ABSTRACT
The World Bank promotes public–private partnerships as vehicles for democratizing environmental governance. This article presents an overview of their constitution in the World Bank, including what the Bank as an organization identified as their promise, and investigates what its partnerships for biodiversity conservation achieved. The article focuses on the institutional design of partnerships' governance structures, and assesses their democratic quality based on their potential to enable inclusion and empowerment of stakeholders. It examines nine global biodiversity partnerships between the World Bank and non-state actors from 1992 to 2008 and analyses the extent to which they have fulfilled the principled expectations expressed by the Bank. I find that partnerships have been organized through institutional arrangements that fail to promote inclusiveness and empowerment, which are minimum normative inputs for democratic decision-making in natural resource management. This suggests that World Bank partnerships are not sufficiently well poised to fulfil the democratic promise. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd and ERP Environment

Introduction

PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS HAVE BEEN A GROWING PHENOMENON IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE. MOST international organizations (IOs), regardless of their mandates, have set up a special unit to secure public–private partnerships with non-state actors (Bull et al., 2004). The World Bank has embraced partnerships with non-state actors, and incorporated them into its mission statement. In environmental governance, the Bank has even referred to them as the only way to do business, forcefully decreeing that for any ‘institution intent on securing our future on a livable planet, going it alone is not an option’ (World Bank/World Wildlife Fund Alliance, 1999: 3).

But what do partnerships deliver in practice (Kramarz, 2013)? Some authors have argued that they have limited power to address the three main deficits in global governance: regulation, participation and implementation (Biermann et al., 2007). Others have deemed them potentially legitimate and effective solutions to global governance (Börzel and Risse, 2005). Much of the existing literature focuses on their functional performance, problem-solving capacity, or the extent to which they can fill implementation gaps (Reinicke and Deng, 2000; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Benner et al., 2003; Biermann et al., 2007). Undoubtedly, these are important dimensions of
the transnational partnering phenomenon. Yet, what remains underexplored is the principled content of IO partnerships and how they perform in terms of the normative goals these institutions set them up to achieve (Bernstein, 2001; Conca et al., 2006). In this article, I address this gap, by assessing if and how World Bank partnerships democratize decision-making in natural resource management.

This article focuses on the governance structures of partnerships and its analysis is confined to: what actors participate, what social sectors and geographical distributions they represent, who leads their governing bodies and manages their strategic visions, and how much influence different actors have to make the rules that govern partnerships’ interventions on the ground or set standards for future interventions. What is excluded in this structural analysis is a canvassing of stakeholders’ experiences on the ground, and how they use their agency to interact informally with partnerships’ governance mechanisms.

The article proceeds in four sections: first, it defines partnerships for the purposes of this analysis; second, it traces the emergence of partnerships at the World Bank and the democratic promise that underpinned their promotion and growth; third, it describes measures of democracy, focusing on inclusion and empowerment as minimum normative ideals; and fourth it assesses the democratic quality of nine biodiversity partnerships which fit the criteria of this article.

Methodology

The first two sections were developed through a review of official public statements and documents, including material from the Bank’s institutional archives. The second two sections of the article were developed using primary and secondary literature of each partnership, including project documents, external and internal evaluations, and partnership budgets. Written sources include project documents, annual reports, partnership précis, partnership websites and evaluation documents, in addition to secondary research on World Bank biodiversity partnerships.

This was supplemented by 15 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2008 and 2012, with some of the partnerships’ Secretariats including executive directors, partnership advisers, grant managers and partner representatives; with World Bank staff including internal evaluators, task managers, investment officers and senior programme officers; and with external, independent evaluators of the partnerships.

The article focuses on environmental partnerships and specifically those aimed at biodiversity conservation. There are four reasons for this focus. First, the environment sector is where most of the Bank’s global and regional partnerships are concentrated (World Bank, 2011). Second, biodiversity – unlike climate change for example – is an under-researched sub-issue within that sector. Third, biodiversity is a significantly contested governance area, in which standards of appropriate conservation measures are divided along north-south, global-local, and public and private lines of authority. These tensions provide fertile ground for testing the substantive contribution of IO partnerships to democratizing global decision-making. Fourth, the Bank is one of the world’s largest financiers for biodiversity conservation, giving it considerable clout to shape governance structures and effect normative changes. Given the limits of the article, I do not make a claim regarding the principled performance of Bank partnerships in other issue areas, such as infrastructure or health. Doing so would require disciplining cases to render them comparable in terms of intervention types, actors and relationships across issue areas.

