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Understanding the Sustainability of Private Development Initiatives: What Kind of Difference Do They Make?

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Abstract In the Netherlands, there is a large group of small-scale, voluntary development organisations, referred to as Private Development Initiatives (PDIs). By classifying PDI interventions based on their potential sustainability, we aim to enhance our understanding of PDIs as alternative development actors and to get insight into the diversity within this group. We rely on detailed data of 49 Dutch PDIs active in Kenya and Indonesia. The classification is based on a combined analysis of both the intervention type (‘what’ they do) and the intervention manner (‘how’ they work) of PDI activities. This results in a typology that outlines the potential sustainability of PDI intervention strategies. We find that diversity regarding the potential sustainability of PDI interventions is large. Whereas several organisational characteristics influence the choice of the intervention strategy (e.g. independence local partner, budget), intrinsic drivers such as motivation and the personal or professional background of PDI members tend to be of great influence for the potential sustainability of the intervention strategies adopted by the PDIs.

Keywords: development aid; citizen initiatives; sustainability; effectiveness; civil society

PDIs as development actors

If there is one constant in the world of international development, then it is the call at the address of development actors to show the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of their work. As small-scale, voluntary development organisations, referred to as Private Development Initiatives (PDIs), are part of the world of international development, this call is also directed at them.

Supporters (including PDIs themselves) then believe in their efficient and effective contribution to poverty reduction, in their potential to enlarge the public support for development cooperation and in their ability to restore the ‘human face’ of international development cooperation (Brok and Bouzoubaa, 2005; Develtere and De Bruyn, 2009; Hart and van der Velden, 2010). They are also convinced that PDIs turn every collected penny into low-cost support reaching the genuine poor and do all this in close cooperation

with local people. Due to their smallness of scale and direct approach, PDIs are expected to make an essential difference in the lives of people in developing countries.

Critics, however, doubt PDIs' professionalism and expect them to step into the same pitfalls as the established development actors did (Koch, 2007). They see PDIs supporting orphanages without orphans, building schools without thinking of the teachers' salaries or constructing wells that no local person is able to maintain. And they are seen as doing all this in a top-down, paternalistic manner. Their contribution to poverty reduction is then by coincidence at best and non-existing at worst.

Since 2006, several studies analysed the development interventions of PDIs (Chelladurai, 2006; De Bruyn, 2013; Kinsbergen, 2007; Kamara and Bakhuisen, 2008; Schulpen, 2007; van der Velden, 2011). These studies are positive regarding the achieved, direct results of PDI interventions: schools have been built, credit programmes are launched and hospitals are equipped with up-to-date instruments. In addition, van der Velden (2011, p. 41) calls to 'celebrate and preserve the unique characteristics and comparative advantages [of PDIs] such as relevant activities, low overhead costs, committed volunteers, voluntary spirit'. Kamara and Bakhuisen (2008, p. 4), studying PDI interventions in Ghana, were:

moved by the commitment and enthusiasm of many Dutch people [...] and the warm feelings for the country and its people. This passion is at the heart of the program, and has motivated many partners in Ghana in their continuous efforts to contribute to the development of the country.

Their enthusiasm, however, also forms part of the critical concerns that the same studies raise. It leads them, for instance, to paying insufficient attention to a thorough context analysis (Chelladurai, 2006; Schulpen, 2007) and a needs assessment (Kinsbergen, 2006). As a consequence, PDIs have little knowledge about which other organisations or agencies are active in the same region, while listening to the target group before drawing up a project plan is sooner the exception than the rule. Chelladurai (2006) thus warns for PDI projects to be insufficiently imbedded in the local context or simply not sufficiently relevant. At the same time, the collaboration between PDIs and their local partners relies principally on friendship making a critical attitude towards each other difficult with little in the field of discussions about each other's expectations and the division of roles and capacities (Zindel, 2009). Looij (2008) then concludes that the focus is on the project, the execution and the results with much less attention being paid to the process.

These projects are mainly micro in nature, activity-based and focused on the immediate needs of specific target groups without tackling the structural causes of poverty (Chelladurai, 2006; De Bruyn, 2011; van der Velden, 2011). Besides, local capacities to (independently) manage interventions are questioned (Kamara and Bakhuisen, 2008; van der Velden, 2011) as is the lack of building on or linking to local government or other civil societies such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), people's organisations or community networks (Chelladurai, 2006).

Chelladurai also demonstrates that PDIs often lack evaluation and accountability, a finding corroborated by other studies (Bosmans, 2008; Kamara and Bakhuisen, 2008; Schulpen, 2007) and hindering learning processes with both the PDI and its partner. Combining these critical remarks leads many to question the prospective sustainability of PDI interventions.

Being a relative new field, studies so far merely aimed at a general understanding of PDIs and their interventions. Moreover, available data on PDIs' interventions do not allow to systematically study the diversity in sustainability potential of PDI interventions. This limits our understanding of PDIs as development actors, since empirical data show a wide diversity within the group of PDIs regarding organisational characteristics and intervention strategies (Kinsbergen and Schulpen, 2011). The main aims of this article are: (i) to classify PDI interventions based on structural and performance characteristics and (ii) to offer an in-depth analysis of the diversity of intervention strategies of PDIs in order to understand the likelihood of their sustainable contribution to poverty reduction. Our central research question reads: *How can PDI development interventions be classified in terms of their potential sustainability?*

To answer this question, we first construct an analytical framework that enables us to understand the potential sustainability of PDI interventions and to study the diversity within this group. Second, we apply this framework on an empirical sample of 49 PDIs and their interventions. The interventions subject of this study are in different stages of the project cycle. Some are completed; others are still in the process of implementation. We therefore decided not to focus on sustainability itself (ex-post), but to assess the likelihood of the sustainability of PDI interventions by analysing the intervention type and the intervention manner of PDIs (ex-ante). The third and final step in our analysis identifies attributes of PDIs that shape their intervention strategy. We therefore look for common denominators of PDIs (e.g. organisational characteristics, driving forces) with similar intervention types and intervention manners.

Towards a meaningful PDI classification

Salamon and Anheier (1992) point out that for designing a classification system, two basic issues have to be clarified: (1) the unit of analysis and (2) the basis of classification (e.g. size, type and character of activity). For our purpose, the unit of analysis is clear: we focus on the development interventions of a specific type of development organisations, namely PDIs. The basis of the classification should provide insight into the potential sustainability of their development interventions. That brings us to a more complex part of the intended classification since sustainability is very dynamic, largely indefinite and highly contested (Mog, 2004) and lacks a clear definition (Mog, 2004; Pretty, 1995; Stockmann, 1997).

