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## 3. Results

The following section presents results against the five broad questions derived from the research objectives, namely:

1. How and where is FCE working with civil society organisations?
2. What are the perceived benefits and drawbacks of relationships with civil society organisations?
3. What are the ingredients of successful relationships with civil society organisations?
4. What are the lessons learned that could improve future working with civil society organisations?
5. What does the future hold for relationships with civil society organisations?

### 3.1 Mapping FCE relationships with civil society organisations

The ETWF delivery plan has an 'actions spreadsheet' that provides details about completed and planned working, and lists out the partnership organisations with whom this will be undertaken<sup>22</sup>. However, the list is not exhaustive, it does not include all the civil society organisations the Forestry Commission works with, nor does it include all the partnership working that the Regional and District staff are involved with.

In this section we attempt to build an overview of the extent of Forestry Commission engagement with civil society organisations beyond the information given in the ETWF actions spreadsheet. Finding a way to navigate the complexity of the large number of relationships that the Forestry Commission has with civil society organisations, our mapping tries to characterise the types of relationships and organisations involved, and the ETWF delivery areas covered. There are two areas of complexity that we pay particular attention to. These are the kind of organisation in terms of constitution or

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<sup>22</sup> Available at: [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls/\\$FILE/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls/$FILE/eng-etwf-actions-list.xls)

legal definition, size and objectives, and secondly the scale level at which the relationships operate. Pearce (2006) has already indicated in his model of the economy introduced in section 1.2 of this report, that relationships with the organisations operating in the third system of the economy, and the probable outcomes of partnership working, will be conditioned by the sort of organisation involved and the levels at which each organisation operates.

Answering the question how and where does FCE work with civil society organisations, this section begins by defining relationships and partnerships using information from the partnership spreadsheet as well as qualitative interviews. The following part of the report characterises different types of partnerships and tries to show who these partnerships are with, the extent of working in these different partnerships and in which areas of the business and parts of the country they are happening in.

A distinction has already been made between relationships and partnerships in our introduction. We use both terms and concepts in our analysis of FCE working with civil society organisations because FCE engages with them through a variety of different kinds of relationships. Some of these may be connected to partnership working and some may not. Looking at relationships more broadly, rather than just partnerships specifically, provides more information from which to characterise the ways in which FCE works with different civil society organisations, and counts of 'relationships' (rather than numbers of partnerships) help to illustrate the degree of engagement between FCE and different segments of civil society.

### 3.1.1 Relationships

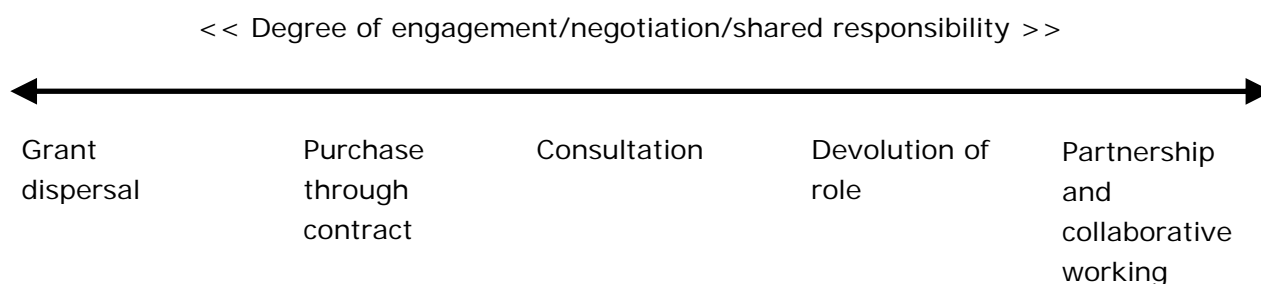
Relationships are used throughout this research as an important indicator of FCE working with civil society organisations. It is important to understand what FCE staff and civil society colleagues understood relationships to be. The range of relationships uncovered by the research can be summarised as:

- Partnership and collaborative working
- Informal and personal communication
- The devolution of responsibility to civil society organisations through award of contracts and formalisation of roles for specific actions
- Contractual
- Advocacy and campaigning (i.e. a relationship in which the Forestry Commission is lobbied by a civil society organisation)
- Consultation

- Grant giving or grant receiving and dispersing.

What the list indicates is a full spectrum of relationship types, which depending on the degree of engagement or shared responsibility has contracts and working relationships at one end of the spectrum, and partnerships and mutual associations at the other (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. A continuum of relationship types present between the Forestry Commission and civil society organisations**



However, partnership and collaborative working may involve a mix of all of these different kinds of relationship. For example in some partnerships civil society organisations might be contracted to deliver specific actions or targets, without being full members of the actual partnership. The distinctions being made here are illustrated by this comment;

*"[Partnership is] distinct from other working relationships we have for example where for example a landowner might say to us "I want a job doing can you come and help get it done with some of your volunteers" and we might say yes to that but in that circumstance the landowner is dictating what work is done, what site it's going to be done on when they want it done, maybe how much they're willing to pay us and that's almost like a local contractor relationship. And equally, on a larger scale there are some programmes we deliver where another organisation is the lead body and we have a formal sub contract to deliver a part of the programme, so I would see those as contractual relationships as distinct from a partnership where there is a more sharing and more equality about what you're doing together"*

Staff member from a medium-sized charity

There is a difference between contractual and 'devolved contracts' too. Devolved responsibility may involve a formal contractual agreement between the Forestry Commission and a civil society organisation, but, unlike the standard contractual agreement specifying the exact works to be undertaken, tends to be more flexible and

evolutionary allowing the contractor greater autonomy in exchange for taking on the role and responsibility for delivering a particular outcome. Contractual and devolved arrangements are not without their own problems and issues, and may not always be successful even though they seem straight forward. One medium sized charity reported problems with both kinds of arrangements where different parts of the Forestry Commission were unaware of agreements made and contracts issued which had led to problems of delivery on the ground.

The last set of comments that came forward from discussions were about Third Sector organisations that had multiple functions around a single issue, such as a lobbying function around species conservation. Advocacy and lobbying of the Forestry Commission by one part of a civil society organisation can inhibit or present a barrier to working with other sections of the same organisation.

### 3.1.2 Understandings of partnership

As the discussion of relationships covered above suggests, partnership working was very well understood as a particular form of relationship by Forestry Commission staff as well as by individuals from Third Sector organisations. In many cases the term 'partnership' or 'partnership working' was used to refer to specific projects, or the delivery of particular objectives. 'Partnership working' also existed beyond specific projects, and in these cases it was about ongoing contact and communication extending relationships between the Commission and civil society organisations that had worked together, including the strategic development of new programmes and future relationships.

For the majority of respondents, the difference between what they saw as 'relationships' and what they perceived to be 'partnerships' was to do with the equality of the relationship, the sharing of mutual benefits, and working towards shared objectives. The definition of an equal relationship was not one in which the roles, responsibilities and endowments of the partners were the same, but rather where these were fair, mutually agreed, and accepted, and contributed to realising shared objectives, for example:

*"To me partnership is about working with other people and organisations .... they can be in the Forestry Commission as well as in external and Third Sector organisations .... and it's where you've got a shared agenda, a common thing you all understand and agree you are trying to achieve"*  
FCE national office staff

*"Partnership for me is where we're working with another organisation as equals – that could either be in the short term to deliver a project or it could be in the*

*longer term to figure out more strategically where we're going to get to and how we can complement one another."*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

Underlying this notion of equality and fairness, is the recognition that different partners bring different skills and resources to the partnership. A key issue in partnership relationships is the way in which one partner takes the lead to co-ordinate resources and maintain the efforts of all the other members. Whilst there was general consensus amongst respondents that leadership was essential, there was a strong view that if a lead organisation starts to dominate in terms of decision making power, or operational attitude, the relationship between parties can no longer be described as a partnership. It becomes some other form of working relationship.