Defining Partnerships

Partnering has become a buzzword among IOs. A normative drive to partner has made defining what actors mean when they say they are working in a partnership a daunting task (Linder, 1999).¹ For example, as Nelson (2002) argued, there is a tendency in the United Nations (UN) to use the concept of partnerships to refer to almost any kind of relationship. This article conceptualizes partnerships as non-hierarchical steering mechanisms between state and

¹Linder offers a helpful review of the multiplicity of meanings of partnerships in contemporary discussions. His taxonomy reveals usages that vary from privatization disguised as partnering to actual power-sharing structures.
non-state actors to design and implement conservation interventions, or set standards for future interventions on
the ground (Börzel and Risse, 2005).

For this analysis, partnerships meet five specific conditions. First, they are global, in that they finance activities
across several countries. Second, they set up an autonomous governing unit with executive functions over the part-
nership. Restricting cases to only those where partners share decision-making authority is what distinguishes part-
erships from other types of collaborations (Nelson, 2002; Richter, 2004). For example, in traditional World Bank
projects a coordinating unit manages day-to-day operations but governance decisions rest with the IO and host coun-
try. Third, partnerships have different functions such as awareness raising, fundraising, implementation of projects
or standard setting (Tesner and Kell, 2000; Börzel and Risse, 2005). This article evaluates the institutional design
and potential for democratic governance of partnerships that implement activities on the ground or set standards
for future biodiversity conservation interventions. Fourth, partners must include both state and non-state actors
such as business firms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, trade organizations and academic
institutions. The development of public and private actors sharing governance functions arose in the 1990s, and
poses a different set of questions regarding democracy that are explored in this article. Fifth, partnerships must
be substantially focused on addressing biodiversity loss, as defined by the Bank’s environment unit.

Circumscribing partnerships to those cases that meet these five conditions is useful for analytical purposes, and
generally consistent with the criteria the Bank adopts in its own evaluations of global partnerships. The Bank spec-
ifies that these initiatives must generate benefits ‘intended to cut across more than one region of the world and in
which the partners: reach explicit agreements on objectives; agree to establish a new (formal or informal) organiza-
tion; generate new products or services; [and] contribute dedicated resources to the program’ (World Bank, 2002: 3).

The Emergence and Promise of World Bank Partnerships

The excitement over partnerships with civil society represents a shift in attitudes at the Bank. Before the 1992
Earth Summit, the Bank could be characterized more by distrust rather than engagement with NGOs (Domask,
2003). This started to change after the 1992 conference. Ten years later in the Johannesburg summit, partner-
ships with the civil society and for-profit firms gained momentum, and were endorsed as a key instrument for
effective global environmental governance. One of the official outcomes of the summit was the announcement
of over 200 partnerships between state and non-state actors.2 Partnerships are said to promote cooperation
and coordinated action, and are the instrument of choice at many IOs. They are often described as win–win
solutions: for the poor, capital and the environment (Richter, 2004). This new attitude of cooperation encour-
gaged some scholars to write of an emerging normative consensus, or a new synthesis, in multilateral governance
(Thérien and Pouliot, 2006).

The growth of global partnerships at the Bank also mushroomed during the same period, mirroring the trend in
the international arena. The Bank started to act as an entrepreneur for new partnerships in the mid-1990s, and by
2011 it had launched over 120 global and regional partnerships with yearly expenditures of $7 billion (World Bank,
2011). The Bank refers to global partnerships as a group of collaborative development initiatives that go beyond tra-
ditional country work. However, these include a gamut of initiatives, from limited institutional collaborations to
partnerships and trust funds.3

World Bank President James Wolfensohn (1995–2005) made partnerships one of the hallmarks of his adminis-
tration. He repeatedly invoked the partnership approach as the new way of doing business, and made them a
centrepiece of his plans for institutional renewal. Partnerships became enshrined in the organization’s new mission

Wolfensohn highlighted the promise of democratizing development governance by ending hierarchical rule-
making through partnerships. He stated that the Bank was becoming a better ‘listener’ of its partners, showing