A common approach towards sustainability crossing different fields of study distinguishes three dimensions: economic, social and environmental sustainability, with especially the latter gaining in importance in recent years. In this study, we do not

follow this tripartition, but instead frame the concept of sustainability explicitly in the world of international development cooperation and the evaluation of development interventions. Here, a distinction is made between a more formal interpretation of sustainability and a more substantive one.

Since the 1980s, sustainability is one of the five yardsticks in the evaluation of development interventions (Brown, 1998) and related to other measures concerning relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact (OECD, 1986). Roughly, two approaches can be distinguished. The first approach offers a more formal definition and focuses on sustainability in terms of the lifetime of projects, programmes or institutions: do projects, programmes or organisations continue to exist after the withdrawal of external donor support (Brown, 1998; DAC, n.d.; Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1989)? The second approach provides a more substantive analysis with a strong focus on the extent to which interventions are aiming at fundamentally tackling structurally constraining factors that induce, maintain or strengthen poverty and inequality.

The first (widely adopted) approach (DAC, n.d.; World Bank, 2002) implies that development projects or programmes are considered sustainable when they are able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended time period after major financial, managerial and technical assistance from external donor is withdrawn (OECD, 1989, p. 13). Local ownership and sufficient local capacities (human and financial resources) are two important interlinked preconditions for this kind of sustainability (World Bank, 2002). In order to become sustainable, local stakeholders should feel responsible and should be capable of continuing the intervention after the external support ends.

Others see this formal approach as too narrow (Edwards, 1999; Fowler, 2000; Stockmann, 1997; Wilkinson-Maposa and Fowler, 2009). As Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1992, p. 371) state: ‘just because a project, program or organisation endures, does not necessarily mean it is valuable’. The main concern should not be whether the project, programme or organisation will last, but whether it makes a lasting impact on poverty (Edwards, 1999). This second more substantive approach then states that in order to be sustainable, development interventions should aim at tackling the causes of poverty and bringing structural change.

In this study, we will combine both approaches of sustainability. We analyse the sustainability of a PDI development intervention by assessing (1) the extent to which an intervention aims to address and change underlying causes of poverty and (2) the extent to which the intervention is locally owned (and thus can be continued without external financial and technical support). The former criterion reflects the substantive sustainability dimension, the latter elements provides insight into the formal sustainability dimension.

Finally, we need to identify practical and observable aspects that characterise PDIs and their operations and that are linked to the before-mentioned sustainability dimensions. Following Fowler (2000) who states that the probability a development organisation contributes to sustained change depends on both the type of a development

intervention and the process through which change is brought, we rely on two aspects: (1) the type of interventions PDIs carry out in developing countries (*what activities are undertaken*) and (2) the intervention manner of PDIs (*how they are organised*) as the basis for the empirical classification. Together, these aspects form the intervention strategy.

Intervention types and prospects for sustainability

In classifying the intervention types of PDIs in the light of their potential sustainability, we start from Korten's (1990) attempt to classify NGOs in four generations of strategies. (1) first generation, *relief and welfare*, are aimed at alleviating directly observable needs by service delivery; (2) second generation, *community development*, pursue the strengthening of local capacities of people to better meet their own needs; (3) third generation, *sustainable system development*, with a focus on the elimination of institutional and policy constraints and (4) fourth generation, *people's movement*, characterised by a vision of people-centred development with development organisations being facilitators of a global people's movement.

The starting point of this classification is 'a pattern of evolution [...] away from more traditional relief activities [...] towards greater involvement in catalysing larger institutional and policy changes' (Brodhead, 1987; Korten, 1990, p. 115; also see Elliott, 1987). According to Korten (1990), most NGOs start by taking up a welfarist approach; they act as service deliverers and offer direct relief to meet immediate needs. The recognition that relief and welfare do not tackle underlying causes of poverty may result in a strategy with greater attention for self-reliant local action, referred to as second-generation strategies. Through similar processes, the main strategy of an NGO can evolve from systems development (third generation) into people's movement (fourth generation). The implicit message then is that in order to offer a sustainable contribution to poverty reduction, development organisations should focus on structural causes of exclusion and poverty.

Intervention manners and prospects for sustainability

Korten (1990) suggests that generational strategies are inextricably linked to specific intervention manners. First-generation NGOs are usually considered as 'doers', second generation as 'mobilisers', third as 'catalysts' and fourth as 'activists/educators'. This indirectly defines the position and role of both the local partner organisation and beneficiaries. For example, in the first-generation strategy, Korten (1990) describes the role of the NGO as 'the doer', while a passive position is reserved for the beneficiaries.

With regard to intervention manner, we assess sustainability by looking at the degree of participation of local stakeholders. Participation of local stakeholders is referred to as one of the most, if not the most, important preconditions for sustainability (Chambers, 1994; Edwards, 1999; Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1989; Fowler, 2000; Mog,

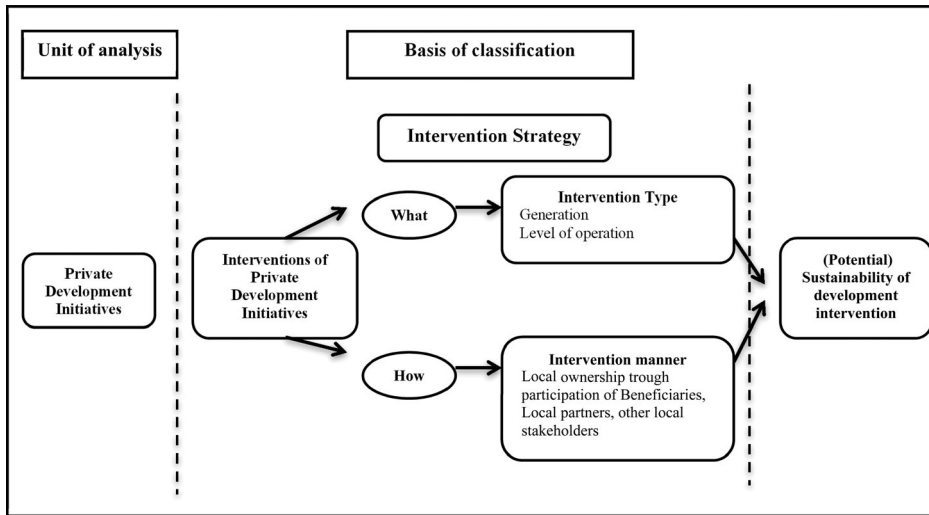
2004; Stockmann, 1997). By co-defining change, local actors are more committed and motivated to take ownership of processes needed to bring it forward (Fowler, 2000). The recognition in the 1970s that many development projects failed because of their top-down approach made the concept and practice of participation of major influence in the field of international development cooperation (Cornwall, 2008).

