cause, but it has changed so dramatically that one is left to wonder if there is any benefit left.” Nonetheless, he does also mention he sees the role of IDH in building relationships: “IDH is playing a role as well in working relationships with FMO which is an ongoing discussion”. Connected to this role of convener is also the benefit that IDH has a very broad network that can be tapped into. Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) explains that she sees IDH as a lining pin to make contact with local authorities abroad and that that is something important she is looking for.

A side note that is mentioned by Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) is that many private sector companies do not have a department that actively searches for opportunities to engage in partnerships for sustainability: “They are busy doing their business, they are not skimming the internet trying to see if
somebody made a call for sustainability projects.”

4.2.2. Expertise and knowledge

A second important benefit that IDH delivers on is that it provides expertise and knowledge. This is mentioned both in terms of knowledge on sustainable value chains as well as for the PPP process. Interviewee B (pers. com., 18-04-2018) explains: “I think I would consider IDH to be a knowledge institution.” Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) adds to that: “The broker role is by far the biggest, and then secondary during that broker role you have quite a lot of events around the learning around the goal setting, the common understanding, etc. But I would say that that learning is a function of that joint understanding of investment. It is also more of a co-learning”. In this role of facilitating learning, the long-term vision that IDH has is deemed as an important factor “IDH has a long-term vision and I think that’s necessary when you are talking about sustainability” (Interviewee A, pers. com., 11-04-2018).

Cross-sectoral knowledge is specifically mentioned. Cross-sectoral information is of interest as it may function as a learning opportunity. Other sectors might be ahead: “In general the fruits and vegetables sector is three to four, maybe five years ahead of the plants sector in terms of sustainability” (Interviewee B, pers. com., 18-05-2018). She elaborates that many different sectors face similar problems related to working conditions.

With regard to the knowledge that IDH has of the PPP process it is mentioned that: “They know better where certain funds can be sourced in order to do capital investments into the added value or the by-product processing.” (Interviewee C, pers. com., 18-05-2018). Furthermore, with regard to the expertise and process of a PPP, Interviewee A (11-04-2018) describes the accelerating role IDH has, and explains that it is very important to keep projects moving: “When IDH sits down and leans back, I’m pretty sure that nothing will happen”.

Funding

Third, it was mentioned that another benefit of collaborating with IDH is because it provides funding. “IDH is a co-funder or dominant funder of a certain investment in the value chain. That is very clear-cut understanding” and “IDH has been doing some funding of certain programs. That’s a very tangible added value to our group.” (Interviewee C, pers. com., 18-04-2018).

Potential added values

A number of potential added values are brought forward which are broadly to be divided into: creating trust, increasing transparency, offering additional knowledge and further extending the network to other commodity chains. In some cases the potential added value is described by other interviewees as an already existing added value. Interviewee C (pers. com., 18-04-2018) sees as a potential added value that IDH could also deliver on creating credibility and trust by doing an endorsement. Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) mentions that he is interested in more insights in the selection process of IDH concerning partners for its projects. He reckons that this is a process that has a formal, for example through a call to action, and an informal, for example through meeting at a conference, aspect and that more transparency on how choices are made is valuable: “The question is sometimes how do you balance this individual information with publicly available information?” (Interviewee D, 30-04-2018). Interviewee B sees potential added value in information on how to deal with certain environmental challenges, but also notes that IDH might already have such information but that she is not aware of it. “I don’t know to what degree IDH also focusses on environmental issues, but I see that there is a gap there for our sector as well. She explains it would be interesting if there is knowledge readily available on that.” Interviewee C (pers. com., 18-04-2018) proposes that other forms of financial support than match funding could be used with more flexibility and based on impact. Like Interviewee B, he mentions that he is not aware whether such a funding scheme already exists, because he hasn’t looked for it yet. Furthermore he adds a point on the cross-sectoral benefit that IDH could deliver on: “IDH can be an enabler in the sense of finding partnership, they have much broader network in the industry than cashew only.”
4.3. Priorities in sustainability

The interviewees were asked to prioritize the current sustainability topics they are involved with that their company is facing at this moment. This gives insight in the sort of challenges they face, and the topics that they are thus interested in to receive additional information on or support to cope with. It became clear that the topics they mention are also very closely related to the sector they work in, therefore the results are presented per interviewee.

Interviewee C (pers. com., 18-04-2018) mentions three main points of interest in sustainability: “So there are a couple of priorities. One is on the ground in Africa. One is on the enabling environment. One other enabler will definitely be focus on investment on by-product production.” Impact on the ground, explained by Interviewee C, is about the impact on workers’ and growers’ lives through increased productivity, leading to more income and improved infrastructure including facilities such as roads and water supply. Second, the enabling environment is about being able to do business in Africa. “The overriding point on the sustainability part is: Can we stay alive in Africa, in the sense of being a business? One thing we’re discussing with IDH is how do you get finance into Africa at a level that is actually affordable?” Interviewee C explains that finance in Africa is a particularly difficult point as the perceived risks are much higher which increases interest rates. Third, mentioned is the investment on by-product production, which is about developing by-products of cashew which create additional value and a new business case.

Interviewee B (pers. com., 18-04-2018) described as the most important priorities in sustainability due diligence and pesticide control. She explains that the company’s interest in sustainability topics is also influenced by consumer demand: “We have our customers’ demand which are very important for us as well, customers are very much focused on pesticide use”. She also mentions labor conditions as an important theme and specifically mentions gender.

Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) mentions that the company at this moment is very focused on CO2 reduction. This is a priority because the cooking processes take up lot of energy. Furthermore they take into consideration the whole chain – both upstream and downstream – in efforts to reduce CO2. As part of the efforts downstream it is also added that the company searches for a way to reduce the environmental impact of packaging. Specifically, an upcoming project in Indonesia is mentioned: “On the social side we are starting the first of May with a huge project where we are going to use geo data to reach out to farmers in Indonesia. The goal is that in the end 100.000 farmers will have the possibility to use modern technology to make that the yields of their land is increasing. The idea is also against deforestation, but also living wages so that their income is rising.” The company is also involved in work against child labor. Last, it is mentioned that traceability and transparency are important aspects for the business.

Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) explains that there are three aspects that the company focuses on with regard to sustainability which are equally important. The first one is the business aspect of sustainability, and how to develop market models of sustainability. He explains that the company works on living landscapes and non-deforestation policies, which they adhere to in projects and operations. The challenge in this is how such concepts can be turned into marketable models. “Let me start at the business one: how can we actually develop these market models of sustainability? How do you actually turn the concepts into something that can be marketed?” He elaborates on a specific method, that was recently launched by the company and they are now implementing. Furthermore, he notes that it is impossible to do sustainability without traceability because the two are intrinsically linked, adding: “When I talk about how you market that sustainability, then traceability is a key tool. Because if you can’t trace it, you can’t claim it.” (Interviewee D, pers. com., 30-04-2018). The second focus is on climate change. It is explained that it is an important topic they are dealing with continuously while exploring implementation strategies, ways to increase impact as well as ways to measure this impact. Interviewee D mentions: “There is a lot of thinking around that, but it’s obvious that agriculture and climate change are intrinsically linked.” Third, the SDGs are mentioned, by which is meant focusing on a number of activities related to the SDGs. Interviewee D explains that a focus on a number of SDG topics is chosen, especially those which are related to farmer and community wellbeing. Interviewee D explains that next to the importance of taking care of the people in the supply chain an additional benefit is that SDGs enjoy relatively high exposure and this has a positive benefits.
Last, an important note to make is that both Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) and Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) mention ‘hot’ topic or trends in sustainability. These topics are focused on by multiple different actors in the value chain at the same time and thus there is a discussion and activity around these topics, making them more visible than others.

4.4. Information

4.4.1. Channels

In order to reach target audiences, suitable channels to disseminate information must be chosen. Broadly, the channels that interviewees use to stay informed on sustainability in their sector can be divided into two categories which are information they receive from media outlets, and information they receive through the communication channels of organizations and companies directly. In the latter case, there are two sub-categories identified that partially overlap, these are the corporate communication channels, and the social network.

Media outlets mentioned included national and international newspapers, including online articles from for example Nu.nl (a Dutch news website), the Guardian and BBC, and websites specifically focusing on news about sustainability, such as Oneworld.nl (Interviewee B, pers. com., 18-04-2018; Interviewee D, pers. com., 30-04-2018). Also, Interviewee B mentioned that she is interested in Dutch short research programs on television including Keuringsdienst van Waarde and Zembla, even if the programs do not focus on the horticultural sector specifically but relating sectors.

To stay up to date interviewees follow information provided by a variety of organizations. Mentioned as most important corporate communication channels are online newsletters and the social network LinkedIn. Interviewee D, Interviewee B and Interviewee A all three mention newsletters as a channel through which they receive information. The time spent on reading newsletters is limited though. Interviewee B (pers. com., 18-04-2018) explains that she schedules 2 hours a week to go through newsletters she receives, while in reality the actual time she spends reading is about 30 minutes a week. Likewise, Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) says she is subscribed to a number of newsletters but rarely reads one, as she does not have the time to do this. Interviewee D adds that, next to newsletters, he uses LinkedIn to stay updated, but doesn’t use Facebook or Twitter: “I’m on LinkedIn. On LinkedIn I post some things myself, when IDH posts some things I sometimes like or share it. But I don’t really use Facebook and I don’t do Twitter either.” He notes that although he sees these sorts of communications as important, they are especially effective if it is not the first point of contact: “If you would tell me in a newsletter there is a new concept, but I wouldn’t yet know anything about it, then maybe I feel like it’s not so relevant. But if I’d already heard about it in a workshop and then it comes in a news bulletin, then it’s a good way to share it.”

Last, the social network was mentioned specifically as an important way to keep up to date on developments regarding sustainability. All interviewees mention that they attend conferences, workshops, and conventions. Interviewee D (pers. com., 30-04-2018) explains that at these events the top end of the industry and the latest innovations are presented: “In the end I think through workshops, and also conferences. I regularly go to big events and go to these debates. I gave a presentation in December which was all about food security, scaling, innovation… In the end 90% of these events are basically social networking events.” Furthermore, also through contact with buyers, relations, colleagues and the like they stay informed on latest developments (Interviewee B, pers. com., 18-04-2018).

As a side note to staying informed, it is important to include here that in response to the question how the interviewees stay up to date on sustainable developments in their field, both Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) and Interviewee C (pers. com., 18-04-2018) mention that there is little information available. As an important reason for this Interviewee C brings forward that there are more pressing challenges to be dealt with that ensure business survival: “I think the industry is not really caring much about sustainable development. I think anyone working in the African environment is not really worried about sustainable challenges, they are more worried about: Can we get the factory filled with people? Can we get the factory
filled with the right people? Can we get the finance to get going? Can we get the raw materials that we need?” (Interviewee C, pers. com., 18-04-2018).

4.4.2. Content

The interviewees were asked to explain what sort of information helps them in making choices to start a sustainability project and how they see Return on Investment (ROI). Also, through a number of tasks on the websites information about the content that the interviewees see as important was gathered. Gaining understanding of these considerations helps articulating a message that the interviewees see as valuable and helpful.

One point that stands out particularly is that the interviewees are interested in concrete information on results. They use such information in their own documentation as well. Interviewee C and Interviewee D explain that many processes within the companies they work for are closely monitored, for example collecting information on yield. Interviewee C (pers. com., 18-04-2018): “We verify numbers on how many growers we work with and obviously monitor these.” He adds that it is not interesting just to see increase of number of workers: “I want to see that we increased the yields. It’s not only counting noses, but it’s also counting impact”.

Connected to information on results, Interviewee B (pers. com., 18-04-2018) mentions she is interested in information on progress. Likewise, Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) wants to know about goals and where the project is now. Also it is mentioned by Interviewee A and Interviewee B that guidelines could be interesting. Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) explains: “Sometimes it would help if there were some basic instruments, formats, which you can use to move forwards. Like checklists, surveys, balance score cards, things like that”.

Interviewee C and Interviewee D explain that the information that gives insights on ROI is in general financially oriented, but also other factors play a role. As Interviewee C explains about ROI: “It has to be financial in some sort of form, but for me it’s never been financial to start with”. Interviewee D comes to a similar conclusion explaining one side of the information is very much about the financial aspects: “We would be quite interested to know not only what we are doing with IDH, but can you give an overview of not only how much money you have been able to leverage in the coffee sector, but where has it been invested and with whom has it been invested and on what topic has it been invested?” He explains this would help the company to better position itself. Furthermore he adds: “When it comes to direct profitability of returns on investment, the majority of the indicators at the moment are still very much financial”. While on the other hand it is intangible aspects of a company that play an important role in the perceived value of a company, including their innovation, intellectual property, human capital, leadership, ideas and vision (Interviewee D, pers. com., 30-04-2018) and specifically mentions that the company wants to be a leader in sustainability.