*"There are different kinds of partnerships, they work differently, you know higher level stuff which is about influencing, and other partnerships which are about delivering real interventions .... but they have something in common and that is a degree of equality in how things are decided and organised .... you can't have a partnership with a dominant organisation .... it's something else then .... I'm sure a dictionary definition of partnership has something to do with equality and equal power"*

FCE District staff

*"In my mind as long as everyone is making a practical contribution then it's a partnership, as long as it's not one organisation dictating"*

Staff member from small charity

*"This partnership is not about the [organisation name] dictating everything that should happen, if that was the case we might as well do it on our own land, it's about a project that everybody is buying in to. I think it's inevitable that one organisation will take the bulk of the responsibility as long as everybody is able to contribute to the project, although that is not necessarily going to be in an equal [i.e. exactly similar] way"*

Staff member from small/medium charity

### 3.1.3 Characterisation of Forestry Commission partnerships

Having established the way in which relationships and partnership are understood by Commission and Civil society partners, this section aims to characterise the different kinds of partnerships that the Forestry Commission is involved in by:

- Identifying and categorising the forms of partnership

























**Table 4. Segmentation of Civil society organisations working with the Forestry Commission England**

Segment	Examples (annual turnover £ <sup>23</sup> )	Degree of FC engagement
<b><i>Charities and Non-Governmental Organisations</i></b>		
Large charities	RSPB (>100m), National Trust (>400m)	Low - Medium
Medium sized charities	Woodland Trust (28m), Federation of Groundwork Trusts (28m), BTCV (29m), YHA (50m), CSV environmental (20m), Sustrans (26m)	High – Very High
Small charities	Butterfly Conservation (3.5m), Small Woods Association (<1m), Jericho Project (1.7m), Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1.2m), Grantscape (1m), The Ramblers Association (<8m), Buglife (<600k), FWAG (<4m) Blue Sky (<800k)	Medium-High
Very small charities	Mountain Bothies Association (100k), Grassroots (<10k), Hamsterley Trailblazers (<10k), Peabody Trust (100k)	Low
Trusts small and medium	Silvanus Trust (<200k), Wildlife Trusts (national 20m, otherwise between 1 and 10m), Fieldfare Trust (<250k), Greensand Trust (<1m), Forest of Avon Trust (<10k), Forest of Dean Sculpture Trust (40k), Green Light Trust (<300k), Bradford Environmental Action Trust (<300k)	Low - Medium
<b><i>Social Enterprises</i></b>		
Woodland focused	Mersey Forest (500k), The Dean Oak Cooperative (?), Rural Development Initiatives (?), Bransholme Enterprises (?)	Low - medium
Issue focused	British Association for Shooting and Conservation (?), Carbon Trust (?)	Low

<sup>23</sup> Using income figures taken from organisations latest available Annual Reports and Accounts published on their respective websites and through the Charities Commission register <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/ShowCharity/RegisterOfCharities/>

Segment	Examples (annual turnover £ <sup>23</sup> )	Degree of FC engagement
<b><i>Membership Organisations</i></b>		
Interest Groups	Countryside Management Association, British Horse Society (>7m), CTC (2m), Forest of Dean Commoners Association (?), National Interfaith Network (<400k), SingletrAction (?), Country Land and Business Association (?), International Mountain Biking Association-UK (?)	Low - Medium
Trade and professional associations	ICF(?), CONFOR(?), Renewable Energy Association (?)	Medium - High
<b><i>Community Based Organisations (CBOs)</i></b>		
Community woodland groups	Relationships mediated by BTCV, Community Forests and Woodland Trust, may also be direct through local staff	Low
'Friends of' groups	'Friends of' the Lake District (500k) 'Friends of' Bedgebury Pinetum (<200k) 'Friends of' Westonbirt (<800k), 'Friends of' the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys (?) 'Friends of' Dalby Forest (<10k). Relationships may also mediated by Community Forests and Woodland Trust	Medium - High
Volunteer groups	Gainsborough Young Rangers, NP volunteer groups, relationships normally mediated by BTCV, CSV, Community Forests, and conservation organisations (rarely direct)	Low

## 3.2 Benefits and drawbacks of partnership working with civil society organisations

### 3.2.1 Why working with civil society is valued (benefits)

The introductory section of this report outlined the assumed benefits of working with civil society organisations. However, it is important to uncover what benefits are most valued by the Commission and its partners as the success of relationships and partnerships is likely to be related to the realisation of these. Respondents in the Commission as well as the Enterprise recognised an extensive range of benefits and gains that could be made through working in partnership with civil society organisations. These follow closely the assumed benefits of engagement with civil society organisations. The most commonly mentioned benefits included:

- Access to **additional sources of funding** comes through partnership working, and can be a specific benefit of working with the Third Sector
- **Improved delivery** through added staff and resource capacity
- The Third Sector provides **access to skills and knowledge** additional and complementary to that available in the Forestry Commission
- The Third Sector is able to **increase the level of engagement** with people and issues beyond the reach of the Forestry Commission and other public sector bodies
- Third Sector working often generates **new ideas**
- the Third Sector can often provide **continuity of delivery** when projects change funding structure or objectives evolve
- Third Sector organisations have the **ability to lobby and act independently** which can increase partnership legitimacy amongst users
- Third Sector organisations often have **greater flexibility and more proactive** timescales which can speed delivery of projects and actions.

The most commonly mentioned, and probably most important benefits to Forestry Commission staff were the first three on the list concerning increased access to resources, shared skills and expertise and more efficient delivery. These were considered to be the fundamental reasons around which successful partnerships and close working relationships could be built.

Whilst the Forestry Commission is committed to increasing the level of public benefit that is achieved on the public forest estate or through other forms of engagement with trees, woods and forests, this often involves moving beyond traditional forestry towards projects and actions that link with other social, economic and environmental policies. A key issue on this context are the resources required to deliver these kinds of actions. The Commission has land and facilities it can offer in support of projects, but it is constrained in terms of financial support for projects that are not immediately connected with management of the resource. Funding opportunities for the development of novel ideas which link other policy priorities to greenspace, trees and woodlands do exist through for example, the Heritage Lottery Fund, but as a public agency these are not available to the Forestry Commission. For the Commission to deliver the widest possible public benefits partnership working and relationships with civil society organisations able to access these resources is particularly important. For example, one FCE District staff member said:

*“Engagement with the third sector provides us with links to sectors of the local community that we may not normally get easy access to, as well as ways to fund that access and think more creatively about what we are able to offer”*

As far as the civil society organisations interviewed were concerned they considered their ability to leverage alternative resources as one of their key strengths, which many of the FCE staff acknowledged as an important reason for building relationships. Typical perceptions were that:

*“Working with the third sector enables us to carry out work that we may not be able to achieve [alone] due to resource constraints”.*

FCE District staff

*“I think we bring a level of expertise in some areas and certainly I think we can bring some fundraising skills; access to the ability to look for money as well as actual access to funding pots”*

Staff member from a large charity

*“All organisations are finding themselves short of money and tend to be therefore more willing to form partnerships with the Third Sector, as I think a lot of the funding pots that are available are now aimed at ‘hard to reach’ groups ... we can access those better”*

Staff member from a small charity

Shared skills and knowledge were particularly important as this not only allowed synergistic relationships to develop, but provided a clear rationale for working together, and contributed to the clear delineation of respective roles between

Commission staff and personnel from civil society organisations. The mutual benefits from the two-way flow of knowledge and skills in such relationships were appreciated by both Forestry Commission and civil society respondents. This was true not only in terms of the exchange of skills managing the woodland and forest resource, but also extending beyond forests and managing relationships with people amongst the wider community. The following comments were typical:

*"It has taken us a time to realise but, there are things we do well, and areas where we can benefit from the skills and knowledge of others, you know, we don't have to do it all ourselves. Partnership working and relationships with the Third Sector is beneficial because it opens up access to areas where our knowledge needs building, and they know where we can fit in and provide the skills they don't have too"*

FCE District staff

*"Our expertise is clearly ecology and wildlife and the requirements of rare species, whereas the Forestry Commission are very good at managing land, managing forestry, growing trees and cutting them down, so we like to think we are giving them added value in terms of ecological expertise .... if you look at the staff list for the Forestry Commission the number of ecologists would be extremely small, but the ecology would be one of their five strands of conservation they are aiming for, so they need that added value from us .... and we get knowledge of how to manage the trees"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

*"I think we bring an insight into the community and grassroots, at times if you're working for a big organisation like the Forestry Commission it's the knowing... because traditionally and historically they've had very limited access to communities, especially minority communities and what [names the organisation] brings to them is a real insight, a real feel for what is going on at the community level. Projects such as [names the project] are a learning curve for them; it helps them identify the needs of the community as well"*

Staff member from a small charity

The issue of improved delivery was linked to community or public engagement and the methods by which civil society organisations are often better able to connect with particular sections of the community, and better identify their needs as this might relate to forests, woods and trees. The continuity offered by civil society organisations was also noted, as many of these bodies continue to work in the same area with the same communities even if the funders and funding streams change.

### 3.2.2 The Drawbacks: Barriers to success

Although there are many recognised benefits to relationships with civil society organisations there were also associated limitations and challenges. These drawbacks underlie some of the main reasons why partnerships and relationships may not work. The main drawbacks from the point of view of Forestry Commission staff were:

- The **significant amount of time** spent liaising with partners or steering groups which is necessary to build relationships but represents a significant investment of resources
- A **lack of understanding** with regards to partner organisations' objectives/ways of working/limitations that causes problems with delivery
- **Inequality** of effort/support/input from other partners that may result in increased workload on one organisation's behalf
- Issues to do with **public relations**, media and communications including generation of negative publicity, or, Third Sector organisations 'stealing the limelight' around successful delivery
- Over-reliance on **key persons** or 'champions' to move things forward and **personality clashes** leading to difficult project implementation.

Many of the barriers to success mentioned by respondents mirror the reasons for successful partnerships and working relationships. We explore some of the issues in greater detail as ingredients of success and just focus on two of the barriers to success here.

The use of time and resources to build and manage relationships and partnerships was mentioned more than any of the other issues affecting success. Commission and civil society staff all recognised that forming new relationships and partnerships, and then going on to maintain relationships with a number of different organisations is far more time consuming than internal collaborations. There is a paradox about the use of time, since there is a clearly recognised need for good communication and relationship building, at the same time as the amount of effort that requires is recognised as a real drain on resources. In the words of one respondent:

*" the biggest downside is spending a lot of time which is unproductive .... It's a business decision really and like all business decisions if you get it wrong you can end up not getting much back for your investment"*  
FCE national office staff

*"Like most partnerships an element of trust is required beforehand. So we sometimes spend years in some cases on meeting with partners, possibly*

*taking them out on site, working with them on small projects etc, before we are jointly willing to work on a larger scale. The key is to focus on an individual rather than the organisation, but that is a significant investment which may not always pay off over time"*

FCE Regional staff

In addition to this respondents emphasised the related issue of the time and energy taken up in partnership processes and the maintenance of relationships, and the affect this had on how quickly, and even whether, partnership goals were achieved.

*"I suppose you could say, in terms of time management, steering groups and things like that can be very cumbersome and time consuming and although for many reasons they're essential, I think if they're too bureaucratic, that's definitely a problem, yes when it stops things getting done, when they turn into talking-shops .... pieces of theatre"*

Staff member from a large charity

There are links here too with the different ways of working between civil society organisations and public organisations. The drawbacks of partnership working are closely connected with a lack of understanding between partners concerning the objectives and working methods of each organisation. The perception amongst FCE staff was that many civil society organisations needed extra investment in terms of time for capacity building to be able to work in partnership to a required standard. For the civil society organisations this same issue was often perceived as an over-emphasis on 'box ticking' and bureaucratic process, which could present real challenges to effective working. For example:

*"Public sector organisations have a lot of controls put into place, and boxes that need to be ticked,... and obviously they have to make themselves answerable to the general public – there have to be facts and figures that have to be produced, which I think can act as boundaries, that stop you feeling as creative and open, or perhaps entrepreneurial, if you like"*

Staff member from small charity

This lack of understanding is further important where it prevents FCE and potential partners from being able to reach a set of shared objectives. Many Third Sector organisations have a particular and narrow focus, e.g. single species conservation or single issue interest, which presents particular challenges to the Commission as it is required to be multiple-issue oriented. For example, one FCE District staff member said:



*“drawbacks to Third Sector working .... really are single agendas – some organisations have a single agenda approach that makes it difficult to engage effectively”*

another believed,

*“ There is a deal of understanding to be reached on how the interests of a single purpose organisation are married in to one which is managing such a range and diversity of things .... there may be benefits there ... if you have the time to find them”*

FCE national office staff

There was a recognition of this amongst civil society organisations too, as indicated by the following comment:

*“We have much more in common now with the Forestry Commission, our objectives are so much more similar, so I think, and also it’s not just about what we do on our site, or what the Forestry Commission does on their sites, .... I mean if you’re looking at the impacts of climate change and things like that, there is a much greater need for people to look outside of their sites, to look across much wider landscapes, multiple objectives, so you need to have a partnership approach if you’re going to achieve anything and you have to understand how to accommodate those different objectives and organisation priorities to get to the bigger picture not the single issue”.*

Staff member from large charity

## 3.3 Ingredients of successful partnerships with civil society organisations

### 3.3.1 Features of success: What works

Information collected during the interviews and from the questionnaires showed that the key features of success have little to do with the form and constitution of the relationship with civil society organisations, and much more to do with the generic principles of partnership working and building meaningful relationships. In other words, the qualitative evidence suggests that it does not matter whether relationships with civil society organisations were formal or informal, or what form they took. There were key processes and issues which were more important to ensuring the success of those working, professional and personal relationships.



This is not to deny the need for different kinds of agreement and a clear articulation of the kind of relationship or partnership being entered into. However, the principles of equality and mutuality, and the ability to build collaborative advantage around shared working practice appeared to be more important to success than the particular constitution of a relationship or partnership.

The key features or ingredients of success were identified as being:

1. Mutual **communication**
2. **Transparency** in decision making and mutual objective setting
3. Ability to build **shared working practice**
4. Mutual **understanding** of the organisations involved and their organisational objectives and professional context
5. Mutual **trust and respect** which comes as a consequence of communication and understanding
6. **Individual champions** and managing people.

Each of these features of success is explored in greater detail below. Even though they have been treated separately, they are of course interlinked.

### 1. Mutual communication

Mutual communication is about building **meaningful** communication between the Forestry Commission and the organisations and individuals it works with. So, even though the time needed to maintain contacts, develop relationships and ensure good communication were all issues identified as major drawbacks of partnership working, these remain essential tasks and processes in building success. Mutual communication is the ability of the individuals within each organisation in a relationship or partnership being able to discuss, transmit and network information, responses and feedback about day to day situations, the progress of partnership working and other process issues. One of the most important things mentioned by respondents that contribute to success is being able to deal with problems speedily. This is something that relies on trusted, mature communication, moving quickly to understand the situation and putting an end to the chance for rumour and misunderstanding. Many respondents pointed out that when in partnership with a mixed group of people and organisations problems can escalate very quickly unless appropriate lines of communication and action are in place.