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2This increased to 330 partnerships registered with the UN after the Johannesburg summit (Biermann and Pattberg, 2008)
3This article focuses specifically on what the Bank calls Partnership Programmes, and applies the criteria noted above that further restrict the
number of initiatives analysed.
respect and sharing with them the authority to plan their development (Wolfensohn, 2001). To civil society he acknowledged that the World Bank had ‘sat on a mountain with the IMF’ for 50 years and it was now changing and looking to join forces with civil society in meeting the challenges of development (Wolfensohn, 2000b, paragraph 6). Internally, before the Board of Governors, he said, ‘To be a good partner, we must be ready to listen to criticism and respond to constructive comments’ (Wolfensohn, 1995, paragraph 65).

During Annual Meetings of the Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the President spoke to the Board of Governors of the key dimensions of partnerships: inclusion, participation and empowerment (Wolfensohn, 2000a). He stated: ‘All partners in development must pay special attention to inclusion, participation and empowerment: Inclusion, because we cannot expect reforms to be sustained, if poor people are excluded when choices and trade-offs are made. Participation, because poor people know best what makes a difference in their lives. Empowerment, because we will not have lasting change unless poor people acquire the assets and means to shape their future’ (Wolfensohn and Kircher, 2005: 368). He referred to partnerships as a mechanism for inclusion and consultation with parliaments, civil society and the private sector in speaking with the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank (Wolfensohn and Kircher, 2005).

President Robert Zoellick (2007–2012) called for a ‘League of Networks’, in contrast to the old League of Nations (Zoellick, 2010). He continued to highlight the democratizing promise in a widely discussed speech in development circles, entitled ‘Democratizing Development Economics’. President Zoellick referred to partnering in terms of shared authority and non-hierarchical decision-making. He stated that partners are vital sources of resources and knowledge and that aid prescriptions would not flow from the Bank in a unidirectional way. His message on the eve of the 2010 Annual Metings was on democratizing development and recognizing partners’ roles in that enterprise.

In summary, the Bank transformed its view of the private sector and civil society. Whereas these actors were traditionally seen as rule takers, the Bank began to refer to them as joint rule makers, and to partnerships as the vehicles for sharing that decision-making authority. The degree to which this promise was internalized in meaningful ways is the subject of analysis of this article.

Scholars have also referred to the democratic promise of partnerships (Dingwerth, 2005; Bäckstrand, 2006; Biermann et al., 2007; Martens, 2007; Agger and Löfgren, 2008; Mert, 2009; Bexell and Mörth, 2010). Börzel and Risse (2005) note that it has been generally argued in the literature that partnerships with non-state actors enhance democratic participation.

Measures of Democracy

The Bank has many roles within partnerships as a founder, convener, lender and fiduciary manager. In an internal evaluation that sampled 26 global partnerships, the Bank was a founder or co-founder of new partnerships in 97% of cases, a convener 89% of the time, it contributed financial resources from the Bank’s budget to 85% of the partnerships, was a member of the governing board in 89% of the cases, it chaired that board 40% of the time, and also housed the partnership Secretariat in 40% of the cases. Hence, the Bank has in most respects considerable formal control over partnership processes and outcomes (World Bank, 2004). What follows is an assessment of the principled outcomes that have resulted from these roles, taking into consideration the Bank’s justification of partnerships as vehicles for democratizing decision-making.

Conceptions of what constitutes democratic decision-making evolve over time, as norms and values change. Kenney (2000) has evaluated arrangements for collaborative management of natural resources in the United States, and argued that current normative discourse on democratic decision-making tends to favour participatory democracy in the Jeffersonian tradition, rather than representative democracy following Madison’s model. As such, the normative ideals that are ascribed to healthy democratic institutions from an American perspective value diversity, pluralism and adequate representation. This interpretation is consistent with the Bank’s discourse on participation and democracy, as Wolfensohn’s and Zoellick’s speeches and institutional reports can attest. The stated goals focus on including and empowering a diversity of partners.
Defining what the normative ideals of democratic decision-making are beyond the traditional realm of state governance is also sensitive to interpretation by actors in particular contexts. The United States discourse to which Kenney refers may be a dominant one at the Bank, but it represents a limited worldview on democratic values. The input of actors in the developing world, required to arrive at an inclusive conception and responsive implementation of democratic ideals in biodiversity, is significantly understated in official Bank speeches.