A number of website tasks were carried out with the interviewees on the website www.idhsustainabletrade.com. This was done to evaluate what the interviewees think of the content of these webpages, what information they would expect there to be and what information would be useful for them to make the decision to start a collaboration with IDH. All the respondents were fairly unfamiliar with the website, although some commented that they had visited the website in the past. Nonetheless it is in general not a website that people visit on a regular basis, therefore none of the participants beforehand thoroughly knew the structure or the content of the website. Multiple tasks were drafted to visit sector pages, initiative pages and project pages. A sector page is an overview page that gives information about all activities IDH undertakes in a specific sector, for example cocoa or spices, but also gives information on the general situation, main challenges and related news and documents from IDH. An initiative page is a page dedicated to one specific initiative such as for example the Sustainable Nuts Initiative (SNI) page, and is focused on the goals of that specific initiative and mainly interesting for the actors that are connected to that initiative. Initiative pages are included in the corresponding sector page, so the SNI is found on the sector nuts page. A project page is a short summary of a specific project and is also found on the sector pages. A project page can consist out of two lines of text or multiple paragraphs, depending on how elaborate it is explained. The participants were most familiar with initiative pages. Three out of four candidates referred to the initiative
in which they collaborate with IDH multiple times and two commented that they knew about the content of that page, visited it regularly or referred the page to their stakeholders for explanation on the initiative.

A main point that came forward regarding the content is that many specific concepts that IDH uses are unfamiliar to the interviewees. One of the tasks was to search for a report on ‘Service Delivery Models’ (SDMs), which was a concept that was completely unfamiliar to the participant (Interviewee A, pers. com., 11-04-2018). The task then was simplified to find information on fertilizers. Interviewee A chose to use the search tool to look for fertilizers, rather than using the navigation bar. Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) notes that: “I have no idea what you mean with sectors or landscapes or approaches or impacts. Now I go back to the search because I have no idea what to look for”.

Interviewee D (pers.com., 30-04-2018) reviews the information on a number of project pages in cocoa and comments that he would like to know who the private sector partners are, but also: “If I was looking at this I would want to know what is the duration of this project, what is the budget of this project and what are the objectives of this project?”. He reckons though that involved parties might not want to have information on their financial contribution made public. About the specific project reviewed he says: “It’s a few glossy headers but it really doesn’t give me a good feel or an insight of what is happening on the ground, or how I could replicate this.” Also, since the projects are accessible through a world map, Interviewee D finds this information hard to access and would prefer an excel sheet with the information: “More easy to access, because now I would have to go to every individual project and sort it out, but if I would have an excel sheet where I would see the total investment in the coffee sector of IDH, and then for each project these are the partners, and these are the timelines, and you could easily make a bit of an excel sheet with some headers of who is investing where and what’s happening”. Interviewee D argues that it would be good to have pointers in newsletters or on the website focused on what is happening around themes such as living wage, but especially mentions: “I think what really makes my colleagues move, is numbers. The bulk of these guys are traders and it’s about volumes and profits.” He explains that it is easier for them to see the value if indicators they use on a daily basis are used including number of farmers, value traded, profit margin, price increase. “It’s good to be very concrete. You can be very conceptual about the idea of living wage. But then you have to come up with a very concrete example: we tried this in Costa Rica, and Ruanda, and these are some of the results. The more that you can illustrate the concept with some practical examples, then it becomes more tangible.”

Interviewee A (pers. com., 11-04-2018) visits the initiative page Sustainable Spices Initiative (SSI) and finds the information to be very general and not focused, commenting that: “This is a very broad approach and if here it would say potato instead of spices it would have been the same”. Also, she would be interested in more result focused information commenting after seeing the page that she would like to see “more about results”. Furthermore she argues that the information is too text heavy: “I would have preferred here to have something more visual. Maybe a nice vlog, or something like that.” Interviewee A is asked which information is important for her on the sector page if she is considering a project with IDH: “I would like to start with projects that are already ongoing, so references. I would like to read or see or hear what has already been done and how it’s working in other commodities.”

Interviewee B reviews the Flowers and Plants sector page and scrolls only halfway through the page, commenting that the news section was for her the moment to stop scrolling. For her the information on the initiative page Sustainable Floricultural Initiative (SFI) is too low on the page, shown below news: “I would definitely incorporate the link to SFI higher up on the page.” Interviewee B is asked which information is important for her on the sector page if she is considering a project with IDH: “What sustainability risks are there in the region where I want to start doing business. Cross sectoral information is also relevant. Progress that you make in other initiatives would be interesting. Case studies.” Interviewee B mentions that she is text oriented herself, but that in general people are not “So, I can imagine you can do a lot with imaging over large pieces of text.”

Interviewee C reviews the Nuts sector page and when going through it finds the ‘resources box’ at the bottom of the page. This box is a collection of different publications by IDH related to the nuts sector. He downloads two of the case studies. Furthermore he comments on the page that he would like to know what the benefit of collaborating with IDH is, and that this should be clear on the page: “What can IDH add? There must be a reason for us to connect with IDH.” Interviewee C is asked which information is important
for him on the sector page if he is considering a project with IDH: “It is important that there is likeminded people and companies on board. And to have agreed on the outcome.”

4.4.3. Formats

There are different formats that content can be formatted in. The interviewees were asked to explain what sort of information they would like to receive and as a result a number of preferred formats where mentioned next to the content. Case studies and information about specific projects are mentioned to be of value (Interviewee B, pers. com, 18-04-2018; Interviewee A, pers. com., 11-04-2018). Interviewee A further mentions that for her it is important that the information is as brief and to the point as possible because she has limited time to spend on reading. She prefers information to be more visual, specifically mentioning video and film.
5. Analysis and Discussion

The main findings of this research are presented according to the three sub-research questions and an overall discussion. The sub-research question focus on the motivations that the private sector parties of this case study have to engage in a PPP, both in general as specifically for IDH, their main interests in sustainability, and the way in which they would prefer information to be presented. Also, for the first and second sub-research question in this section a clear relation is drawn between PPPs/sustainability and the associated information needs for private sector companies. It was found that the private sector partners of this case study highly value information that helps them in the continuation of their business in the context of sustainability. By this it is meant that the interviewees find information that focuses on results particularly relevant and valuable; this includes tangible and concrete examples of projects.

5.1. What motives do private sector parties have to engage in a public-private collaboration?

The findings of this research are on many points similar to what was proposed by McQuaid (2002). McQuaid (2002) divided reasons for joining a partnership into three benefits: 1) sharing resources, 2) effectiveness and efficiency and 3) legitimacy. This structure is used to answer the first question and similarities and differences in the findings are pointed out.