Communication needs to be a 'real' line of communication. This means the meaningful transmission of information that moves beyond a small group of people. Diffusion of information to all parts of the Forestry Commission that might be involved

in buying into decisions in the different working areas and delivery levels of the organisation is essential. In other words **communication needs to be frequent** and vary between formal and informal mechanisms, passing through **horizontal and vertical** organisational structures.

*"One of the issues we have working with organisation like [name of charity] is that the agreement you make the level of understanding and the statement of shared objectives that you produce they can just become something that is a conversation between that organisation and one or two members of our staff and nobody much else knows about it ... in fact the original agreement with [name of charity] sat on the shelf for years without most of us knowing that it was actually there so it is quite important that an arrangement with a Third Sector body like that doesn't just become a relationship between one member of our staff, who is quite enthusiastic and that, but we need to put it into a formal structure whereby we have defined work programmes to make sure we have got the right level of engagement across the organisation to make sure things are happening"*

FCE national staff

Good communication is proactive, not just responsive. It not only includes partners being able to use open dialogue to quickly tackle misunderstandings or other issues, it also means **continuing dialogue** through the process of organising partnership work, and providing thanks and praise for jobs and tasks completed to build confidence and trust between partners. This is particularly true where organisations are working in contentious areas, and difficult social contexts.

*"A draft for that [i.e. a set of collaborative activities] was produced 4/5 months ago and all I've had back from Forestry Commission after a few chases is that they've got some issues with it and need to discuss it further, it's just the complete absence of any communication that is really quite frustrating .... this is how relationships begin to break down "*

Staff member from a small charity

*"We get all the complaints from everybody about everything, and it would be nice to have a bit more support – and you know, sometimes a bit of a thank you wouldn't go amiss, it's the little things like that which can make all the difference in a relationship"*

Staff member from large charity

Continuing dialogue also means maintaining relationships in the medium and longer term, not allowing a halt in communications once initial implementation of activities or a partnership has been established.

## 2. Transparency in decision making and objective setting

The organisations involved in a relationship need to understand the processes involved in building a partnership agreement (whether formal or informal) and the agreement of objectives and deliverables. All respondents recognised this as a key feature of success clearly linked to mutual understanding of each other's organisations, a clear articulation of the purpose of the relationship, and delineation of respective roles.

*"The main ingredients of a successful relationship, partnership, are: matching objectives with both organisations' goals. Understanding both organisations' strengths and weaknesses and managing these. Mutual respect and perhaps a bit more support than with a purely 'contractual' relationship. Be prepared to be flexible"*

FCE Regional staff

Transparency and equality in decision making comes about through good communication and the building of mutual trust. It is difficult to build trust, and unless communications are handled well trust can easily be undermined changing the nature of relationships:

## 3. Shared working practice

Finding ways to share working practice was a particularly important issue for Forestry Commission staff whether the relationships were contractual or more complex partnership agreements. There were three key areas around this issue consistently mentioned by respondents.

The first was to do with finance, the need for **compliance in financial reporting** and cash flow management that referred to Forestry Commission procedures and recognised ways of dealing with finance and external funding. One of the most mentioned issues was how to manage budget line surpluses which often arise working with civil society organisations because of their reliance on volunteer labour and community organisations as delivery agents which sometimes means intended tasks and spend is delayed or postponed.

The second was to do with practical operational concerns and finding ways in which the **work programmes** of individual people in a partnership would be understood using mutually agreeable formats and planning processes that would 'fit' institutionally. This operational planning also extended to integration of site-based actions being incorporated into forest design planning, and business planning.

The final concern related to **project reporting** and the production of documents which presented financial, process and deliverable information in a form that provided measurements against key indicators and markers which made sense to the Forestry Commission as well as the partner organisation.

These three issues link back to effective and open communication, trust, and transparency. They each provide a means to understand the roles in a relationship, the achievement of delivery targets and some measure of a return on investment.

*"because we have worked to find this mutual system of planning and reporting that uses Forestry Commission working, we really know exactly what we are getting for our bucks and there is a formal structure to it which means that we can have certain measures and means of engagement between [name of charity] and our own lead national contact and the contacts at each of our regional units .... We can work across our business [i.e. different parts of the Commission] as well as directly with the [name of charity]. Without those processes being put in place I think we would be less likely to meet success because the Forestry Commission is a complicated organisation, it doesn't work well without set procedures and process"*

FCE national office staff

*".... shared financial reporting and procedure is important ... it's a part of it ..... a part of success .... We know exactly what we are getting for our bucks and there is a formal structure to it which means that we can have certain measures and means of engagement between [name of charity] and our lead national contact and the contacts at each of our regional units. It is definitely why the relationship with that particular organisation works so very well"*

FCE national office staff

*"Their [i.e. smaller Third Sector organisations'] 'hand to mouth' existence can sometimes create additional challenges, e.g. cash flow that makes arrangements more difficult. They may have reduced management and systems that FC has to be aware of and adapt to, i.e. change its expectations, find suitable means"*

FCE Regional staff

*"Although independent, we are reporting against certain public sector targets, which, in a way is quite helpful .... not that I like the targets that much but ..... it is helpful because it makes it easier for us to demonstrate the relevance and*

*the impact of our work .... and the Commission see what we have done for them in concrete terms ... it's an important part of how we build success "*  
Staff member from medium-sized charity

#### 4. Mutual understanding

Real communication and trust between organisations is supported by a mutual understanding of the professional context and aims of the organisations involved in a relationship. It has already been noted in the section dealing with barriers that a lack of understanding prevents relationships from moving forward and achieving in the way that they should. Once the reasons why individuals in organisations want to pursue particular objectives, and why they prefer to operate in particular ways becomes understandable, better negotiation and identification of ways in which to reach synergistic relationships is possible. For civil society organisations this means looking to understand the drivers affecting the prioritisation of objectives that public bodies such as the Forestry Commission are working to, as well as understanding the nature of forestry and forest management in a contemporary context.

*"Sometimes there is a tendency for some of the other organisations to not quite appreciate how we operate, how we're funded and the constraints we face, we work better together when these things are known"*  
FCE District staff

*"Some organisations don't understand the limitations we have to work to ... the perception is that public bodies stretch further than they can in reality"*  
FCE District staff

*"I can't hope to make things work unless I speak the language that my partners speak! As long as you don't compromise the integrity of your own organisation, and that's really important .... We have charitable objectives and that's not negotiable"*  
Staff member from medium-sized charity

*"There are frustrations on both sides about not understanding your partner organisation's objectives .... Certainly foresters have said to me you don't understand what I am trying to do here, you don't see, you won't be satisfied till we have done this, this and this ..... Trying to reconcile those two things [our objectives and theirs] is difficult but that's how the relationships are going to work in the end"*  
Staff member from medium-sized charity

*"Looking more strategically and longer term – when I describe our development function, I always ask 'what's the policy direction?' Because if you've got*

*government departments talking about climate change and biodiversity conservation, tackling antisocial (sic) behaviour and so on – those are the needs that are being expressed for which we need to devise solutions – how we're going to do that, when the funding will become available etc .... it is no different in the way we deal with the Commission ... we have to "*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

Respondents mentioned some of the most effective ways of overcoming some of this lack of understanding, and talked about the chance to take part in networking activities, and invitations to observe or comment on strategic planning and other activities carried out by FCE as being particularly useful.