Studies of democracy within decentralized, networked or partnership arrangements for environmental management have relied on an array of measures. Ribot (2004) emphasizes the importance of broad-based inclusion of local communities and publicly accountable local authorities to ensure real empowerment. Dingwerth (2005) also underlines inclusiveness, transparency and accountability as measures of democracy. Leach (2006) points more extensively to inclusiveness, representativeness, impartiality, transparency, deliberativeness, lawfulness and empowerment. Agger and Löfgren (2008: 117) assess the quality of democracy by evaluating ‘public access to political influence, public deliberation, development of adaptiveness, accountability and finally, the development of political identities and capabilities’. For Bäckstrand (2012) particular characteristics of input and output legitimacy can determine stakeholder democracy. She highlights the ideals of participation, control and accountability, and deliberative quality in decision-making processes. Klijn and Edelenbos (2013) evaluate the impact of political accountability, voice and due deliberation on outcomes of governance networks, and conclude that the last two dimensions are the most important ones for achieving desired outcomes.

I refer to two minimal input criteria for democracy that the Bank advocates, and are echoed throughout the literature on the democratic quality of environmental partnerships: inclusion and empowerment. Inclusion is a minimal condition, which stipulates that all the relevant stakeholders participate in decision-making processes. Empowerment refers to providing capacity and channels of influence for stakeholders to contest and guide decision-making.

To operationalize inclusion, I assess who and how many different social actors participate in these partnerships, as well as partners’ geographical representation. To assess empowerment, I consider who chairs the partnership’s governing body; if the chair position fixed or rotating; if the partnership’s Secretariat is located inside or outside the Bank; if the partnership is governed through a stakeholder or shareholder model; and if the executive body has strong executive powers or a weaker advisory role.

Inclusion
Partnerships that do not extend participation to actors beyond those who regularly take part in global governance may perpetuate, under a fashionable new governance recipe, existing power imbalances that make the status quo a preferable option to the partnership alternative on democratic deficit grounds alone (Leach, 2006). To assess inclusion, I consider the diversity of actors who are part of decision-making processes in partnership arrangements. As noted earlier, biodiversity governance is contested along public and private, north and south, and local and global lines. Consequently, partnerships that include actors from civil society, firms and government, who come from developed and developing countries where biodiversity interventions take place, and advocate on behalf of global and local interests are considered relatively inclusive. By contrast, a partnership that is limited to the Bank and one international NGO, which advocates primarily for conservation of global biodiversity, is deemed less inclusive.

Empowerment
This is a second minimal dimension of democracy because it measures the extent to which partners are able to bring to bear their own preferences on partnership decisions. Empowerment is gauged using the following five questions for assessment. First, who chairs partnerships’ governing boards? Does the World Bank or another organization chair the partnership’s executive board? This gives an indication of who may be the de facto lead partner. Second, is the chair position fixed or rotating? This is used as a proxy to assess the extent to which formal decision-making leadership is shared among partners. Third, is the partnership Secretariat located inside or outside the World Bank? This further probes the level of direct control the Bank exercises over its partnerships vis-à-vis other partners. Fourth, does the partnership follow a shareholder or stakeholder model of governance? In the former, only those actors who contribute financially to the partnership become members of the governing board. In the latter model, non-contributing actors are also part of the board that gives strategic direction to the partnership.
The basic logic behind the stakeholder-centered model of representation is that having a moral or economic stake in the outcome of a public decision-making process entitles each faction to a seat at the table (Leach, 2006: 101). The stakeholder versus shareholder assessment is particularly relevant for the World Bank, as stakeholder governance has been internally recommended as a best practice in global partnerships (World Bank, 2002). Fifth, does the governing board have executive or advisory powers? In the first case the governing board has direct and formal influence on management and can dictate the strategic direction of the partnership, allocate funds according to the priorities it establishes and select future lines of work. In the second case, the governing board advises but does not prescribe. An important indicator of empowerment is the degrees of involvement stakeholders have in framing the problem, and designing the solutions that a given partnership can provide, as opposed to being auxiliary advisers to an executive unit that has ultimate authority to decide on the type of interventions or standards it will prescribe.4

The biodiversity conservation problem is not a clear-cut fact. As Ebin has argued, while evaluating the conservation approaches of different co-management regimes in the fishing sector, problems ‘are constructed by humans. Framed through an integration of what is perceived to be the relevant facts, values, theories, and interests, problem definition is integral to the policymaking process’ (Ebbin, 2011: 151–152). In the context of partnerships, the ability for partners to continually frame the issues and solutions through an executive governing board is a distinct form of empowerment. The partnerships that are most empowering will be both inclusive and authoritative. That is, it will have chosen to follow a stakeholder model of governance, and set up a board that has strong (executive) rather than weak (advisory) functions.