Arnstein (1969, p. 216) defines participation as ‘the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future’. According to Fowler (2000), participation can be analysed from three different perspectives: (1) depth (measure of stakeholders’ influence on decision-making); (2) breadth (measure of the range of stakeholders involved); and (3) timing (stage of the process at which different stakeholders are involved). We will consider the *depth* dimension by characterising the role of stakeholders in the project cycle. In order to get an insight into the *breadth* of participation, we look at the degree of involvement of (1) beneficiaries, (2) local partners and (3) other local stakeholders (e.g. local government). This is particularly done for the design phase and the implementation stage of the interventions in order to get an impression of the *timing* of participation.

Although this study builds on Korten’s generations model, the analytical approach in this study differs significantly from this model. Korten expects the intervention type, manner, and scope to simultaneously move along the line of the different generations. Because of the novelty of the research approach, we do not want to assume strict correlations between these different indicators. In order to grasp as much as possible the diversity among PDIs, we will look explicitly and separately at what PDIs do (intervention type), how they intervene (intervention manner) and at which level they do so. Four different levels of operation are distinguished: the individual or family level, the community level (micro), the regional level (meso) and the national level (macro). [Figure 1](#) presents the analytical framework for this study.

Data collection

We started by selecting our sample in two target countries of Dutch PDIs. Kenya and Indonesia were chosen because of the relatively large proportion of PDIs active in these countries (Kinsbergen and Schulpen, 2011). We sampled 49 PDIs (25 active in Kenya and 24 in Indonesia) drawn from a database of almost 900 PDIs. This database was the result of a large-scale survey conducted among Dutch PDIs in 2008–2009 (CIDIN-PDI Database 2008–2009). The sample was purposefully diverse with respect to background characteristics of the organisations: the age of the organisations, their budget and the number of members. However, the target group and focus themes of PDIs were not predefined, leaving us with a diverse group of interventions. Although we aimed to compose a sample of PDIs and interventions that offered an adequate reflection of PDIs as a group, we have to remain cautious in generalising the results of this study to the entire PDI population.

Figure 1: Analytical framework for classifying interventions of PDIs

The average age of the sampled PDIs is 11 years. On average, PDIs have an annual budget of nearly 50,000 euro and almost nine members on which they can rely. The majority of the PDIs are active in the field of education (e.g. school construction), followed by health care (e.g. dental clinic) and providing shelter for vulnerable groups (e.g. orphanage). A smaller group of PDIs supports interventions related to environmental issues, water and sanitation and art and culture. The diversity within the sample allows us to look for common denominators of PDIs with a similar intervention strategy (see Appendix for an anonymous overview of the PDIs and their local partners).

The main researcher with the help of two trained research assistants executed the research. Data collection started in the Netherlands (2.5 months) and continued in Indonesia and Kenya (five months). We opted for semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate method in order to allow and stimulate respondents to reflect on the intervention and their own organisation. As such, the approach during the interviews can best be typified as reconstructing a 'life-history' of the PDI, the local organisation and the intervention. With the use of an interview guide, we discussed the emergence of the PDI and the local organisation, their organisational characteristics, developments over the past years, donor profile, type of interventions in developing countries, partner/PDI relations, challenges, motives, future plans, visions and dreams. To get an adequate insight into the intervention strategy of the PDI and its partner, we extensively discussed the type of (and decisions about) PDI-supported interventions and the character of the implementation process. In addition, the role of the different stakeholders (local partner, beneficiaries and the broader network) during the design and implementation of the intervention was discussed. For different reasons, six local partners and their projects were not visited during the field research. In these cases, information on the

partner, the projects and the cooperation with the PDI as obtained during the interview with the PDI was added with insights gained from other information resources (e.g. email correspondence with partner, website and newsletters).

All interviews were conducted with those members of the PDI and the local organisation who were most familiar with both the organisation itself and the intervention. These were in the best position to provide us with a ‘life history’ and current functioning of the organisations and the interventions. Respondents in the Netherlands range from the chairman or general board member of the PDI. In Kenya and Indonesia, depending on the type of project and local partner involved, school heads, teachers or Community Based Organisation (CBO) leaders provided us with the needed information (also see Appendix for an overview of interviews conducted). In addition to interviews, PDI interventions were visited and observed during the field research and, wherever possible, informal talks were held with beneficiaries. The data from the interviews were processed with the use of ATLAS.ti. In order to stimulate an open, trusted atmosphere during the interviews, anonymity was guaranteed to the participating PDIs and their partners. More importantly, in the central analysis of this study, it is not the individual cases that make up the story, but the collective emerging pattern that allows us to answer the central research question.

Results

In presenting our findings, we first discuss differences in intervention type of PDIs (*what*), followed by a review of differences in intervention manner (*how*). Next, we classify the intervention strategies of PDIs – in light of their potential sustainability – by combining the intervention type and intervention manner for every PDI, providing the basis for the classification of PDIs. In the final paragraph, we identify common determinants of PDI types that share a similar intervention strategy and discuss their prospects for sustainability.

PDI intervention types

At first sight, there is a large variety in interventions that PDIs undertake: from installing solar panels, to starting a community bank, and from assisting an orphanage to supporting a peace process. A closer look reveals that every single one of them undertakes activities that can be typified by what Korten (1987; 1990) defines as ‘first-generation strategies’ or relief and welfare provision. PDIs respond to immediate, often visible needs, mostly at the level of basic needs. They act in response to something that is, according to their or others’ perspective, ‘lacking’: lack of (proper) schooling, lack of (proper) health care, lack of (proper) water and sanitation. This results most of the time in ‘hardware’ investments: construction, renovation and the supply of goods.

For the majority of PDIs ($n = 38$), relief and welfare type of interventions are their main and only focus. Within this first group, a distinction can be made between those PDIs that support only one project (e.g. one specific orphanage) and those that support

more of the same type of project (e.g. building several schools). Their interventions are directed to individuals, families or groups of individuals that share a common need (e.g. schoolchildren). Most of these PDIs intervene at the level of individuals or families; others spread their activities over several villages or a certain region.

Characteristic of PDIs in this group is that they are strongly focused on the symptoms of poverty and not or to a lesser extent on the structural causes of poverty. Their interventions are aimed at visible needs and they intend to offer concrete solutions to these problems. This does not mean that these 'first-generation' type of PDIs are not tackling root causes of poverty. However, their interventions are not intentionally aiming at it.