*"I took part in developing the [mentions area] framework so I had a really good opportunity to understand what the Commission wanted to do .... and I could see how we could help to develop an urban [forestry] agenda .... It's been a very positive experience .... It's to do with the individuals involved as much as with the Commission itself .... finding that understanding of who we are and what we do ... getting involved in spaces for discussion really helps with that"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

*"Working with the Forestry Commission is no different to working with other organisations, in fact it's better than most as we know where we are coming from ... we have been lucky enough to sit in on meetings and networky type events and have got the message about their concerns and objectives .... I think our expectations are realistic"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

## **5. Mutual trust and respect**

Interviewees identified trust and honesty between partners, built through communication and mutual understanding as critical. It is not only trust that is important, extending respect in relationships is part of this. This includes recognising efforts that different organisations have made to accommodate each other, respecting difference and acknowledging boundaries:

*"there are cases where we feel we have gone a long way, we have extended ourselves and spent what for us is a large amount of money and that is sometimes not appreciated because we are part of, you are working with an enormous organisation and you are working with, trifling sums in comparison with some of their budgets ..... they can perceive it as a very small part of the jigsaw ... but we need to be respected for what we manage to do"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity



## 6. Individual champions and managing people

The role of particular individuals within the Commission was mentioned by most of the Third sector organisations interviewed as being a crucial link in building successful relationships. Particular individuals were frequently mentioned. The role that these 'champions' played involved brokering relationships and advocating on behalf of Third Sector organisations. Successful relationships will always be down to personalities and professional attitudes and aptitudes. Successful relationships rely on processes and procedures for ensuring continuity between advocates and original contacts, and for supporting or managing those individuals less skilled at partnership working.

*"Successful relationships? Well it's partly down to personalities I think, because until a year ago it was quite a straightforward, uncomplicated relationship, and then there were some personnel changes, and subsequently more changes since, we'd built a relationship with the original person and then they moved on..."*

Staff member from a small charity

### 3.3.2 Relationships: Form and mediation

#### Types of agreement, mediation and negotiation

The research showed that there are very many different ways of organising partnerships and relationships with civil society organisations. The variety of arrangements included: partnership agreements, Memorandum of Understanding, formal delivery contracts, public sector procedural arrangements, community management agreements, block grants, terms of reference, leasing, and estates permissions. Evidence from the interviews stressed that there were no forms of partnership working or relationship that obviously performed better than others. There is no simple answer about what kind of relationship works, the processes and principles already described are more important than the actual constitution of the relationships.

However, there were some notable remarks about the form of relationships which are worth noting. Relationships can grow too big to manage successfully, as effective communication and negotiation of objectives/positions is hindered as the number of organisations and people increases.

*"In the case of the large consortium – there were just too many opinions, voices, approaches - and the whole thing got very messy"*

Staff member from medium sized charity

But, some relationships can work better where there is more than one party involved, not only because of the opportunity to use a greater pool of resources, but because negotiation and distribution of roles and 'power' can be more easily managed.

*"I do think it would be different if it was just the Forestry Commission and just one other organisation, .... it works well with more of us in the relationship .... the Forestry Commission don't have ultimate control and that gives me more freedom .... they all want certain boxes ticked but they're not too prescriptive because they understand that its an agreement between a number of different bodies"*

Staff member from small charity

There was some discussion about the need for process and structure in the form and management of relationships and partnerships. On the one hand was a recognition by civil society organisations that structure and formalisation of relationships was important, but that this could often present a stifling of innovation and flexibility with changing or developing ideas. As far as Third Sector organisations were concerned maintaining this space for innovation within relationship structures is an important element of success. This comment was typical:

*"I think there is a space for the FC to be more entrepreneurial but there have to be very entrepreneurial individuals, and having had experience of working with [mentions FCE staff name] for example, she's got very much a vision of how she sees this site going forward, that's the entrepreneurial side, you need someone with that vision, ok being aware of the background and the boxes you've got to tick, but its finding your way through that, being able to look past that and I think there are people with those skills and I think increasingly people are realising you've got to change, you've got to develop, you've got to move forward, you've got to look at the individual sites and the local communities and local need....."*

Staff member from small charity

As was this:

*"Some formal partnerships can be bogged down in bureaucracy, with too much being time spent working on agreements, and sometimes it's just better for people to get together, to talk and develop things from there. I think where projects develop and there is a need for a financial commitment or a need for someone to hold the finances, then perhaps there needs to be a formal agreement - but I'm a bit nervous of having to have a formal agreement for every kind of working relationship because it bogs things down and it can stifle initiatives and stop things getting done.... It takes much longer to get anything done, if there's an opportunity out there, if you go and talk to somebody you*



*can get most likely get it done in the next few weeks, whereas, if it involves having a meeting and getting a partnership agreement, you know, the drafts get batted back for weeks and weeks and the opportunity can be lost"*

Staff member from large charity

Furthermore, respondents noted the important role the Forestry Commission plays providing funds for small, low value, low risk, projects with a variety of civil society organisations. This was viewed as a key issue with regard to achieving success in delivery of ETWF objectives involving new ideas and different organisations.

*"There is a danger that the small projects are going to be lost, the Forestry Commission really needs to think about maintaining a low value low risk budget – you know seed funding – to let new ideas through, a testing ground. It's from some of those small initiatives that some of the better ideas spring up, you get to connect with different groups, and things that can have much wider applicability. You need to keep that going."*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

### Scale level of organisational working

It was very clear from the research that relationships and partnerships are most successful when they work through a variety of scale levels, particularly those that connect the local level with the national or regional. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, a civil society organisation that has a capacity deliver at the local level, but also operates at a national or regional level can connect local needs with strategic overviews that fit in with the wider policy context that the Forestry Commission is working in. The ingredients of success, understanding of organisational need/objectives, and the ability to maintain vertical and horizontal communication are all satisfied by this working at multiple scales. Secondly, the evidence suggests that Third Sector organisations which work at multiple scales, also have the capacity and skills of greatest interest to the Forestry Commission. The delivery of ETWF objectives depend on a range of perspectives, understandings and competencies operating at the different scale levels inherent to the social economy. It is the civil society organisations working at multiple scales that have the spread of skills needed to tie all these issues together. The following comments are typically illustrative:

*"You need to have very clear objectives and what you are going to deliver, I think that when they are lost sight of that's when they [i.e. partnerships] become a bit of a talking shop with no deliverables ..... and where the link to smaller organisations and the local level is just lost .... you can spend hours and hours dedicating time to meetings where you don't actually get a lot from it .... it just becomes a talking shop ..... the important things is joined up thinking and*

*operation .... success comes when the delivery partners can maintain local and strategic presence around objectives"*

FCE District staff

*"It's all about striking up relationships with individuals, and on some sites you get a forester or a wildlife ranger who really understands what's going on and that's brilliant, but quite often their boss might not be involved and then might not buy into the project .... or from the other end you quite often get buy-in nationally, on a national scale you work on a national level strategy which is considered very important and then that doesn't really trickle down through work budgets or work programmes .... the best outcomes come from tying the two together"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

*"I am certainly keen to develop this work nationally .... everybody at the Forestry Commission has been very supportive and welcoming at the local level, just what you want really, with my national hat on though, we need to extend this further ... engage the two at a national and local level more effectively .... [names the organisation] needs places to work on with volunteers and the Forestry Commission needs work done ..... we need to build in this type of mutual sustainability and it depends on multiple scale communication and understanding"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

In addition to this, the point was made a number of times that local level working, connecting and mediating relationships between smaller local organisations in the community economy was an important function of civil society organisations extending Forestry Commission reach into areas that are otherwise time and resource intensive to connect with.