In the first place McQuaid (2002) mentions that by engaging in a PPP more resources become available to the actors involved. Several types of resources are described including financial assets, information and expertise, alternative perspectives and connections and networks (ibid.). The research found that financial assets, by co-financing projects, is an important factor to engage in a PPP. This is in line with the findings of Ismail (2013) who notes that especially for the private sector the financial aspect of the partnership is a crucial factor in its perceived successfulness. The findings suggest that the businesses of this case study are looking for a way to reduce the risks on their investments and that a PPP is a way to do this. There is thus in the first place a strong link between input of financial resources and reducing the perceived risks of a project. This is an important finding in the research as it gives insight on what one of the main points of reducing the risks for the private sector companies is. Salazar and Katigbak (2016) came to a similar conclusion and found that investments in SDG related fields by the private sector is still low because of the perceived risk that investments are not returned. Thus in order to attract private sector partners in a PPP it is of crucial importance to communicate about the co-financing capabilities and the decreasing risks that a PPP may offer. On the other hand, it was also found that doing a co-investment is also a way of achieving a common goal and that it benefits both the public sector as well as the private sector interests. This is in line with what Biermann, Man-san Chan and Pattberg (2007) and Schäferhoff, Campe & Kaan, (2009) found, that PPPs function as an institutionalized platform where public and private actors can jointly work together and that by doing this both the public good as well as the private interest can be served. Therefore in communication efforts this is also an important aspect to bring forward, that by engaging in a PPP a private sector partner can simultaneously secure its own interests as well as work with other actors on public goods.

A second group of resources that can be shared in a PPP mentioned by McQuaid (2002) are those that include information, expertise and alternative perspectives. This research found that information on what is happening in the industry connected to sustainability is sought after. Two distinct aspects were identified. In the first place companies are interested in information that helps them with making their value chains more sustainable. This can either be specific information on how to increase sustainability, for example in the form of expertise concerning pesticide use, or it is information that helps with implementing sustainability projects, for example how to apply for funding. Of particular significance is the finding that cross-sectoral information is perceived as important as it offers insights in other sectors that may be years ahead in dealing with sustainability issues. This is relevant especially for universal themes such as working conditions. The second aspect is gaining insights in the sustainability discussion on a broader level. This entails both information regarding what other (private) actors are doing in a specific sector, but also what the general discourse concerning sustainability is and the, so to speak, ‘hot’ topics that currently enjoy high exposure. The reason that these sort of insights are sought after is because it helps the company position
itself, which is good for business survival. Furthermore, by sharing information among participating partners, more transparency in the value chain is created which helps to identify risks for the company as well as for the industry as a whole.

The last category of resources identified by McQuaid (2002) that came forward in the interviews was connections and networks. The research found that this type of social resources or social capital is of great importance to the private sector companies, as it allows to connect with the right actors in collective projects. For example, many projects in value chains deal with international stakeholders including local governments. For such projects it is very valuable to have a partner in the collaboration that has connections, as starting such connections may require significant resources especially if it is in a remote geographic location. Connected to this is also the importance of trust. It was found that trust among the partners is an important factor that determines whether the private sector companies of this case join in the partnership. One aspect if this is the belief that the different partners work towards a common goal. Also, it was raised that through the network new connections were made that later lead to become partnerships. This bears resemblance with the findings of Tallontire (2000) explaining that initial connections can be made at conferences which later develop into a business relationship. These are important ways of connecting that typically take place through the network before the start of a partnership and are an important link in starting a collaboration. As such, the findings of this case are in line with what was pointed out by Thornton et al. (2013), that information acquisition to make informed decisions and strategically interacting with parties in the network are important aspects of organizational networking. The underlying finding here is that trust is built through lasting and proven connections and networks, and that this mutual trust helps in collaborations. As Healey (1997) argues, trust and knowledge are a fundamental aspect of a collaboration.

The second benefit of a PPP according to McQuaid (2002) is effectiveness and efficiency. It is described as creating synergy and avoiding wasteful duplication which ultimately lead to greater outcomes and cost savings (ibid.). The research conducted found that particularly private partners engage in a partnership because it increases their impact. A point that comes forward is that, especially smaller players realize that they need to team up to be able to increase their impact. By impact is meant the positive change that can be made in the value chain with regard to sustainability. In line with this, Schäferhoff, Campe and Kaan (2009) and Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008) also found that individual actors are increasingly realizing that they need to join in collaborations because they cannot solve global challenges by themselves. Relating this to information needs, it is thus beneficial to communicate that through partnerships individual players can have more influence and power in discussions and have bigger leverage. Furthermore brought forward by McQuaid (2002) is the fact that PPPs are more effective in the long-term because partnerships create stability. The research suggests that having a shared common goal helps to create stability, although no direct relation between stability and effectiveness in the long-term was brought forward. On the other hand, it was clearly pointed out that if common goals are lacking, or throughout the process goals of involved parties shift this may have consequences on the perceived benefit that a partnership brings, which could eventually potentially harm the continuation of the partnership. This finding is supported by previous research on the importance of setting clear goals and moving in the same direction (Trafford & Proctor, 2006; Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; McQuaid, 2002). Thus, to ensure effectiveness and efficiency it is important to continuously secure that all the actors in the partnerships are aligned in goals, and that there is open and transparent communication about this.

The third point regarding partnerships brought forward by McQuaid (2002) is that of greater legitimacy because local communities are involved directly in the partnership. Based on the findings of the research two groups of local communities can be identified, which are smallholders and local authorities. With regard to smallholders, although workers and growers are a fundamental part of the value chain, the results do not bring forward that through the described partnerships in the case study the smallholders are specifically more involved. The partnerships do specifically focus on improving the situation of smallholders, for example focusing on living wages, working conditions and infrastructure improvements, but it is not further elaborated on what the role or influence on such topics is by the local smallholders. With regard to local authorities, it was found that involving local authorities is an important aspect of the partnership as they are a key player that has influence on how a project develops. Greater legitimacy in the scope of this research seems to be especially related to involving local authorities because they hold a key role in the collaboration, whereas this was not necessarily found for the smallholders. With regard to communication this then means that especially the fact that connections with local authorities can be made is an important point to stress.

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One aspect that did not specifically come forward in the results but that is mentioned as important in the literature is the positive effects of engaging in partnerships on the reputation of a company. According to Dentoni and Peterson (2011) this is seen as an important reason to engage in partnerships. It was found in the case study that focusing on the SDGs helps with establishing a positive image of the company. Looking at the wider literature on CSR, Windsor (2001) points out that part of the reason to implement a CSR strategy is for the positive effect on reputation. La Rocca et al. (2016) explains that an important reason to establish a positive reputation in business to business contexts is because it is crucial in starting new relations. On a different note, Windsor (2001) also points out though that distinguishing between moral motivations and reputational strategy is difficult. This may offer explanation why the relation between partnerships and reputation was not specifically mentioned, as it is to some degree a reputational consideration that companies do not want to address. On the other hand, what found in this study is that it is perceived as important for the private sector companies of this case to be seen as a leader in sustainability thinking and that it is of importance to stay at the forefront of the discussion. This is in line with Dentoni and Peterson’s (2011) findings that another reason for engaging in a partnership is to demonstrate leadership in addressing sustainability challenges. Relating this to communication, it thus seems to be fruitful to highlight the benefits on reputation of engaging in sustainability efforts. This also relates to what was earlier mentioned, namely that communicating the possibility of partnerships to deliver at the same time on private interest as well as public goods is a good strategy.