A smaller, second group of PDIs ($n = 7$) complements their relief and welfare type of activities with interventions in the field of community development (i.e. second-generation strategies). For example, one of the PDIs in this study is supporting a waste-processing project. They cooperate with a CBO. Group formation is an explicit part of this project. These types of interventions transcend the individual or family level and are focused at community or regional level. Interventions aim at a group of people and strategies are often structured such that the group and group formation are integral part of the intervention.

A small minority of PDIs in our sample forms a third group ($n = 4$). They undertake activities that are deliberately aiming at changing constraining structures (third generation): they 'look beyond the individual community and seek changes in specific policies and institutions at local, national and global level' (Korten, 1990, p. 120). In that sense, they also look beyond the more visible needs, the symptoms of poverty and try to address the underlying forces. They deliberately aim their interventions at (helping to) restructure policies and institutions in order to overcome their disempowering function. PDIs within this group are all involved in lobby and advocacy activities, principally at local or regional level. These interventions are less visible, less concrete and have a longer term horizon. However, all of them combine third-generation strategies with first- and/or second-generation type of interventions. For example, one of the PDIs in this group supports the construction and renovation of schools. The PDI and their partner have frequent contact with local government officials on future plans and policy development. Moreover, they try to stimulate the local government to financially contribute to the construction or renovation plans and motivate the government to focus more on the quality of education in their policy and plans. Within our sample, no PDIs undertaking fourth-generation strategies can be identified.

PDIs intervention manner

In this paragraph, we analyse how PDIs decide on the type of interventions they undertake and who is involved in the design and implementation of these interventions and how these roles are articulated. We therefore discuss the opportunities for local participation by beneficiaries, the type of cooperative relationships between PDIs and their local partners and the character of local and regional networks.

Role of beneficiaries

For more than half of the PDIs in our sample ($n = 26$), the role of the beneficiaries remains limited to ‘receivers’ throughout the design and implementation of the intervention. In the most extreme case, PDIs may even disregard all opportunities to actively involve the local population. When asked if the local population is an active partner for the PDI, one interviewee responds: ‘No, that is not an option’ (Interview PDI founder). However, in the initial phase of starting a PDI or intervention, the local population often functions as a source of inspiration. Encounters with local people and their living conditions usually instigate the decision to start a PDI or a certain intervention and influence the choice for a specific theme or target group:

And we were so shocked, the showers were so dirty. Yes, that really impressed us. And then we continued our trip to the coast and on a certain moment we said to one another: we have to do something about this. (Interview PDI founder)

A second, smaller group of PDIs ($n = 7$) expands this role of the beneficiaries in the design and/or implementation phase. This is done by informing the beneficiaries on (possible) plans of the PDI and its partner, by consulting beneficiaries about their needs or by organising meetings during which they inform beneficiaries on the progress of an intervention or on future plans. A third group is made up of 12 PDIs that more actively engage their beneficiaries, mainly during implementation. In most of these cases, this is based on the beneficiaries being organised in small groups through which the intervention is being implemented (e.g. group of neighbours managing a shared water pump). In a fourth and final group ($n = 4$), beneficiaries are actively engaged not only in the implementation but also in the design phase of the intervention, in the management of the organisation or in the planning of future projects. By doing so, beneficiaries have a larger, and sometimes decisive, influence in the actual design and execution of an intervention.

What most interventions have in common is that PDIs and their partners request or oblige beneficiaries to offer contribution in kind or in cash. By doing so, they hope or expect to enlarge their feeling of responsibility, stimulate local ownership and/or preserve their dignity:

Most of them do not have any money, and if they do not have it, they do have to pay. That means that one time they bring along a bunch of wood or a chicken or whatever. There must be something in return. [...] To prevent that people too easily say [...] ‘they will solve this’. Or make beggars of them. (Interview PDI founder)

Although the role of beneficiaries in the implementation phase is often more extended compared to their role in the design phase, beneficiaries are generally requested or even obliged to participate within a framework determined in a process from which they were excluded or only participated in a limited way.

Cooperation relations between partner and PDI

Looking at how PDIs and their partners cooperate, we can distinguish three groups based on the way roles are divided among PDIs and their partners. In the first group ($n = 21$), the influence of the PDI on the type, design and implementation of the intervention is larger than that of its partner. PDIs take up the role of manager and their partners are the executors of their ideas and plans. In some cases, the PDI is also active in the actual implementation of the intervention. When asked on the number of beneficiaries he expects to support in the future, one partner responds:

I don't know, I think they [PDI] have big plans. [...] They have the vision in Holland, we carry it out. We share the vision. (Interview PDI partner)

When more direct involvement (e.g. email, phone or personal visits) is difficult, some of the PDIs in this group make use of intermediaries (in many cases, this is a Dutch person living in Kenya or Indonesia): the PDI instructs the intermediary to go and check on progress or bookkeeping. By doing so, the go-between eases cooperation between PDI and partner and removes distrust within the PDI. Others opt for more radical control mechanism and even become a member of the board of their local partner.

In a second group ($n = 18$), there is a higher degree of consultation between PDI and partner. Consequently, partners here have a stronger influence on design and implementation. The PDI and its partner are sparring partners sharing responsibility for the design and implementation of a certain intervention.

A third and final group of PDIs ($n = 10$) takes up a low profile and more distant position in the cooperation with their partners. Their role is that of an advisor, coach and financier. The partner is the one in charge and responsible for the development and implementation of the intervention:

They decide what to do there; we sometimes make a suggestion, but not more than that. We are no big brother. (Interview PDI member)

In most cases, the relationship between PDIs and their partners is very warm and close. They give expression to this by using family and friendship terms:

He sees me as ... he says: you are more like a brother to me, that's how close we are. [name of partner] is great, we kiss and hug ... when we are there, ... that is also why we do not want to grow big. When we are there, we always go out for dinner with 10–15 people. That costs 50 or 60 euro and then we have a whole evening of fun. (Interview PDI founder)

The local networks of partners and their knowledge of local circumstances, needs, customs and structures is an asset that gives most partners a significant amount of influence on, among others, the intervention type, the implementation and the selection of the beneficiaries. However, we find that many PDIs remain relatively influential, as

they find it hard to leave the design, implementation and day-to-day management to their partners.

Making use of networks

During the design phase of an intervention, most PDIs make limited use of broader networks. This is especially the case when it is the first intervention they support. At that stage, networks are rather small and PDIs in general do not invest a lot of time in developing this network. Throughout time, PDIs start to develop their (local) networks. The size and the composition of PDI networks differ strongly, varying from small merely Dutch PDI networks to large and more diversified networks consisting of, among others, other civil society actors, local government officials and private companies.