### Legitimacy

Relationships between the Forestry Commission and civil society provide legitimacy for the Forestry Commission as well as for civil society organisations. For the Forestry Commission this legitimacy comes from the credibility of the partner organisations as far as the perceptions of other stakeholders or target groups might be concerned, for example:

*".... we think very carefully about involvement and who would be the lead partner on a project ... because it changes the whole kind of tone of the project and the way its perceived by people, as to whether it is a government project or a non-government project ..... like the woodland project we are working on*

*at the moment is led by [names organisation] with the Forestry Commission as a partner ... and that means you can go and approach a private land owner and you are not representing government, you're independent, and you are not tied into any agendas that that land owner might have with for example, DEFRA, English Nature or the old style Forestry Commission ..."*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

It also serves to add to the credibility of civil society organisations with other public or funding bodies if they are known to be in working relationship, or receiving funding from the Commission:

*"even small amounts of funding [from the Forestry Commission] can add a lot of credibility amongst other funders within the region .... so we can do a lot with a tiny bit of seed corn funding"*

Staff member from small charity

### Relationship and partnership life cycles

A mutual recognition that relationships and partnerships pass through various stages, as understanding, roles and needs evolve, and some kinds of relationship may have a distinct life cycle with a real end point, is very important. Knowing this is a key ingredient of success as it affords understanding of how to develop successful relationships by investing the most appropriate level and type of resources at the most appropriate times and aids understanding of when to bring relationships to an end or when to carry them forward.

*"because we had an existing relationship we didn't need that initial brainstorming session, we could just go to the next level, this is what we need to do, how can we do it, and it can be quite quick and straightforward, simply because we had the infrastructure in place to manage it and the understanding between partners and also the expertise .... we all knew each other .... its always so much easier then you can just pick up the phone and say no that's not going to work, lets do it differently .... It takes a long time if we have to start from scratch, you have to bring people together and then you have to decide if you have got the right people, and everybody's got different ideas, and then you go off and then you need another meeting ..... and that's how you do it .... It's actually is often more efficient and will deliver much better results when you can be quite flexible and slot it in to something that's already ongoing"*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

### 3.4 Suggestions for improving practice

The opinions of respondents from civil society organisations were that, in general, the Forestry Commission has learnt significant lessons in how to establish and manage relationships with the sector over the last five to ten years. There was a recognition by all that the early rush to form partnerships has now become a more reflective process, using early experiences to establish partnerships for well considered reasons leading to fewer 'bad marriages' being formed as a result.

There were four repeated issues concerning improved practice that were elicited from both Forestry Commission and respondents from civil society organisations.

#### 1. Time and planning

Time has already been discussed as a key investment in building successful relationships. The issue here is an organisational acceptance of the need for time to plan. As an institution, the Forestry Commission and civil society organisations both need to recognise the value of forward planning and 'front-end' communication.

#### 2. Communication – short, medium and long term

Communication needs to be understood as an essential continuing process. The intensity and style of communication may change over the course of a relationship, more intense and frequent in the short term and less so in the longer term once a relationship is properly established, but communication with partner organisations should not come to a sudden end. The importance of continuing communication, and the need to plan communication processes that foster relationships in the longer term, should be stressed.

#### 3. The real need to link different levels of the organisation

Being a relatively small organisation spread over a very large geographical area, across a number of different business areas means that the Commission has a complicated business model. Alongside communication a key issue is making sure that different parts of the organisation are tied into relationships and partnerships with civil society organisations in the most appropriate ways to facilitate delivery of activities and services.

#### 4. Guidance

Many of the Forestry Commission respondents suggested that guidance on partnership working would be useful. Even though many of the new recruits to the Commission have skills in this area, for much of the time other Forestry Commission staff learn effective partnership working and how to broker successful relationships through experiential 'on-the-job' learning. A guidance document outlining key principles and

the detail of the most important lessons learnt could provide for more efficient better supported cross-institutional working.

Other suggestions that respondents mentioned included:

- Training in how to broker relationships
- The need for more lesson learning, 'feedback loops', and realistic (i.e. appropriate indicators, light touch process, low resource implication) monitoring and evaluation processes
- A pool of mediators (perhaps from a draw-down service contract) from which to draw to enable balanced views and sound negotiation to take place during partnership establishment and times of crucial decision making
- More opportunities for communication about organisations' objectives and development of strategy.

### 3.5 Horizon scanning: Perceptions of the future

The research was undertaken before the change of government. Respondents were keen to discuss trends relating to engagement with civil society organisations. There was a mixed reaction to questions about the future of relationships and partnership working between the Commission and civil society organisations. It was already widely understood before the May 2010 election that the public sector would have to respond to recessionary pressures by trimming delivery plans and reducing involvement in certain areas of activity. The most recent surveys examining the condition of civil society organisations have shown similar downward pressures and reactions (Charity Commission 2010; Clark and Wilton 2010). Charitable donations are reduced in some areas but stable in others, which, alongside a reduced *commitment* to spend on partnership projects involving civil society organisations by the public sector means future scenarios are difficult to interpret (interview data and CAF and NCVO 2009).

All of the civil society organisations and Forestry Commission staff surveyed as part of this study see the future in terms of uncertainty. There were four clearly different attitudes or perceptual groups that emerged.

1. Those who thought that the **impact of recession** on civil society organisations **would reduce their capacity and ability to deliver** in place of the public sector. Amongst this group was the perception that the Forestry Commission may no longer be able to provide the direct grant and project income to civil society organisations through partnerships nor income through contractual relationships. For some of the smaller sized organisations where income from the Forestry

Commission is particularly significant part of their capital flow, this was a serious issue.

*“The future of partnership working with the third sector is Bleak! [sic] Partnership funds are very much at risk. For this next year for example I have had to cut partnership funds by half [mentions amount] to balance the budget for salary inflation. Forecasts about possible public sector cuts don't bear thinking about. The Third Sector is already suffering from recession. In this region alone both [mentions charity] and [mentions charity] have cut their regional posts and the [mentions charity] has had to completely reorganise”.*

FCE Regional staff

*“Given cuts in funding and increasing [institutional] centralisation, working with the Third Sector will become much harder for the organisation”*

FCE District staff

*“Third sector involvement is growing, though the third sector is experiencing resource difficulties that overshadow their ability to engage - they need to pay the bills, so must earn cash. We don't always have cash to pay for their involvement”*

FCE Regional staff

2. Those respondents (from the Forestry Commission as well as civil society organisations) who thought that **civil society organisations would step in to fill the gaps** left by a withdrawal of the public sector in service delivery. The following views were typical of this group:

*“Third sector involvement in the future will be important in view of the fact that public funding e.g. via traditional land based public agencies such as Natural England and Environment Agency and probably local authorities will be reducing over the next few years .... It's the Third Sector that will be delivering for us”*

FCE Regional staff

*“the Forestry Commission with a future of reducing resources will become more reliant on the third sector to help deliver key objectives. Closer partnership working on major projects is pretty likely”*

FCE Regional staff

3. There was a third group of respondents who thought that the form and scope of partnership working and **relationships with civil society organisations would have to change to take account of new political and financial realities**. For this group the view was that some civil society organisations would find it more



difficult to engage with the forestry agenda, whilst others would find new and increasing opportunities for partnership working and other relationships. What was important here was a strategic approach to communication and scoping potential working arrangements, along with an ability to develop creative, innovative and credible project and policy delivery mechanisms.