All the above mentioned aspects to more or less extend have a positive influence on the continuation of the business, may it be through reducing financial risks, getting involved with the right partners or through positive impact on reputation. Kolk, van Tulder and Kostwinder (2008) found that the leading interest for companies to take part in a PPP is the corporate interest and that the cooperation must contribute to corporate profitability, either directly or through reputational benefits. This research finds support that the companies seek direct benefits such as financial benefits or knowledge in a partnership but does not find direct relation between reputational benefits and a partnership, although the benefits of focusing on sustainability topics are mentioned. All in all, it is found that continuation of the business is an important aspect of joining a PPP, and while corporate profitability is part of this continuation, this research cannot confirm it is the absolute leading interest for the companies to engage in PPPs, as they mention a variety of different reasons too. On the other hand the findings of Knorringa and Helmsing (2008) that corporations only engage in development initiatives to the extent to which this is desired by their stakeholders, finds less support. The research found that the companies are clearly looking for the business case in development initiatives, rather than to do it solely because of stakeholder pressure. These business cases for example are increasing the yield and productivity through development projects. Also, by engaging in development projects through a partnership the company can gain important insights which help position the company. This in turn also adds to a company’s business survival strategy. On the other hand, the point which will later be elaboration on further is that businesses are influenced by trends in sustainability and the interests of stakeholders such as consumers with regard to their interests in sustainability. It could be argued that currently sustainability in itself is a ‘hot topic’ which attracts business attention to the topic in general.

5.1.1. The specific benefit of IDH in public-private partnership?

In the first place it is found in this research that IDH is often the one that initiates contact. This is not directly related to the benefits of having IDH join in the partnership, but offers an understanding of the context in which partnerships are formed. An important insight here is that the private sector does not have a department looking for funds on development on a regular basis. Therefore the role of IDH communicating about partnerships and initiatives is rather important, as the private sector might not be aware of the initiatives that are taking place. In addition, IDH has a role as accelerator in projects and it is even considered that a project might stop moving if IDH takes a step back.

Looking at the benefits that were brought forward, the results indicate that especially the role of IDH as a convener is important. This role is important because it creates a space where companies can work together with other companies, thus creating a pre-competitive environment for the private sector. Furthermore, collaborations between public and private partnerships are also convened, so that they can co-invest and set common goals. The research also found that the fact that IDH is an independent third party is seen as
important, because the main goal for IDH is to convene partnerships, rather than to negotiate for its own interests. Additionally the fact that IDH has an extensive network is a benefit to include IDH in the partnership. Human capital is considered an important asset. It was brought forward that the role of IDH in getting in contact with local authorities is important.

Second, the role of IDH as an organization providing resources is found to be of importance. These can primarily be divided into expertise/knowledge and financial contributions. The expertise and knowledge IDH can offer is both related to the PPP process as well as to specific themes in making value chains more sustainable is seen as very important. Projects in sustainability are often long-term, as they deal with topics such as climate change and food security, and thus need significant investments. It was found that the long-term vision of IDH is an important benefit as well. Looking further at the financial contributions, this is seen as an important aspect of the partnership too. It is explained that financial contributions or co-investments can decrease the risks private partners face, making it more likely and attractive for them to join in a project.

Last, a specific point that comes forward and should be mentioned is that cross-sectoral information is seen as an important benefit that IDH can deliver on. IDH works in 12 different sectors and thus gathers a wide variety of different information in its work. As many sectors deal with similar problems especially around themes such as working conditions of workers and growers, while at the other hand some sectors are years ahead of others, the importance of cross-sectoral information becomes clear. The research suggests that especially smaller sectors benefit from cross-sectoral information as this case found that especially the spices, horticulture and nuts sector mentioned the benefits of cross-sectoral information, while this was not brought forward in the interview with the coffee sector.

Another important finding is that IDH should be clear and explanatory about its work and its added value, as this is not a given to be understood. This hold true both for the specific language used, meaning the concepts and discourses it uses to communicate, but also in general to continue explain what added values it delivers in projects. It is important that each partner knows what they can expect as the tasks that are carried out by IDH, but also what they can expect of the collaboration with the other involved partners. Expectations should be managed to avoid that partners become demotivated or lose trust in the partnership. Also, in this regard two way communication is a crucial aspect as it allows for stakeholders to provide feedback. However, two way corporate communication channels such as Twitter or LinkedIn seem unfit for such discussion as it may deal with more confidential information and therefore this finding more relates to one-on-one communication channels.

It was found that there are several points which IDH can address that can increase the added value. These include transparency, trust, financial flexibility and making knowledge available. Transparency within the value chain was mentioned as an important point to engage in partnerships, but additionally it came forward that also transparency in internal processes is valued to better understand choices that are made. In the context of IDH this related to the way in which partners are chosen to join a partnership and the process behind this. An important additional benefit that IDH could offer is that it can raise credibility of the actors through endorsements of credible partners that are also taking part in the partnership. This strongly relates to the findings about trust that were referred to earlier. Third, more flexibility in financing projects was brought forward. And last, making more knowledge available for example on how to deal with certain environmental challenges.

All in all many similarities are found between the benefits of engaging in a PPP in general, and the added value that IDH can bring to the partnership. In both cases the benefits of sharing resources, decreasing risks, a broader network and sharing knowledge are brought forward. The important special aspect of IDH is that it is has a unique role as convener in the PPP as an independent third party. These benefits are thus important points to take into account when communicating about a PPP.

5.2. What are the main priorities of each private sector partner with regarding sustainable challenges?
In the research it became clear that the priorities that businesses place on sustainability reflect the choices in the projects they are involved in. Many of the examples to illustrate priorities in sustainability that were put forward were examples of running on soon to start projects. First some of the current running projects are discussed in relation to the three pillars of sustainability. Then afterwards an analysis is provided of what priorities in sustainability were brought forward in a broader context. Based on the collected information six themes were identified.

In the first place, the projects that the respondents are involved in through their work are reviewed. Reviewing the projects that were mentioned clearly the three pillars of sustainability can be identified: economic, social and environmental. An interesting point to mention is that it might be that many projects are inspired on and set up with the three pillars in mind (as the sustainability reporting of three of the four companies are all based on the three pillars of sustainability), and therefore these three pillars often come forward in the interviews. Analyzing the results, it becomes clear that the projects carried out focus on these three aspects, but in various degrees. This means that while the three pillars of sustainability are clearly interlinked, there is often one dominant pillar in a project which is paid attention to. Especially the economic pillar comes back in many of the projects that are mentioned. Often increasing yield and productivity are mentioned which are most related to the economic dimension of sustainability. At the same time though, it is mentioned that through increasing yield and productivity wages will rise which then improves the quality of lives of workers and growers. In that regard there is a clear relation between the economic and social dimension of sustainability. Furthermore, the social dimension also includes worker conditions, which in turn has an effect on for example productivity. From the cases it seems to come forward that the environmental perspective is a bit more isolated from the other two sustainability aspects, for example projects on pesticides are mentioned which have a clear environmental link. Although reduced pesticide use may also have effects on economic and social aspects of sustainability, this was not specifically mentioned in the research. However, also examples can be brought forward that show a relation between the environmental pillar and the economic and social pillar, such as the project to increase yield to limit deforestation.