Looking at the type of network of PDIs and their partners and how they use it, we can distinguish three groups. A first group ($n = 26$) has a rather small network. The design and implementation of their intervention is mainly based on their own and their partners' insights and, to a greater or lesser extent, input gained from their beneficiaries. Most of these PDIs have no contact with local government. Some of them even fear the government because they are afraid for corruption, for losing control, and/or compromising the quality of their intervention:

We do make ourselves known with the government. But we do not cooperate with the government. When the government asks us to do something, we do so. But we do not participate in the development discussions of the government. We are not involved in those local development programmes. The reason for this is that we do not trust the government for a penny [...]. We only inform them on what we have done. (Interview PDI founder)

A second group of PDIs ($n = 21$) has access to a larger, more diversified local network. These PDIs use their networks mainly to learn from others by sharing tips and tricks, to try to avoid duplication by informing other PDIs on their activities and to search for (financial) support. Most of the PDIs in this second group make sure to be on good footing with the government and to have official blessing for their presence and interventions in the area. They therefore bring 'mandatory' visits to local government officials in order to keep the relation going. Their cooperation with the local government could be typified as 'formal-informative'.

A very small third group ($n = 2$) distinguishes itself, particularly from the second group, by its constructive cooperation with the local government. They request the government to contribute to their projects and vice versa, they are invited to participate in the design of new government policies, with their interventions, they 'set the good example' and inspire and stimulate the government to take up their responsibilities. This type of relationship is illustrated by the next case:

On a certain moment the project is finished [...]. With the handover [of the project], the government is coming. The government is co-financing more and more of the projects in

which we are in involved. That is one of the great developments. Because in the end, they are responsible. (Interview PDI founder)

Whereas the size of the networks and their composition differ, PDIs share that they mostly start using and/or developing a network after they have decided on the target group, the theme and the intervention. They thus principally use their network within the framework of an already determined plan. When starting a second or third project, some PDIs start to involve their networks earlier on in the project cycle:

And what I'm doing right now, with [name of the new project], I am mapping all organisations [...] I'm finding out which NGOs are working in school that has to do with HIV, hygiene, sanitation, to link this up with [project of PDI]. (Interview PDI founder)

Classification of PDIs

Typology

In this section, we apply the before-outlined approach for classifying PDIs based on their intervention type and on their intervention manner. Table 1 presents an overview of the different (sub)groups and the score assigned to each category. There are two variables related to the intervention type (1.1 generation strategy and 1.2 level of operation) and three variables related to the intervention manner (2.1 participation of beneficiaries, 2.2 participation of local partners and 2.3 participation of other local stakeholders). Each PDI has been assigned a score for each of these variables. The sum of the scores on variables 1.1 and 1.2 characterises their intervention type. The total of the scores of variables 2.1–2.3 characterises their intervention manner. We apply categorical coding and thus assume equal distances among the scoring categories.

Figure 2 presents the final results of our analysis. The total score for intervention type and intervention manner determines the position of the PDI on, respectively, the *X*-axis and the *Y*-axis. The size of the balls refers to the concentration of PDIs within a certain category: the larger the ball, the larger the number of PDIs that is relying on a certain intervention strategy. Looking at Figure 2, we can distinguish four groups of PDIs.

Group #1

In the lower left side of the graph, we find the largest number of PDIs (group 1). Relief and welfare type of activities with strong involvement of PDIs in the design and implementation of the intervention characterise the intervention strategy of these PDIs.

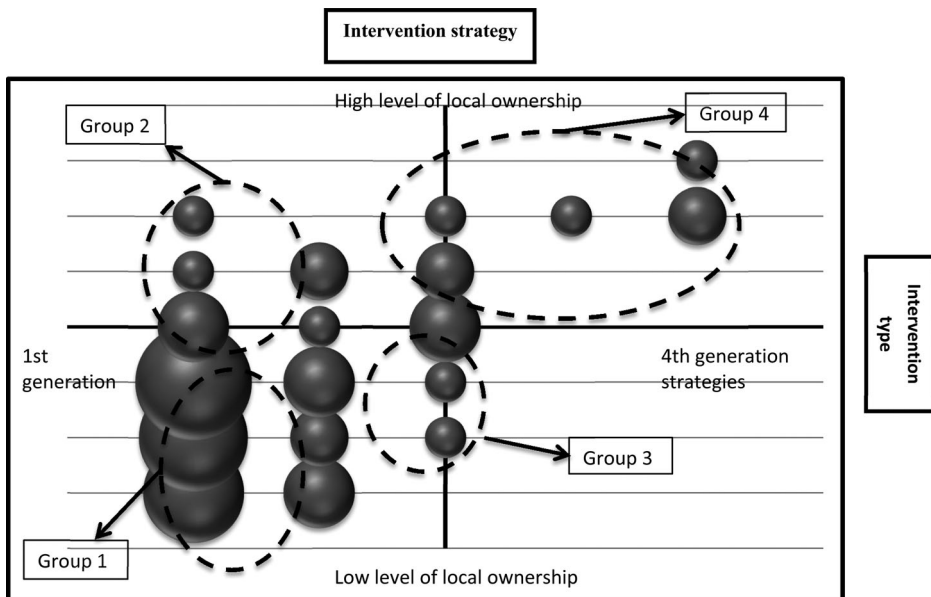
From a sustainability perspective, both the intervention type and the intervention manner of the PDIs within this group are potentially risky. Particularly, the limited participation of local stakeholders can have strong negative influence in this. Although it seems acceptable that certain needs of the local population are observed, it is harder to guess on (root) causes of needs, on priorities in needs and on interventions that

	Variables	Typology	Score
1. Type	1.1. Generation strategy	First generation	1
		Second generation	2
		Third generation	3
	1.2. Level of operation	Individual/family	1
		Village/community	2
		Regional	3
2. Manner	2.1. Participation of beneficiaries	Inspirational role	1
		Consultative role	2
		Active in implementation	3
		Active in design and implementation	4
	2.2. Participation of local partner	Executive	1
		Shared responsibility	2
		In control	3
	2.3. Participation of other local stakeholders	Absent/limited	1
		Extended, formal relationship with local government	2
	Extended, constructive relationship with local government	3	

Table 1: Overview of different intervention types and intervention manner.

appropriately respond to the observed needs and underlying causes. There is a risk of subjective interpretation of needs with as consequence the development of projects without ‘real’ beneficiaries/suggested beneficiaries or the development of inappropriate projects. This is illustrated by the next examples, where a lack of beneficiary participation and a limited role of the local partner resulted in projects with a short lifetime.