**Evaluating the Promise of Democracy**

Between 1992 and 2008, 15 partnership programmes were launched to target biodiversity conservation, as identified in a Bank portfolio review (World Bank, 2008). Of these, only nine fit the five conditions of a global partnership defined in this article (Table 1). These nine partnerships are briefly described below with summaries that include initiation date, founding partners, goals and governance structure.6

**Small- and Medium-Scale Enterprise Programme and Environmental Business Finance Program**

Launched in 1995 by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group and the Global Environment Facility, this partnership was initially called the Small and Medium Scale Enterprise Program (SME) and received new funding in 2004 under the name Environmental Business Finance Program (EBFP). The IFC housed the partnership. The partnership provided low interest rate loans to financial intermediaries who would in turn fund small- and medium-scale businesses that wanted to invest in high-risk environmental ventures such as eco-lodges, private reserves, certified fishing, certified wood and forest products, shade-grown coffee and other sustainable agriculture initiatives. These intermediaries can only loosely be defined as ‘partners’, in that their primary role was to receive risk incentives and performance fees according to the projects that they generated rather than share governance functions (International Finance Corporation, 2004). In total, 25 intermediaries received financing, which included national firms, such as El Sewedy Electrical Supplies Company (for projects in Egypt), and international NGOs, such as World Wildlife Fund-US (for projects in Papua New Guinea). These intermediaries lacked screening or approval authority. IFC management governed the partnership, making it a weak case of partnering, by this article’s criteria. However, there were attempts to expand decision-making authority. EBFP set up an advisory board with limited governance functions. The IFC review committee that made decisions on

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4 One caveat is that partnerships that are more technical or scientific in nature have the potential to enable participation but have reduced space for broad-based empowerment of stakeholders beyond experts.

5 The biodiversity unit identified these to include significant biodiversity financing and programmatic focus.

loans and selected intermediaries was advised by a panel of internal and external environmental experts which provided a channel for stakeholders to guide investment decisions.

**Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP)**

Initiated in 1996, this partnership’s goal was to enhance biodiversity by limiting the impact of alien invasive species. Its objectives were to improve the scientific basis of decision-making, develop early-warning systems and responses, enhance control methods and strengthen international agreements on invasive species (World Bank, 2008). The founding partners were CABI (a scientific NGO), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). An Executive Board exclusively composed of the four founding members governed the partnership. On occasion, a representative from Australia’s National Science Agency (CSIRO) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) also participated in the Board, but governance was primarily based on a shareholder model. CABI, which has 10 offices around the world, was the last institutional host of the partnership Secretariat in its South African offices (World Bank, 2009).

As noted in an internal Bank evaluation, the partnership struggled with accountability issues because of its institutional arrangement. GISP blurred the roles of management versus governance by having most members of its management team also serving on its Executive Board (World Bank, 2009). Unlike the other cases in this study, the World Bank did not initiate this partnership. This case is also unusual in that the Bank was a major financial supporter, and identified as a partner, but never became part of the partnership’s executive board: its main governing body.

The next three partnerships, the World Bank/WWF Alliance, Programme on Forests (PROFOR) and Forest Trends, focus on forest and biodiversity conservation. Forests host most of the world’s biodiversity. Tropical forests alone are believed to host 50% of the Earth’s biodiversity (Loo, 2009). Consequently, the next three forest partnerships are included in this article given their central role in biodiversity conservation, the substantial number of activities they implemented to protect biodiversity and the Bank’s own classification of these partnerships as biodiversity initiatives.