Second, based on the collected information a division was made of the six themes that were particularly mentioned in connection to sustainability. Although it was intended to make a prioritization of sustainability topics, based on the information collected no definite prioritization can be made. Therefore the six themes are presented as main interests, but not prioritized. Four of these points can strongly relate to the three pillars of sustainability, as explained in the paragraph above a well. Two points however more relate to tools to communicate about sustainability. These are traceability and SDGs and their importance is explained further. Another important finding besides the six mentioned themes is that it seems companies tend to focus on the ‘hot topics’ or trends in sustainability. Therefore it is noted that in order to attract interest it is important to be well aware of what the trends in the field of sustainability. A different point that influences what the private sector focusses on is what is of interest to consumers.

Interest fields in sustainability relating to the three pillars of sustainability:

- **Financial and business aspect of sustainability – Primarily economic**
  This point was brought forward in different contexts, and entails how sustainability can be a business opportunity. It is mostly focused on the economic perspective of sustainability. One of the central questions that came forward was: how to develop market models for sustainability? The goal in the end is to secure continuation of the business, and an important aspect of that is what role sustainability can play in this. Looking at Carrol’s (1991) pyramid of responsibilities of businesses it is found that the economic dimension is the most important one, upon which all other business responsibilities rest. With regard to responsibilities in sustainability this is found to be the same, as first the continuation of the business must be guaranteed, being economic sustainability.

- **Impact on the ground – Primarily economic and social**
  This point relates primarily to economic and social dimensions of sustainability. The impact that is aimed for is to improve the situation of workers and growers. Specifically mentioned are working conditions, living wage, and improvements in infrastructure.

- **Environmental impact – Primarily environmental**
  Next to the previously mentioned primarily economic and social impacts on the ground, the environmental impact was a clear theme as well. It was discussed both on the high level of climate change, where it was
made clear that agriculture and climate change are intrinsically linked, and impact each other. Most companies seemed to be aware in various degrees of this impact and mentioned taking specific measures in their value chains regarding limiting this impact varying from pesticide control to CO2 reductions.

- **Labor conditions – Primarily social**
  Labor conditions are primarily a social aspect of sustainability and partially are addressed already under ‘impact on the ground’. But it was chosen to also identify labor conditions as a theme by itself, they also are a category by themselves being mentioned as an important aspect in the supply chain. They are a universal theme that is an aspect of each value chain, as every sector works with growers or workers in one way or another. Gender equality and child labor were specifically mentioned as point that are taken into account.

Tools in communicating about sustainability:

Two themes that were frequently mentioned in relation to sustainability are traceability and SDGs. These are, rather than part of one of the three pillars of sustainability, more a way that can help communicate about sustainability. This is further explained in the two points below.

- **Traceability, transparency and due diligence**
  The importance of traceability and transparency is a main finding of the research. It is brought forward that it is impossible to do sustainability without traceability. Traceability especially has to do with insights in the value chain and it was found that this is also an important factor in the marketability of sustainability, because in order to claim a certain statement it must also be traced and tracked. Therefore, traceability is a way to gain insight in the value chain and help communicate about sustainability topics. On the other hand, with regard to transparency, openness of businesses in a broader sense of doing business is deemed important. This is the case because in may help with assessing risks in the value chain.

- **SDGs**
  The SDGs were mentioned as an important focus of sustainability. The 17 goals are a comprehensive and simple way to recognize and communicate about sustainability. This is an important point because often challenges related to sustainability are highly complex which makes it hard to explain the work that is done to address such issues. In this regard the SDGs can function as a way to explain what specific measures are aiming to reach by connecting them to one or more of the SDGs. Furthermore, this is also a way to raise visibility and awareness as the SDGs are highly recognized. Connecting projects on sustainability to the SDGs helps to position them and could help to focus attention on them.

5.3. In what way do private sector parties want information to be presented?

A number of important findings were made with regard to the way in which the companies in this case study wants information to be presented. Seven key findings are pointed out that explain what is of importance for private sector partners in relation to information on public-private partnerships. These seven points are rather diverse and bare some overlap with previously presented findings. Different aspects of presenting information were brought forward including the content of the information, the format as well as the channel.

In general the main points that are brought forward are:

- **Concrete, focused and to the point information**
  An important point that became clear is that in general it is seen as important to stay up to date on developments, while on the other hand only little time can be spent on doing this. Therefore it is important that the information is focused and to the point. It is specifically mentioned that information should be

- **Result-oriented and financial information**
  When private sector partners consider or engage in a partnership an especially important criteria is to measure the progress. As was brought forward earlier, there are numerous of reasons to engage in a PPP
which all are to some extent related to securing the continuation of the business. In this regard the information that the private sector wants to receive is very result oriented. Specifically numerical information is valued as well as information on the financial aspects of projects. This helps with quickly getting a feel of the project’s scope, objectives and results.

- **Tangible examples**
  Examples are a key aspect of bringing across information. Clear and tangible examples are a way of explaining and illustrating a concept which helps to better understand and digest the information that is presented. Case studies are specifically mentioned multiple times as they function as a reference and a convenient way to explain what has been done and how.

- **Not only text**
  The importance of presenting information in other ways than text only is highlighted. Specifically mentioned is conveying information in video such as vlogs. This also relates to the point earlier made that information should be to the point. For example an infographic could provide information in a structured way which is understandable in one look, whereas the same information might need to be explained in multiple paragraphs which makes it more difficult to scan.

- **Accessibility of the information**
  The information should be easy to access, this includes both the way in which the information is presented, for example it should be easily downloadable. As a second aspect to the accessibility of the information it is important to consider the channels by which it is disseminated. An important finding is that digital channels were mentioned to be of importance to stay up to date, but that next to that network events such as workshops and conferences are also of significant importance. The specific digital corporate channels that are most important are newsletters and LinkedIn. An important insight is that these digital channels may be used to reinforce a message that was already put out for example of a conference. In this way it serves as a reminder after initial personal contact. The findings on the use of digital media are in line with what was found in the literature review about the growing importance of digital channels, the interest and attention they can draw to a message and as well the ease in transmitting a message and low cost of sending to a mass audience (Zhang, 2015; Prokofieva, 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Alvarez, Sánchez & Domínguez, 2008).