*"We are likely to have a new government .... and I suspect .... it will hit the Commission harder than it will hit [names the charity] .... its gonna be horrendous they say, but then I don't know .... umm .... public service delivery will carry on, and I think it will get harder, I am not saying it's good to have less money, but at the same time it will force people to work together differently and that must be a good thing ... those with a strategic and business-like attitude will innovate and capture greater opportunity".*

Staff member from medium-sized charity

*"For non-specific Third Sector engagement we'll have a diminished resource and a diminished capability to engage particularly with new opportunities .... an interesting area for us to explore is whether we have functions and action that we're undertaking that could be delivered in a different way perhaps through even greater engagement with third sector bodies .... the issue here is capacity, trust and the business risk, which are the sure winners in terms of the organisations we could work with?"*

FCE national office staff

*"The future has to be the community or the voluntary sector taking the lead, ...., you know there are going to be cuts to the public sector – I think people are going to be scared to make any commitments, um, I would like, in terms of capacity building and everything, you know and in terms of balance of power and control and things – I would like an organisation like ours to create a role where people like me would work with community/third sector, help them to put in the bids, they would get the money themselves and we would help them with implementing it and managing and being the treasurer and all that".*

FCE District staff

4. For another group the increased pressure on resources, is leading to an equal pressure to **prioritise and invest in the most productive and effective relationships and partnerships**. The view here is that the Forestry Commission should not be trying to engage so broadly with so many different areas of the Third Sector, and rather than being 'endlessly responsive' the Commission should take a more strategic approach to finding maximum impact from relationships and partnerships that deliver against priority policy objectives. For example:

*"You have to think hard about which organisations are going to be the most useful or those which are going to be the most influential .... sadly we can't take a soft approach, or sit down with a blank sheet of paper and work out all the people and all the different Third Sector bodies who might be interested.... and make it happen .... we don't have that opportunity, we don't have that level of resource to work in that way, so we are looking for winners .... and going through a structured thought process around the opportunities that might arise and that's about prioritisation really .... "*

FCE national office staff

*"we don't have to occupy a broad church of relationships, the nature of the forestry strategy means that we are guilty of trying to do too much, cover everything comprehensively .... a shorter list of partners and partnerships means we can manage things tighter more effectively .... we need to think more strategically about how best to use non-grant investment to take forward partnerships in key areas"*

FCE national office staff

## 4. Conclusions

In précis, the research questions asked:

- What relationships and partnerships is the Forestry Commission involved with?
- What relationships work?
- What does not work?

This section summarises the findings presented in this report and draws some final conclusions.

### Assessing the results – measuring success

Proper evaluation of the question concerning which relationships and partnership 'work' and which do not work, requires a definition of, and specific criteria against which to judge, both 'success' and 'lack of success'.

There are a number of ways in which this could be done:

- Appraising the effectiveness and sustainability of the relationship
- Assessing achievement of partnership/project/activity objectives



- Evaluating Returns on Investment (ROI) and the impacts or outcomes of the partnership/project/activities undertaken.

However, the data needed to properly carry out evaluations of this kind was not available, even amongst the case study partnerships. An early conclusion is that a clear articulation of evaluation procedures to measure the success of certain kinds of relationship could be useful for future organisational learning. This is particularly the case when looking for objective measures of value and real impact of relationships with civil society organisations.

### Which relationships work?

In terms of the qualitative evidence collected, the manner in which a relationship or a partnership is **defined or constituted does not appear to determine the success** of a relationship or partnership. It is the **fundamental principles** of building good relationships and partnerships that emerge as more important. Relationships need to be objective driven, and the form of the relationship or partnership that is best suited to the delivery of these will vary from case to case.

Matching the form of the relationship to the objectives that FCE aims to achieve means considering:

- The type of civil society organisation(s) involved (e.g. their area of influence, whether they are delivery or advocacy/lobbying organisations, size and capacity)
- The size of the partnership/relationship (e.g. can communication be maintained between all those involved)
- Finding space for innovation (e.g. are there ways in which small seed funding projects can allow the development or testing of new ideas, can working processes in a relationship allow for experimentation).

The key issues which foster successful relationships are: mutual communication; transparency in decision making processes and the setting of shared objectives; accommodating shared working arrangements; building mutual understanding, trust and respect.

### Finding the right partners

The research suggests that there is a need for robust decision making around which partners and civil society organisations to work with. This does not necessarily mean slimming down or simplifying the number and type of organisations that the

Commission works with, but, success depends on building realistic numbers of relationships and links with organisations which consider:

- A demonstrable capacity and low risk on the part of the civil society organisation with respect to delivery of specific and defined objectives/outcomes (this is related to the size of the organisation, their spread and how many other projects and relationships they are involved with, and their financial and capacity related stability/sustainability)
- How too many forestry related initiatives using a small pool of potential civil society partners means that some organisations become involved in multiple projects or sets of activities stretching their capacity beyond a comfortable level and reducing the quality of outputs
- The ability of the civil society organisation to create and propagate impact
- Civil society organisations' understanding of Forestry Commission needs and ways of working
- Complementary competencies between the Commission and civil society organisations that are clearly understood and articulated in a way that aids role development and value added in the relationship
- Professionalism in project and activity management, joint activity planning and reporting including the development of shared working practice and means to manage differences in business process (e.g. reporting, finance systems)
- Appreciation of organisational differences and ability to compromise and accommodate these
- Civil society organisations able to link together different levels of organisation and operation, from local delivery to national strategy, and between parts of the Commission's business.

The evidence suggests that FCE gets the best results from relationships with medium-sized civil society organisations that operate at both a local and more strategic national level. These charities and Trusts deliver outcomes that are focused on the needs of communities and forests, but which are also closely matched to FCE policy objectives because of the national level understanding. These 'dual scale' medium-sized civil society organisations also seem to be the most able to manage communication across different parts of the Commission, as well as react to changing policy and funding contexts whilst still maintaining organisational capacity.

The data collected suggests that FCE faces challenges successfully engaging with smaller civil society organisations such as the local community-based organisations, or individual volunteers, where these relationships exist outside of partnership consortia operating with formal partnership agreements. This is partly to do with the high

marginal costs of engaging with many small organisations, a resource intensive activity, but also to do with the capacity of smaller civil society organisations to deliver against expectations. Where the capacity and role of the smaller civil society organisations is clearly bounded and understood e.g. as in the case of 'Friend of' groups relationships are usually very successful, but where the roles of smaller charities, trusts and community organisations are more diffuse, or where they are given multiple roles beyond their ability to deliver, relationships and outputs may not meet expectations.

### Facilitating future opportunities

The future position of the Forestry Commission in terms of working with civil society organisations to deliver forest policy objectives is currently in a state of change and the outcomes not yet clear. However, the particular opportunities that emerge from the research which could be developed are:

- Developing new models of service delivery with civil society organisations including finding ways to build new alliances and relationships with organisations beyond the current pool to capitalise on areas of specific expertise
- Creating space for innovation and entrepreneurship, either by facilitating lower risk opportunities for novel engagement with smaller, lower risk organisations and activities, or by allowing civil society organisations with a proven history of impact and 'professional fit' with the aims and objectives of the Commission to develop new areas of joint working.
- Facilitate links with new civil society organisations to build further the themes and work areas emerging as priorities around climate change, and community links to climate change and sustainable resource use
- Facilitating productive relationships between representatives from civil society at multiple scale levels for maximum impact.
- Looking at the possibility of creating communication and learning systems within and between relationships and partnerships to share experiences, evaluate successes and evolve good practice.

## 5. Appendices.

### 5.1 Interview Schedule

#### Interview Schedule for Third Sector Partnership Research

##### Introduction

*Partnership working is becoming an increasingly important feature of forest management. Our broad research aim is to get a better understanding of how partnerships can be used most effectively to deliver the maximum benefits against FC objectives at national, regional and local levels. We are interested in researching this over the different areas of the FC business. So essentially we are looking at what partnerships work and what doesn't work, finding out more about the reasons why, and using this information think about future partnerships. We have a particular interest in uncovering more information about FC partnerships and relationships with the Third Sector and the particular strengths and weaknesses of communicating and working together with NGOs, charities, community woodlands, social enterprises and voluntary groups.*

*[remember the difference between 'relationship' with the Third Sector and our view on 'partnership' working with others]*

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#### All Participants – General Questions

##### A. Mapping partnerships

1. Can you tell me about the partnerships between the FC and other organisations that you are aware of in your role?
2. Do you have a way of characterising the different kinds of partnership you have mentioned? [*probe ..... see if there is a scheme that matches our own*]
3. In your experience, which Third Sector organisations are key players in partnership working with the FC? [*prompt for examples*]

4. Can you say anything about what scale and which areas of the business partnerships operate at most commonly within the FC? [*e.g. are they more frequent at the local delivery level? Within Enterprise, or FC?*].