**World Bank/WWF Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use**

Initiated in 1998, this was one of the first, high-profile experiments of the World Bank with the partnership model. The partners were the World Bank and the WWF, and the partnership was more widely publicized than any previous ones up to this point. The goal was to promote conservation by strengthening or expanding protected areas and enhancing sustainable use of forests (World Bank/World Wildlife Fund Alliance, 2004).

The partnership was hosted both by the World Bank and WWF, each holding a co-chair position. A team composed exclusively of World Bank and WWF staff governed the partnership. The team was responsible for all the

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Table 1. Global Biodiversity Partnerships (1992–2008)

Program on Forests

PROFOR was a global initiative managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and then by the World Bank. Its goal was to enhance the contribution of forests to rural livelihoods, conserve biodiversity and help achieve Millennium Development Goals (PROFOR, 2005). The World Bank currently houses the Secretariat. The governments of Finland, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, the UK, European Commission, Netherlands and Italy have been its primary funders. Although all of its financial partners are public actors, it is included as a public–private partnership because it also incorporates two non-donor representatives from the private sector, developing countries or NGO community in its advisory board that provides guidance to the Secretariat on a range of strategic and operational decisions (PROFOR, 2005).

Forest Partnerships Program: Forest Trends

This NGO grew out of the World Bank’s Forest Market Transformation Initiative, which convened a group of conservation NGOs, private sector innovators and foundations to generate project proposals for forest management. The World Bank and the MacArthur Foundation supported the creation of Forest Trends in 1999. Other partners who supported the original initiative and resulting NGO are the Netherlands, Ford, Emily Hall Tremaine, Surdna, Packard and Kholberg Foundations, Wallace Global Fund, Summit and Rockefeller Brothers (World Bank, 2002). Its goal is to use financial tools to make the market work for environmental and social priorities. A board of trustees governs the NGO through a Board of Directors, where the World Bank sends a representative.

Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF)

This has been one of the highest profile partnerships for the Bank during the last decade. It was originally launched in 2000 (and was renewed in 2008 with additional financing). Its founding partners were Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank, with the MacArthur Foundation and the Government of Japan joining soon after its inception.

This partnership manages a small grant programme that provides limited financing to NGOs and local communities to work in biodiversity ‘hotspots’. These are geographical areas first designated in 1988 by the environmentalist Norman Myers for their high degree of endemism and habitat loss.7 The partnership assigns each hotspot a set of strategic priorities and project applicants must fit their funding requests within one of these to be eligible for a small grant (World Bank, 2007).

Conservation International houses the CEPF Secretariat in Arlington, Virginia, USA. The partnership has adopted a pure shareholder mode of governance, and hence non-contributing institutions are not part of the decision-making process. The Fund is governed by a high-level donor council, which meets once a year and is advised by a working group. Decisions taken by the donor council include articulating a strategic vision for the partnership, approving each of the ecosystem profiles, approving the annual spending plan and setting the conditions for new donors to enter the Fund (World Bank, 2007). Because the CEPF is governed by a council made of its donor partners who share decision-making authority on the strategic direction of the conservation investments, it is coded as a partnership. However, note that this shared decision-making arrangement exists formally only at the pinnacle of the partnership. At the community level, the partnership works to ‘build constituencies of civil society groups in each hotspot that can implement activities in a manner that collectively achieves the program’s conservation goals’ (World Bank, 2007: vii), rather than facilitate local decisions over biodiversity management choices that may or may not use a hotspot approach as a point of departure. The development of hotspot strategies includes community consultations, but there are no institutional channels to ensure that community preferences become authoritative in the partnership’s decision-making.

7Endemic species are those that are prevalent in only a particular geographical area, rather than present in various regions around the world.
Coral Reef Targeted Research and Capacity Building for Management (CRTR)

This standard setting global partnership involves a consortium of research institutes studying coral reef vulnerabilities. Launched in 2004, the goal of this project is to ‘address key gaps in the world’s knowledge and understanding of coral reefs, and put new knowledge and technology into the hands of decision-makers and reef managers where it can make a difference’ (Coral Reef Targeted Research, 2009b: paragraph 1). The founding partners were the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, UNESCO/Intergovernmental Oceanographic Administration (IOC) and the University of Queensland, Australia.