Figure 2: Categorisation of PDI intervention strategies



One of the PDIs recalls the story of a donor who joined him on a fieldtrip. He was shocked when he saw the kitchen in which a group of women was preparing their food: a corrugated shack with inside a lot of smoke in the absence of good ventilation. He decided that a new kitchen was needed and donated money to realise this project. Both the PDI and its local partner were convinced of this idea and without any consultation with the women, the Dutch PDI built the new kitchen, with big kettles and air outlet. To the astonishment of the PDI and the generous donor, the women did not use the new kitchen and continued to cook in their old kitchen. They did not know how to use the modern equipment installed in the new kitchen and therefore preferred their old kitchen.

The data also show several interesting examples illustrating the consequences of limited ownership of local partners. In order to ensure the longevity of interventions, in several cases, either the local partner or the PDI came up with the idea to start an income-generating project. This was, for instance, the case in a school construction project. Before starting the construction, the PDI informed their local partner that they would only support them with the construction of the school but that running and maintenance costs would be the responsibility of the school itself. Following their suggestion, the partner started to keep chickens and try to sell the eggs to generate income. The poultry project failed, as there was not enough money to construct a proper shelter and there was insufficient experience and time to make the project viable. Instead of a source of income, it became a financial burden.

Group #2

The intervention strategy of the second group of PDIs (group 2), in the upper left side of the graph, distinguishes itself from the first group by higher levels of local ownership. Both groups of PDIs undertake similar intervention types but the way they intervene differs. They support the same type of interventions (first generation) but the extent to which local stakeholders, in particular local partners, actively participate in the design and implementation of these interventions is stronger compared to PDIs in group 1. PDIs in this second group are more often active as financiers and advisors of their local partner.

The different consequences both intervention manners have on the potential sustainability of the interventions are best illustrated by comparing the answers of the partners of group 1 and 2 on the hypothetical question: *What would happen when the PDI would stop cooperating with you tomorrow?* In their response to this question, the partners of the first group in general indicate they would be faced with severe financial problems and a drop in the necessary capacities needed to continue the intervention. As one of the partners of the first group stated:

If they would not have been here, the programme would not be going on. [...] For a programme to run, it needs finance. If they would stop, we would miss many things. We would be like a vehicle without gas. [...] The programme will die. (Interview PDI partner)

A partner of a PDI from group two responds as follows to the same question:

For the running costs it would not be a problem. It could only affect some renovation projects. (Interview PDI partner)

Although this partner (as do other partners in group 2) affirms that in case the cooperation with the PDI ends, this would affect their (future) interventions, it would affect them only partly, whereas in the first group, the impact of the ending of the cooperation on the programme would be fundamental.

Group #3

A small third group of PDI interventions can be typified as second generation with strong involvement of the PDI. At first sight, the potential sustainability of the interventions within this group looks more favourable compared to those within groups 1 and 2. PDIs within group 3 adopt second-generation strategies and by doing so, they aim to contribute to lasting, structural change. However, our results show that the intervention manner opted within this group impedes the achievement of this objective. This is illustrated by an income-generating project which is designed in such a way that it has potential to contribute to local community development. On paper and to a certain extent in practice, the beneficiaries and the local partner involved have a rather large say in the implementation of the intervention. However, the relative large influence of the PDI leaves little room to manoeuvre for local actors involved, thus jeopardising the possible achievement of their second-generation strategy. The local manager indicates that at the start of cooperating with the PDI, he had the idea that they were starting a joint project based on shared responsibilities. Gradually, he started to feel like an employee being at the service of the PDI.

Group #4

More to the top middle and right end side of the graph, we find a group of PDIs that extended their relief and welfare type of activities with community development and sustainable systems development (group 4). To a greater or lesser extent, all of these interventions are, compared to the interventions of group 1, characterised by a relatively high degree of local ownership.

From a sustainability perspective, the potential sustainability of the interventions in the fourth group is higher compared to those of groups 1 and 2 because of the chosen intervention type and the intervention manner. Although sometimes in a subtle way, these PDIs focus their interventions on the causes of poverty and try to contribute to structural changes. However, also in this fourth group, we find examples of interventions whereof the sustainability is at risk. In the case of a waste project aimed at processing plastic waste into materials that could be sold to plastic-processing factories, initially not a lot of time was invested in mapping

other actors involved in this subject and thoroughly studying the market for this product. After the machine was bought and installed, the local organisation had troubles in finding buyers for its product. It turned out that in the area two other similar (commercial) projects were running for several years, both experiencing similar difficulties in selling their processed plastic. The founder of the PDI involved had a professional background in waste management and clearly influenced the local organisation to focus on this issue.

Drivers of intervention strategies

In the final step of our analysis, we aim to get an understanding of the dynamic drivers of the intervention strategies of PDIs. We therefore look for some common (organisational) features of PDIs within the different groups distinguished in [Figure 2](#). In this analysis, we will not include the third group since this group is too small to make any statements about their distinguishing features.

The influence of experience

A central starting point in the generation strategies model of Korten (1990) is the idea of an evolutionary process: driven by their experience, development organisations will continue to redefine their strategy from more top-down, direct poverty relief to bottom-up interventions aimed at bringing structural change. When applying this line of thought to our study, we would expect age to be a common denominator of the PDIs within the different groups with younger PDIs being dominant within group 1 and older organisation more represented within groups 2 and 4.

To a certain extent, our results corroborate this idea. PDIs in the first group are generally indeed organisations with fewer years of experience; the average age of the organisations is 9 years compared to 15 years of those of group 2. This suggests that the intervention manner (*how*) of PDIs is determined by the experience of the organisation, with older organisations using a more participatory approach. However, we find that the average age of PDIs in the fourth group, having a similar intervention manner as those of the second group, is comparable to those of the first group.

We can make a similar conclusion regarding the relation between the age of the PDI and the intervention type (*what*). Since we do not find that PDIs characterised by second- or third-generation strategies (group 4) are on average of older age compared to those PDIs supporting first-generation strategies (first and second group), our results do not affirm the idea that the intervention type is influenced by the age of the PDI. This is best illustrated by the next example. The oldest PDI (part of group 3) included in this study started more than 40 years ago to support different types of projects in a region. One of the first projects was the improvement of the quality of the schools in the region. More precisely, they started to support the schools in renovating their roofs and providing chairs for the pupils. More than 40 years later, they are still renovating roofs and providing chairs. What changed is that nowadays parents are requested to contribute,

that the PDI expanded the area it works in and that the PDI also supports the schools in constructing toilets. We hence do not find a clear correlation between the age of PDIs and their intervention manner and intervention type.