### **THIRD SECTOR INTERVIEWEES ONLY**

- 4.i. Is this the level at which your organisation tends to work at most frequently? [*get detail of organisational working*]

## **B. The meaning of partnership**

5. What does partnership mean to you?
6. What role do partnerships play within the FC/your organisation?
7. How has the idea of partnership developed in the FC/your organisation over the last ten years?
8. Do you feel that there are specific drivers or pressures for you/the organisation to become involved in partnerships? How do you see these developing in the future? [*probe for both internal and external influences*]

## **C. Pro's and cons of partnership**

9. If you haven't already talked about this answering the earlier questions, what do you feel are the benefits of partnership?
10. What are the drawbacks?
11. In which areas of the business/the work of your organisation do you think partnership working is most effective? And Why? [*prompt for specific partnership examples*]

*Remember to draw out information about how the benefits and drawbacks relate to different kinds of partnership (strategic, delivery, network, operational) and different levels of operation (national, regional, local)*

### **FOR FC STAFF ONLY**

12. Do you think that there are FC objectives which can't or shouldn't be achieved through partnership? [*prompt for any specific examples of partnerships that they don't feel are working*]
13. Do you think the outcomes achieved through partnership are as effective and as sustainable as those achieved by the FC working alone?
14. Can you say something about which partners you feel provide the greatest impact in terms of achieving ETWF objectives and why? [*probe .... specific*]

*organisations/individuals do not need to be mentioned, but the type of organisation and the way in which it works are important]*

15. How important do you think the Third Sector is in achieving ETWF objectives?
16. What do you think is the most effective or important role that the FC can play in partnerships if it is to effectively achieve its objectives? [*prompt – i.e. lead, join others initiatives, set up our own partnerships and get others to join us*]
17. Does this apply when thinking about relationships with Third Sector organisations in particular?
18. Do you think the FC is as effective as other organisations at working in partnership? [*probe on specific examples, and on the reasons why or why not*]
19. Do you think the FC is as effective as other organisations managing relationships with the Third Sector? [*probe on specific examples and on the reasons why or why not*]
20. How do you see partnership working developing over the next 5 years?

#### **FOR THIRD SECTOR INTERVIEWEES ONLY**

21. Do you view the FC as a partner or do you feel you have a different kind of relationship with the FC?
22. What specifically do you think your organisation brings to the FC?
23. Do you think there are particular benefits brought to the FC by Third Sector organisations in contrast to those from other sectors? [*probe for examples*]
24. Do you feel you have a clear understanding of how your organisation contributes to achieving FC objectives?
25. Is it ever difficult to realise your own objectives as well as those of the FC? [*probe for information about areas of greatest synergy and most difficulty*]
26. How do you think the FC could improve on the way it manages its relationship with your organisation?
27. How do you think the FC could improve on the way it manages partnership working with your organisation?
28. Do you think there are important aspects of partnership working with the Third Sector that the FC needs to consider in greater detail?
29. How do you see partnership working developing over the next 5 years?
30. How do you see the opportunities and demands on the Third Sector developing over the next 5 years?

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#### **Participants with Knowledge/Involvement of Specific Partnership**

## Introduction

*We'd like to find out more about the detail of how particular partnerships work, so I would like to move from the general questions I have been asking to ask some more focused questions about the XXXX partnership that you are involved with ..... or that you mentioned earlier on. This will give us tangible 'case study' examples to help us with the evidence we need to support our synthesis of everything people tell us in the earlier more general part of this interview. You might already have told me the answer to some of the questions I have here, so bear with me as we sort through them.*

## D. Objectives

31. Could you please tell me a bit about the history of the partnership and how and why it was formed?
32. Why did your organisation (FC or other) become involved? [*prompt on motivations, expectations*]
33. How would you define the aims and objectives of the partnership?
34. Were these objectives known at the outset or negotiated/re-negotiated along the way? [*prompt for problems, pro's and cons*]

## E. Structure and relationships

35. Is the partnership formally constituted? [*probe - is it a formal agreement, what sort?*]
36. Who identified the partners and how were they 'invited'? [*probe - were these the best partners, were others missed out, was the best process employed*]
37. How does the partnership operate? [*probe - who does what?*]
38. Who brings what to the partnership? [*probe on what partners think the other partners are doing/delivering/providing in terms of skills knowledge and resources*]
39. How would you describe the relationships between partners? [*prompt – good, bad, trusting, suspicious, tense, strong, amicable*]



40. How is communication maintained between partners and the partnership process?
41. What important lessons have you learnt about these relationships and partnership structures? [*probe for particular Third Sector issues*]

## F. Funding

42. How is the partnership funded and how does this impact upon its operations?  
[*prompt for who holds the funding and how it is channelled*]
43. How sustainable is/was the funding?
44. Has funding impacted upon effectiveness and achievement of objectives?
45. Do those who provide most funds have more influence?

## G. Objectives, Synergy and Value-added

46. Were/will the objectives (be) met?
47. Were there other outcomes, beyond the formal objectives, that you feel were important?
48. Was the partnership approach the best way of achieving the aims/delivery targets/identified need?
49. What are the key lessons learnt from this initiative?

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## ALL PARTICIPANTS

### H. Endings

50. Is there anything you think is important that I should have asked you about?
51. Is there anybody else you think I should talk to about this?
52. Do you have anything you wish to ask me?



## 5.2 Email questionnaire

### THIRD SECTOR PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH

Social and Economic Research Group

Centre for Human and Ecological Sciences

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Partnership working is becoming an increasingly important feature of how the Forestry Commission works. Our broad research aim is to get a better understanding of how partnership working can be used most effectively to deliver the maximum benefits against FC objectives at national, regional and local levels. We are interested in researching this over the different areas of the FC business.

Essentially we are looking at what kind of partnerships work and which don't work so well, finding out more about the reasons why, and using this information think about future partnerships.

As part of the broader study about partnership, we have a particular interest in uncovering more information about FC partnerships and relationships with the Third Sector. We are interested to find out more about which Third Sector organisations the Forestry Commission is working with and in what capacity. We are also keen to find out more about the strengths and weaknesses of communicating and working together with NGOs, charities, community woodlands, social enterprises and voluntary groups.

We would appreciate your help in completing this brief questionnaire as part of this study. The results will be used to produce a summary report mapping the extent of FC relationships with the Third Sector and providing information useful to FC England's Policy and Programmes Group and Regional Directors.

Your answers to this survey will be anonymous.

Thank you for your help.

Please return this survey sheet and any other information you wish to send by January 29<sup>th</sup> to

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji

[Bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

If you have any questions about this survey please contact Bianca on 0777 587 0865





3. Do you feel that partnership working is concentrated in particular areas of the business? Please could you say something about this?

4. Do you feel Third Sector engagement is concentrated in particular areas of the business? Please could you say something about this?

**Effectiveness of Third Sector engagement**

5. What do you think are the most important benefits of working with the Third Sector?

6. Do you feel there are any important weaknesses in working with the Third Sector?

7. How important do you think working with the Third Sector is in achieving ETWF objectives? Please explain your answer as far as you can.

**Successful Third Sector engagement**

8. What do you feel are the main ingredients of a successful relationship with a Third Sector organisation?



9. How do you view the future of FC involvement with the Third Sector?

[Empty text box for response to question 9]

**ADDITIONAL CONTACTS**

10. Can you suggest other people in the FC, or contacts from Third Sector organisations, we could talk to about this research?

Organisation	Name/contact

11. Would you be willing to be contacted again for a more detailed interview in connection with this study?

Yes

No

THAT'S ALL!  
THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

Please return this survey sheet and any other information you wish to send by January 29<sup>th</sup> to

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji

[Bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Bianca.ambrose-oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

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