The initiative is organized around six key research themes established by these founding partners: coral reef bleaching, disease, biological connections between reefs, restoration, remote sensing, and tools to help policymakers manage reefs. There is an Executive Committee composed of academic institutions and NGOs that allocates further resources based on their review of research conducted. Therefore, and because the founding partners shared authority in establishing the original direction of this initiative, it is coded as a partnership.

The Secretariat is hosted by the University of Queensland, and coordinated through regional centres in the Philippines, Mexico, Zanzibar and Australia. One of the reasons these countries were selected (with the exception of Australia) is because the initiative sought to rectify the discrepancy that most coral reefs are found in the developing world, yet research is mostly conducted in universities of developed countries (World Bank, 2004).

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

Launched in 2004, the objective of this standard-setting initiative was to conduct a scientific appraisal of ecosystem change and its consequences for human well-being. The founding partners that identified the need and purpose of the assessment were the World Resources Institute (WRI), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank and the UNDP. Once in full operation, the Assessment’s governing board was made up of representatives from several UN organizations, international conventions, NGOs, academia, business and indigenous peoples. The four founding partners were mobilized by the impact that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had in providing a scientific basis for policy action. The Millennium Assessment thus incorporated research from more than 1360 experts worldwide and their findings were published in technical and synthesis reports (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

Biodiversity and Agricultural Commodities (BACP)

Launched in 2007, this partnership between the IFC, Global Environment Facility (GEF), Japan and the Round table of Sustainable Palm Oil aims to reshape production practices in four main commodity industries: palm oil, soy, cocoa and sugarcane. The objective is to preserve genetic, species and ecosystem diversity in the production of these agricultural commodities. The Secretariat is located in Chemonics International. This private consulting firm, along with the international NGO Ecoagriculture Partners, won bids to, respectively manage and monitor the partnership’s activities. This separation of financing, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and governing roles across many public and private actors is a unique case among governing arrangements of Bank partnerships. The BACP is formally governed by a steering committee composed of IFC, GEF, World Bank, independent experts, the Round table of Sustainable Palm Oil, and representatives from the soy, sugar and cocoa industries. This governing board self-consciously notes in its terms of reference that its membership is designed to ‘guarantee a needed plurality of views, thematically and geographically’ (Biodiversity and Agricultural Commodities Program, 2011: 61). It promotes verification, certification schemes and incentives to financial institutions that adopt policies that encourage biodiversity-friendly supply chains.

The nine partnerships described above showcase the general flavour of the Bank’s global environment initiatives and demonstrate that the practice of partnering with non-state actors now has a significant historical trajectory within the World Bank and IFC. The next section assesses how these cases have performed against the democratizing goal of partnerships.
Evaluating Inclusion

According to interviews with Bank staff in the Global Partnerships and Trust Fund Policy office, and biodiversity portfolio reviews, Bank partnerships tend to attract actors from diverse sectors. In eight of the nine partnership cases above, founding partners represented at least three of the six sectors analysed here: NGOs, business, academia, foundations, multilateral organizations or bilaterals. The most frequent partners have been Conservation International among NGOs, the Global Environment Facility, among multilateral agencies, Netherlands among bilaterals, and the MacArthur Foundation among foundations. Business partners participated in only two global partnerships. Academic institutions took part in only one partnership (Fig. 1).

In biodiversity, conservation NGOs have become the most frequent partners. Business actors are not regular founding partners. Neither the Bank nor IFC have been able to articulate an effective social or financial proposition to attract a significant number of business partners. In contrast, big conservation NGOs such as WWF, Conservation International and TNC are drawing in a significant number of business actors and resources to their organizations, and have set up several internal units to continue to bring in private actors into partnerships and increase their portfolio of market-based conservation initiatives (MacDonald, 2010). Critics of partnerships feared that business partners would commoditize nature (McAfee, 1999).

Other striking characteristics of biodiversity partnerships are that actors overwhelmingly lead them from the ‘north’ and they work on global rather than local issues. In seven of the nine partnership cases, the Secretariats are located in North America or Europe. The fact that a partner is headquartered in Europe or North America is not per se indicative of what conservation policies it will promote. Forest Trends, the resulting institution of a Bank partnership, is an example of a northern NGO that promotes market policies which frame conservation around the local livelihoods of the poor. However, an analysis of Bank partners in these nine cases shows that most are organizations focusing largely on global biodiversity targets. Local needs and local benefits of conservation, such as environmental services for rural livelihoods, are not well represented in partners’ websites and publications, which is one window into their priorities.