- **The other involved parties**
  When evaluating projects, either to consider participating, or in general to get an understanding of a project, information on the participating partners is very important. This is also again a topic that is much related to trust and as well the belief that different partners can together move in the same directions. The importance of both of these points are underlined by Provan and Kenis (2008).

- **Trends and innovation**
  As already mentioned, trends in sustainability are important to attract the attention of the private sector. It is important thus to know what the developments in this field are. Additionally to this the private sector is also looking for a way to stay at the forefront of discussions and of their industry in general, as this has strategic advantages for the survival of the business. In that regard they are also interested in what innovations in the field of sustainability are happening. This all closely ties in with the perceived importance and advantages of being a business leader or thought leader in sustainability.

Regarding the way to stay informed, the private sector companies of this case mentioned that this is done in two ways, through media outlets including newspapers, news websites and documentaries, and through direct channels from other organizations. With regard to the direct channels, the research found that especially mailing newsletters, LinkedIn and networking events, including conferences, workshops and conventions, were used to stay informed. An important finding is that digital channels such as LinkedIn and newsletters were mentioned to be a good way to reinforce a message that had already been heard at a social network event for example.

### 5.4. Overall discussion

Overall through answering the sub-research questions the main research question could be answered. The findings are placed in the context of the ‘aid effectiveness’ and ‘development effectiveness’ paradigms set out in the introduction. These discourses are focused on partnerships, economic growth, productivity, competition and sustainable development (Mawdsley, Savage & Kim, 2014; Gore, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2013).
In this context, this research aimed to explain how corporate communication channels could be used to engage with the private sector companies in this case study. This knowledge then can contribute to the establishment of public-private partnerships.

When looking at the important characteristics of these two paradigms, many parallels can be drawn with the information needs of private sector partners of this case study. The research found that the main reasons for engaging in a public-private partnership are because it is a platform for collaboration and for knowledge exchange. The benefits of this relate primarily to sharing resources including financial ones but also sharing a network, while the knowledge platform is a way to stay at the forefront of the discussion and stay informed on developments in the industry related to sustainability. In the end, all of these aspects contribute to the continuation of the business. This supports the findings of Masoud (2017) that businesses see economic responsibility, the financial well-being of their company, as their most important responsibility. With regard to information needs, this translates especially in result-oriented and impact driven information on sustainability, often with a focus on financial indicators. It is also brought forward that since companies monitor the progress of many of their own internal processes and projects, this also influences the way in which they want to receive information from other organizations. As they work for example with information on yield and productivity in their own business, this is also easy to relate to information from other organizations. However, although the economic aspect of sustainability is the main priority, a very clear connection with the other two dimensions of sustainability is made. This is the “business case of sustainability” and is aimed at the continuation of the business while simultaneously contributing to social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The strategies to take on sustainability are very integrated in the value chain and the projects that the businesses address often focus on all three pillars of sustainability. In this way it relates to Porter and Kramer’s (2011) ideas on CSV, although the environmental aspect of sustainability receives a more profound place. The findings of this research then support what Porter and Kramer (2014) explain, namely that businesses are interested in real change, which aligns social progress with corporate self-interest in a concrete and tangible way. Additionally though, this research found that there is also a well-established understanding that the environmental dimensions of sustainability increasingly play a role in the continuation of business, especially for agri-food value chains, as the intrinsic connection between agriculture and climate chains is brought forward. The third pillar of sustainability, the environmental pillar, is integrated too. Furthermore, while most of the interests in sustainability, described on page 41, can be divided into one or more of the pillars of sustainability, there is another aspect to sustainability which is found to be of particular interest. The research finds that traceability and the SDGs are important tools that can help in communicating about sustainability.

Trends in sustainability as well as influence from other stakeholders such as consumers on what they perceive as important points in sustainability, are both important influence that shape the agenda of what private sector partners focus their attention on. The research identified multiple important information themes which reinforce the findings of reasons to join in a PPP and sustainability interests. Especially the importance of concrete and result-oriented information becomes clear: information on numbers that explain financial aspects such as profitability, other involved partners, tangible and concrete examples that explain what was done and how it was done. This is strongly connected to the business case of sustainability. Relating traceability to information needs, it is closely related to transparency. Companies value traceability because by being able to trace a product’s origins, claims can be made which is good for the value of the product, while on the other hand by having these sorts of insights in the value chain risks can be limited too. This again connects to the aid development paradigm, which explains that because of partnerships there is a higher need for accountability. Furthermore, information on innovations is another important factor that attracts attention. Being a frontrunner and a leader in sustainability is perceived as important as it is seen as a business advantage.

The findings of this research tie in with what Kaymak and Bektas (2017) found: that multinational corporation increasingly face pressure to disclose information relating to ethics, accountability and transparency issues, while simultaneously globalization and unhindered spread of information lay additional expectations on organizations. Transparency is a point that is mentioned frequently and that is placed a lot of importance on as it can help reduce risks for the company. An important insight related to this is also that trust in collaborations is also very important, as it is especially important for partners that all involved actors in a partnership are moving in the same direction.
As brought up before, although it is argued by Knorringa and Helmsing (2008) that corporations only engage in development initiatives to the extent to which this is desired by their stakeholders, this research suggests something different. Increasingly it seems companies are looking for the business case in development initiatives, rather than to do it solely because of stakeholder pressure. These business cases for example are in increasing yield and productivity through development projects. Also, by engaging in development projects through a partnership the company can gain important insights which help position the company.
6. Conclusions

6.1. Aim

In conclusion this research has contributed to explaining what information contributes the private sector engaging in a public-private partnership in commodity value chains. This is important because currently the investments of the private sector in sectors related to the SDGs are still relatively low and partnerships can function as a way to attract private sector players to invest in sustainable projects. By finding what information is relevant for specific stakeholders a strategy that satisfies them in an effective, efficient and affordable manner can be created. The most important findings related to information needs that are based on the motivations that private partners have to join a public-private partnership, the priorities they have in sustainability and the way in which they prefer information to be presented. Ultimately a better understanding of the information needs of private partners in public-private partnerships helps to reach SDG 17 on partnerships that in turn supports reaching all other SDGs.