Dependency of the partner

The results of our study reveal that the majority of PDIs with an intervention manner with restricted participation of local stakeholders (group 1) cooperate with local partners that we refer to as mirror-organisations. This means, these organisations were not founded independently of the PDI, but started (often with support of the PDI) when the PDI commenced to support a certain intervention. Partners of PDIs in the second and third group are more often independent, experienced organisation with a larger group of (local) donors, reducing the influence of PDIs on the local organisations and its interventions.

(Professional) background PDI member

We find as well that the (professional) background of a PDI member can be of strong influence on the selected intervention type. This can result in professional deformation whereby the perception of local stakeholders is dominated by the perception of an external professional:

I saw that not a lot was done in the field of health care. And many children with burns, and I found that really sad. I am a nurse by profession, and I thought: It should be very easy to do something about this. (Interview PDI member)

Back donors

Private back donors of PDIs strongly influence the intervention type of PDIs. PDIs, rightly or wrongly, expect their donors to have a strong preference for money being spent on concrete, small-scale projects. This makes first-generation strategies on micro level more obvious for PDIs. In these cases, the influence of private donors on the choice for a certain type of intervention transcends the influence of, for example, beneficiaries, local partners or other local stakeholders.

Private back donors not only influence the intervention type of PDIs but also their intervention manner. PDIs are related or befriended with many of their private back donors. They therefore feel strongly motivated to ensure their money is spent well by demonstrating results in the short run. This drives PDIs towards a larger influence and control.

Vision

We find that the vision of PDI members on development cooperation in general and cooperation with local stakeholders in particular determines the intervention strategy.

Most PDIs within group 4 from the start combined their first-generation strategies (e.g. school building) with second- or third-generation strategies (e.g. lobby activities). More than experience, it is the vision and attitude of PDI members that determine the intervention type. This is illustrated by a PDI that since its establishment supported first-generation strategies. After eight years, a new member, convinced that in order to bring change more was needed, joined the PDI. Since that time, the PDI started to complement its first-generation interventions with second- and third-generation types of activities. This change was not driven by the experience of the PDI, but by the conviction of one member.

Small scale and the ‘fun-factor’

Finally, we find the two central characteristics of PDIs to be of strong influence on their intervention strategy. There is, first of all, the small scale (i.e. budget and number of staff) of the organisations. Some PDIs mention the restricted time and money they have available as a reason not to start second- or third-generation strategies. They expect these processes to be more time-consuming and expensive compared to first-generation strategies and therefore out of their league. Others take into account a cost–benefit analysis in order to decide on the type of intervention they are going to support:

... That girl for example, she costs 300 euro per month, that is 3,600 euro per year. [...] For that same amount of money you can send 10 healthy children to school. [...] More and more we look at what else could we do with our money. (Interview PDI founder)

Group 4 PDIs, on average, have a larger annual budget at their disposal than group 1 and 2 PDIs (65,000 euro against 47,000 and 43,000 euro, respectively). In addition, PDIs of group 4, on average, have more staff members than those of groups 1 and 2. These results give the impression that a certain size of the organisation is helpful in extending PDIs’ first-generation type of interventions with second- or third-generation strategies. Our results are in line with Kortén (1987) and Elliott who find that a certain level of organisational capacity is required to be ‘effective agents of change’ (Elliott, 1987, p. 60).

Also, the voluntary character of PDIs affects the intervention strategy of PDIs. Many PDIs mention that the involvement in the PDI is of great importance to them. Being a volunteer, many mention that in order to stay motivated, the ‘work should stay fun’ (Interview PDI founder). PDI members mention that being hands-on involved, especially in interventions with concrete, visible results, gives them the energy to design new interventions, to think of future plans, to bring visits to their partner, the projects and the beneficiaries.

Hence, in order to fulfil their motives, many PDI members are strongly involved in the design and implementation of the intervention. It not only affects the intervention manner, but also the intervention type. First-generation strategies, such as the

construction of a school, are preferred over more abstract third-generation strategies. Salamon (1987) refers to this as ‘philanthropic particularism’ tendency for non-profit organisations to provide certain types of services to specific groups of people based on their own particular interest and preferences.

Above, we indicated that in the diversity of intervention strategies we find groups of PDIs with a (more or less) common approach. In addition, we can distinguish several denominators determining the intervention strategy adopted by a PDI. However, the results of our study show as well that there is a high degree of coincidence involved in determining the approach of PDIs. The selection of the country, the region, the local partner or the central theme are in many cases not deliberately selected but are the result of a high degree of happenchance.

Looking at the denominators of the intervention strategies of PDIs, it is striking that nearly all of these factors can be typified as intrinsic drivers, all related to the PDI and its members and not so much to the local organisation or local circumstances.

Conclusion

In this article, we offered an in-depth analysis of the diversity of intervention strategies of small-scale, voluntary development organisations in the light of their (potential) sustainable contribution to poverty reduction and in order to classify PDI interventions with respect to their prospects for sustainability. Therefore, we first designed an ‘intervention strategy’ – framework allowing studying the diversity of PDI interventions. The intervention manner (*how*) and the intervention type (*what*) are used as the two central criteria in this framework that are subsequently used to assess the potential sustainability of the interventions.

We applied this framework in an empirical study among 49 PDIs and their interventions. We found that there is a relatively large group of PDIs whose intervention strategy brings at risk the sustainability of the intervention. This is mainly because their interventions are foremost aiming at the consequences of poverty by delivering direct relief, limiting the extent to which an intervention intends to bring structural change. In addition, the involvement of local stakeholders is rather limited, restricting the extent to which the intervention can be locally owned (and thus can be continued without external financial and technical support). So far, the results of our study confirm the results of previous studies on the interventions of PDIs (Chelladurai, 2006; De Bruyn, 2011; Kinsbergen, 2007; Kamara and Bakhuizen, 2006; Schulpen, 2007; van der Velden, 2011).

However, the analytical framework designed and applied in this study allowed a more diverse picture to emerge. First of all, the analysis of our data shows that there is also a group of PDIs that adopts a different intervention strategy with a greater potential to bring a sustainable contribution to poverty reduction. It is clearly demonstrated that – although PDIs share some common characteristics compared to other development actors – they are not a homogenous group with respect to the potential

sustainability of their interventions. Hence, a more refined assessment is required to understand PDIs as development actors.

Subsequently, our analysis shows that, different from that assumed in the model of Korten (1990), PDIs and their intervention strategies fit different generations simultaneously. We find that the intervention type and manner are not always inextricably linked. The second group of PDIs, for instance, is characterised by a first-generation strategy, but the intervention manner is more participatory than the model of Korten assumes.