In summary, Bank partners in biodiversity conservation are diverse, but NGOs are the most frequent partners. In interviews with Bank staff, this was explained by the installed capacity that large conservation NGOs already have to absorb funding, disburse grants, and report on activities following Bank procurement and accountability procedures. This is an installed capacity that is generally lacking among for-profit actors as well as smaller, national or community organizations that require more monitoring hours from the Bank’s task manager to ensure compliance with policies and procedures.

Evaluating Empowerment

In eight of the nine cases, the Bank was the founder or co-founder of these partnerships. The only exceptions were PROFOR, which was founded by the UNDP, and the GISP, which was initiated by international NGOs. This
supports the claim that IOs are partnership entrepreneurs, and that they participate in partnerships of their own making, rather than become involved in programmes launched by other global actors (Andonova et al., 2009).

Partnerships, to qualify as such in this research, must have set up independent governing bodies. In seven of the cases, the Bank chairs those governing boards. In the remaining three cases, another partner has the role of chair. However, in only three cases are the Secretariats housed by the Bank. The Bank retains control over the governing process by leading the partnership boards, but partners retain significant influence over the day-to-day implementation process by housing the partnership management units.

This division of influences may create a principal–agent relationship analogous to the one the Bank has with its donor members. Whereas the Bank is the agent and donor countries are the principals, in partnerships the Bank delegates responsibilities as a principal and its NGO partners execute as agents. In all cases except two (the BACP and the CRTR), when Secretariats are located outside the Bank, they are always housed by a large international NGO such as the WWF, CI or the WRI.

An evaluation of the governance models of the nine partnerships reveals that seven of the nine cases have adopted a shareholder model. This means that in most cases funding partners are represented in governing bodies, but stakeholders who will be affected by partnership interventions at the local level do not have a formal voice in the process of decision-making. In six of the cases, governing boards have ‘strong’ executive functions, rather than ‘weak’ advisory roles. Therefore, most partnership boards are empowering partners to prescribe conservation strategies, but they are also exclusionary bodies of decision-making in that only funding members are able to wield that authority. Furthermore, assessing the relationship between governing models and board functions reflects that the more inclusive boards have weaker formal influence on the partnership because they only have advisory functions.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings from the two dimensions of democracy analysed here show that, through their principal roles in most of the Bank’s partnerships, NGOs have reaffirmed their positions as key players in biodiversity governance. NGOs have gained significant influence through partnerships, because most of the time they host the Secretariat and management team that implements activities in the field. A World Bank Operations Evaluation Department report in 2004 cautioned on the dangers of placing partnership Secretariats within the Bank or other international organizations, as the partnership manager will need to report to the IO and the Partnership Board. This creates a dual chain of command within the same managerial line. Moreover, when partnership governance is weak, Secretariats and their hosts acquire significant de facto decision-making power (World Bank, 2004). Partnerships are also overwhelmingly based in the United States or Europe and generally focus on global dimensions of biodiversity conservation, rather than on the local environment and rural livelihoods nexus. Finally, partnership boards are authoritative in steering the partnership’s actions and the Bank is authoritative within those boards. Yet, these decision-making bodies exclude the participation of those who do not financially contribute to the partnership.

The troubling finding from this analysis of institutional design is that partnerships are poised to perpetuate a significant problem in global governance: the underrepresentation of local interests, and relatively undemocratic process of arriving at biodiversity intervention decisions under the banner of promoting more democratic governance. This supports complementary findings on multi-stakeholder partnerships across a range of issue areas (Biermann et al., 2007).

This article explored the potential contribution of partnerships to the goal of democratizing environmental governance. It suggests that the traditional theoretical treatment of partnerships as horizontal governance arrangements that devolve power to enhance participation and empowerment of actors traditionally left out of governance decisions is not empirically evident. Bank partnerships display the kind of hierarchical delegation features that the literature on IO behaviour attributes to principal–agent dynamics (Nielsen and Tierney, 2003). This runs counter to the promise of addressing the democratic deficit of environmental governance through multi-stakeholder partnerships (Bäckstrand, 2006). The Bank needs to revise its institutional arrangements to fulfil that promise.
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