In short, the findings suggest that with regard to information needs of the companies in PPPs the companies are particularly interested in impact (on the three pillars of sustainability), results (especially financial), transparency and trends/innovations in sustainability. Elaborating on this, the main findings of this research suggest that the cases of the private sector partners investigated are looking to combine securing the continuation of their business, especially from a financial perspective, with being involved in sustainable projects. Their information needs are strongly connected to this goal. Furthermore, increasingly it is seen as an advantage to be a leader in sustainability. Again, this is strongly connected to continuation of the business, as it is seen as a business advantage to be at the forefront of developments. This then asks for information on latest innovations for example. It was found that companies see it as a business advantage to be well informed about developments in the industry and the sustainable sphere. Two influences with regard to the interests of private partners on sustainability topics are specifically identified: trends in sustainability and influence from stakeholders. Trends in sustainability are the ‘hot’ topics that receive considerable attention and enjoy relatively high exposure, therefore making them interesting to focus attention on. The important stakeholders of the private sector companies influenced what topics they focus on, as these relationships are important to the companies. Arguably the SDGs themselves are a contemporary trend in sustainability. The 17 goals are very understandable and recognizable, and help to explain sustainability efforts of companies, by classifying them under one or multiple SDGs. This makes it an advantage to use the SDGs as a “tool” to position sustainability efforts in relation to the SDGs.

With regard to information on PPPs, the main finding is that it is of great importance to continuously point out the added value of the PPP to the private sector partner. These advantages are primarily that a PPP can function as a platform for collaboration and for sharing knowledge. It was found that sharing resources, including financial resources, knowledge and expertise and network and connections where the main three categories of resources mentioned. Financial resources make the financial risk of a project smaller, which is an important factor that influences whether a private sector company wants to join in a project. Knowledge and expertise, give the company a business advantage as it has information or can carry out specific functions. Also included in this is having insight in the business landscape, which can help position the company better. Network and connections, can contribute to increasing trust and to bring the right actors together. In the end again, each of these factors has to do with the continuation of the business. Other points mentioned are that PPPs help to increase impact on sustainability topics, and that there are reputational benefits for focusing attention on sustainability topics which are addressed through PPPs.

Overall, these points all tie in with the paradigms that influence the development agenda and are focused on economic growth, partnerships and productivity. Information needs of the private sector are found to be parallel to such indicators: what is the business case of sustainability? What is the benefit to engage in a partnership? And what are the results and impacts?
6.2. Recommended further research

Although a thorough account could be given of what information private sector partners look for, the research has not been able to fully answer the question through which channels this information could be disseminated. A modest contribution in this field was done, as it was found that reinforcing messages through digital channels, which first had been put out at social networking events, may higher the chances that it is picked up by private partners. It was also found that especially digital channels were mentioned, the only exception being social networking events to stay up to date of developments in sustainability. In relation to this changing media behavior, it was brought forward by Kaymak and Bektas (2017) that especially multinationals face a whole new media landscape where transparency plays a major role. This is a point that could be further explored as it would be interesting to further investigate to what extend transparency is important and especially what the role of different media could be in that. In a world that is increasingly digital, where so many messages compete to attract attention, transparency might also be influenced by the availability and accessibility of messages. Further research should be conducted to understand how organizations in the current media landscape could fulfill the need for more transparency especially related to their efforts in sustainability.
7. Acknowledgements

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8. Reference list

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9. Appendices

9.1. Appendix 1: Question list interviews

Introduction (short)
- Name & company
- In which commodity program do you work with IDH?
- Could you briefly describe how you see IDH and the work IDH does?

Motivations for collaboration (4)
- How did you (as a company) get in contact with IDH? Can you describe this process?
- What is the benefit for you to engage in a multi-stakeholder collaboration?
- What is the added value for you to collaborate with IDH?
- How could IDH improve this added value for you?

Return on Investment (2)
- How do you define return on investment?
- What type of information or documentation provides you this?

Interests and information provision (5)
- What are your priorities in sustainability?
- How do you keep up to date with developments in your industry related to sustainability challenges?
  Which media do you use for this?
- To what extend do IDHs channels provide you with this information?
- What additional information would you like to receive from IDH?
  - Example: Are you interested in services of IDH, examples of other company projects, impacts and results, contact information, etc.
- Is the information IDH provides useful for you to explain to your stakeholders why you collaborate with us?
- What additional information could we provide that fits this purpose better?
- Which companies are in your opinion good at sharing information that is relevant to you? Why?

Website (before testing)
- What type of communication channels do you use/follow of IDH? What streams are most used by you? Why?
- Do you visit IDH website?
  - If yes, what do you look for? What do you expect to find?
  - If not, why not? What would make you visit the website? How else do you find the information that you need?
9.2. Appendix 2: Web testing tasks and scenarios

1. Navigation

Objectives:
- Test which one from Sectors or Commodities is clearer from the user perspective.
- See if users can easily navigate from sections to sections.

The task:
Start at homepage. How would you navigate from here to the commodity chain you work in with IDH? [Relevant sector page]

Questions:
Does ‘sector’ imply the same to you as ‘commodity’? Which do you find clearer?
Where would you click if you want to go to the [relevant page] from here? Can you show me?

(Throughout the testing keep an eye on how the user makes use of the navigation. If he uses the menu items versus going back to homepage, if he uses the project details widget for quick access to other section etc.)

2. Motivations to visit the website

The scenario:
“You know or you have heard from a partner that IDH produced a report on (agricultural) extension services and financial support, the Service Delivery Models Report. You would like to read or download that report so you decide to use the IDH website.”

The task:
Can you please show me how you would look for that report without using the Search function? [Relevant report] (Depending on the user’s profile the scenario/taks can be changed - For example SDM or Innovative finance approach might be relevant)

Questions:
Did you ever read or downloaded reports from the IDH website? If yes, can you please show me how you looked for it?
Did you come across similar resource type section on other websites where you thought that it was easy to navigate into and find what you were looking for?
- If yes, could you give me some examples?
- If not, can you think of what would make your research easier in that resource section? What could help you?

3. Content searched for

The scenario:
“Your company is planning a project in [relevant country] in the [relevant sector]. The objective is to improve the profitability through improved productivity of [relevant commodity] production and to develop resilient farmer organisations. You are assessing IDH’s capabilities to be your partner in this project.”

Questions:
Can you tell me what kind of information you would need from IDH when starting a project? Would you look for it on the website? Where?
Are related case studies, or potential ROI important information for you when you plan a project with IDH?

The task:
Starting from the homepage, can you please show me how you would look for some of this information?

4. Content searched for

Questions:
How important it is for you to know who else is engaged in IDH projects when you are assessing IDH capabilities for a project?
Where would you like to be featured as a partner on the IDH website? Did you come across this information on the IDH website?

The task:
Can you show me where it is on the IDH website?

Questions:
Do you review people’s experience and skills when you assess your potential partner for a project? If yes, where do you expect to find this information?

5. Content strategy

Questions: What do you think are IDH’s priority in your commodity sector? [Sector related to user’s interest].

The task:
Let the user read the commodity page overview and ask him the following questions:
- Do these priorities match your own interests? Is the language used to describe these priorities compatible to how you understand them? What kind of information are you missing that would be helpful to get you engaged with IDH’s sector program?