Furthermore, a close look at the intervention strategies of the 49 studied PDIs demonstrates that there is no evolutionary process guiding PDIs from first to second- and third-generation strategies. There are PDIs with several decades of experience still supporting relief and welfare type of activities and/or doing this in a top-down manner, but there are also organisations with less than five years of experience involved in programmes of community or systems development implemented in a participatory way. With age not being decisive for their intervention strategy, our results warn against adopting an evolutionary perspective towards the development of PDIs.

The external organisational characteristics that seem to influence the choice of the intervention strategy of a PDI are strongly related to the independency of the local partner and the size of the PDI (budget and number of staff). In addition, the results show a number of intrinsic drivers influencing the intervention strategy of PDIs whose influence is less obvious from a sustainable development perspective. These factors refer to the (professional) background of PDI members and their motivation to volunteer in a PDI. Besides, the fact that the majority of PDIs operate outside or, at most, at the outskirts of the established development market place might play a role here. The world of most PDIs is hence not affected by the development discourse and changes taking place within this discourse.

Overall, it has been of great value to look separately at the way PDIs intervene and the type of interventions they undertake. Korten (1990), Elliott (1987) and Brodhead (1987) assume that the intervention type development organisations undertake comes along with a certain intervention manner. The dual approach undertaken in the study at hand allows identifying more of the diversity among PDIs. In addition, this approach allows pointing out possible risks of the sustainability of PDI interventions in a more specific way. This in turn permits making more tailor-made recommendations for how to increase the potential sustainability of PDI interventions. For future research aiming to, for example, classify or typify development interventions or organisations, it is recommendable to take up a more refined approach as has been done in this study. Doing so allows grasping as much as possible the diversity within the object of study.

As the results of our study show that the potential sustainability of PDI interventions is diverse, our recommendations also need to reflect this diversity. PDIs within group 1 can enhance their potential sustainability in two ways. They can either increase the involvement of local stakeholders, or they can start to complement their first-generation strategies with interventions more in line with second- or third-generation strategies. This latter recommendation can also be helpful to improve the potential sustainability

of PDIs within group 2. Although the prospects for sustainability of the interventions of PDIs within group 4 look more favourable compared to those within groups 1 and 2, there is still substantial room for improvement. Especially by decreasing their influence on the implementation of the intervention and by balancing their financial role and increasing the investments in structural change (e.g. strengthening the role of the local government), the probability of contributing to structural poverty reduction in a sustainable manner increases. A general recommendation to enhance the sustainability of PDI interventions, applicable to all PDIs in this study, is to decrease the role of internal drivers (e.g. private donors, personal motivation) and increase the influence of external, local drivers (e.g. contextual factors) on the intervention strategy.

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APPENDIX

#	Country	Respondents PDI	Type of local partner	Respondents local partner	Theme
1	Indonesia	Secretary–chairperson	School	Local coordinator–school teacher–school board	Education
2	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Hospital	Director–project manager–contact person	Health care
3	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Study centre	Local coordinators	Education
4	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Local foundation	Local coordinator	Education
5	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Local foundation	Local coordinator	Education
6	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Individual	Local individual	Fair trade
7	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Local foundation	Program manager	Water and sanitation
8	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Individuals	Local coordinators	Education

(Continued)

Appendix. (Continued).

#	Country	Respondents PDI	Type of local partner	Respondents local partner	Theme
9	Indonesia	Secretary and general board member	Hospital	Not visited	Health care
10	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Individuals	Not visited	Various
11	Indonesia	Chair–founder	Local foundation	Program manager	Women employment
12	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Shelter	Local coordinator–program managers	Shelter
13	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Mission	Not visited	Health care
14	Indonesia	Former chair/founder	Individuals	Not visited	Education
15	Indonesia	Chair/founder–secretary	Local foundation	Director–secretary–general staff members	Shelter
16	Indonesia	Chair	Local foundation	Director–school manager	Education
17	Indonesia	Chair and founder	Individuals	Not visited	Education
18	Indonesia	Chair/founder	Hospital	Local coordinator	Health care
19	Indonesia	General board member	Local foundation	Chair	Health care
20	Indonesia	General board member	Shelter	Director	Shelter
21	Indonesia	General board member	Local foundation	Chair–former chair–board member–directors shelter	Shelter
22	Indonesia	Chair–founder	Local foundation	Local coordinators	Shelter and education
23	Indonesia	Chair–founders	Local foundation	Local coordinators	Water and sanitation
24	Indonesia	Chair–founders	Local foundation	Chair–program manager	Education and micro credit
25	Kenya	Chair/founder–general board members	Shelter	Program manager	Shelter
26	Kenya	Chair–founders	Local foundation	Program manager	Health care and employment
27	Kenya	Founders	Local foundation	Chair–general staff members	Employment and nature conservation
28	Kenya	Chair	Local foundation	Director	Health care and employment
29	Kenya	Chair–founders	Local foundation	Program manager	Health care

(Continued)

Appendix. (Continued).

#	Country	Respondents PDI	Type of local partner	Respondents local partner	Theme
30	Kenya	Founder	Local foundation	Chair–general board members	Education
31	Kenya	Chair/founder–general board member	local foundation	Board member–general staff member	Shelter
32	Kenya	Chair/founder	Local foundation	Chair–general staff members	Education
33	Kenya	Chair/founder	Local foundation	Staff member	Art and culture
34	Kenya	Chair/founder	Individual	Local coordinator	Education
35	Kenya	Founder	Local foundation	Chair	Education and health care
36	Kenya	Chair	Shelter	Local coordinator	Shelter
37	Kenya	Chair–founder	Local foundation	Local coordinators	Education and health care
38	Kenya	Chair/founder–general board member	Local foundation	Local coordinators	Education and employment
39	Kenya	Chair	Local foundation	Program manager	Health care and employment
40	Kenya	Chair/founder–general board member	Local foundation	Chair–general board members	Health care
41	Kenya	Founder/treasurer	Local foundation	Chair–general board members–general staff members	Micro credit
42	Kenya	Founder	Local foundation	Director–chair	Education
43	Kenya	Board members	Local foundation	Not visited	Education
44	Kenya	General board member	Local foundation	Chair–program coordinator	Education
45	Kenya	Founders–general board member–secretary	Clinic	Local coordinator	Health care
46	Kenya	Founder/treasurer	Local foundation	Program manager	Education
47	Kenya	Founders	Local foundation – Individuals	Board members–general staff–local coordinators	Education
48	Kenya	Chair	Local foundation	Chair–board member	Education
49	Kenya	Founder	Mission	Local coordinator	Various