

6. Conclusions

‘And that the boys are so healthy, that they are doing so well and therefore do not have to leave their house, ... Well, I think that is great, that is a real success. I’m incredibly proud of it.’
Interview PDI founder¹

‘I do not think it is earthshaking what we have achieved. I do not think we have saved people’s lives or saved children from famine. If we stopped, there would be no deaths. But I think it is quite nice what we have done.’
Interview PDI founder

‘Everything we did, we always started by doing it a little bit wrong.’
Interview PDI founder

¹ The quotes are derived from interviews with founders/members of private development initiatives. The data are available on request.

6.1 Introduction

Worldwide, a growing number of alternative actors are engaging in international development cooperation. From celebrities to multinational companies, from large charitable organisations to individual citizens, a diversified number of actors want to contribute to the global fight against poverty, inequality and exclusion. This study is focused on one of these alternative development actors, private development initiatives (PDIs): ordinary citizens who start their own small-scale voluntary development organisation, through which they provide direct support to individuals, communities or local organisations in development countries, independent of direct government support. A sincere fascination with this passionate engagement was the personal motivation for starting this study. Who are these people who spend so many hours in a PDI, what motivates them to do so and what are the results of their efforts? This study tells the stories *behind the pictures* of renovated school buildings, income-generating goat-farming projects or installed solar panels. In addition on the one hand to the words of praise of their supporters and on the other the critics who see the work of PDIs as amateurish, this thesis aimed to bring to the fore facts, figures and nuances. This study offers a broad and in-depth insight into PDIs as alternative development actors. Our central research question is:

Which factors shape the nature of private development initiatives and influence the sustainability of their development interventions?

The Netherlands, as one of the forerunners in the field of international development cooperation, is our site of study. The Netherlands is characterised by a high degree of generosity regarding charitable causes in general and development organisations in particular (Schuyt et al., 2013). In addition, the proliferation of the arena for international development cooperation – the background against which the establishment of PDIs is taking place – occurred quite early in the Netherlands (IS Academie NGO database; Schulpen et al., 2011). A final reason why the Netherlands is an interesting study in terms of PDIs is the fact that both in the political arena and in the public sphere the debate on the efficiency and effectiveness of development organisations in general and PDIs in particular has been very prominent for many years (Beerends, 2013; Bodelier & Vossen, 2007; Coumans et al., 2013; Halsema, 2013; Koch, 2007; Weisglas, 2012; WRR, 2010).

Studies on PDIs so far have offered interesting first insights into the characteristics of PDIs and their functioning as development actors. They generally lack an integrated and contextualised approach, however, resulting in an overly one-dimensional and uniform understanding of the PDI phenomenon. We therefore provide a more detailed insight into the distinguishing features of PDIs (i.e. the organisations and their members), the underlying driving forces and the individual motives for citizens' engagement in PDIs. This study pays major attention to the question of how the activities that PDIs undertake can be characterised and valued with respect to their potential sustainability.

The analytical approach used to disentangle the origin, operations and background of PDIs is intended to do justice to the broad diversity within the group of PDIs. It takes into account the context wherein PDIs are operating in the Netherlands and analyses in an integrated manner *what PDIs are, what they do and how they do it*. We therefore employed the structure-conduct-performance (SCP) framework as an integrative approach as it permits understanding of the interactions between these questions (Bain, 1956; Mason, 1939; McWilliams & Smart, 1993). In each of the four central chapters, specific aspects of the structure, conduct and/or performance of PDIs were central to the analysis. The central research question, combined with the SCP- approach, resulted in four sub-questions:

Chapter 2: What drives the start of PDIs and what characterises PDIs, their members and their activities?

Chapter 3: What determines time investment of PDI volunteers?

Chapter 4: How do characteristics of development organisations influence the decision making of (potential) donors?

Chapter 5: What determines the sustainability of PDI interventions?

6.2 Results

6.2.1 Characterisation of PDIs

The second chapter of this thesis offers insight into the distinguishing features of PDIs, their establishment motives and their interventions. Since no large-scale dataset was available for studying the structure of PDIs, a unique data set has been created (CIDIN-PDI Database 2008-09). The data were collected from nearly 900 PDIs with the use of a self-developed survey. We were particularly interested in understanding:

What drives the start of PDIs and what characterises PDIs, their members and their activities?

What are PDIs?

The most distinctive feature of PDIs as compared with other development actors is their voluntary character: the majority of the PDI members undertake activities in the field of development cooperation on a voluntary basis, whereas the core tasks in established development organisations are carried out by paid staff members. Both regarding the annual budget and the number of members PDIs are small in scale. This is a second important distinguishing feature of PDIs compared with established development actors. The members of PDIs are in general middle-agers, almost equally divided between women and men and between those who consider themselves to be part of a religious community and those who do not. The majority of the members combine voluntary work in the PDI with a paid job. Regarding their income and educational level, the members of PDIs come from the average or above-average strata of Dutch society. The most important trigger for people to initiate or become actively engaged in a PDI is a holiday or longer stay in a developing country.

What do PDIs do?

We find that the convictions concerning the origins of poverty of PDI members do not always correspond to their ideas on the solutions to poverty. PDIs consider restrictive economic structures and the absence of, and irregular access to, resources like education and healthcare as the two most important causes of poverty. They attach special importance, however, to investments that result in improved access to basic services like education and health care. In practice, these small-scale, voluntary development organisations contribute in particular to direct poverty reduction, especially in the field of education and health care. They do so mainly in the (Sub-Saharan) African and Asian continents, in countries such as India, Indonesia, Ghana and Kenya. In other words, in practice their preferred intervention type is direct poverty alleviation. Although they also attach considerable importance to lobbying and influencing policy and civil society building, this is not reflected in the general picture of their actual investments.

How do PDIs do it?

At first sight, the working method of PDIs seems to be efficient (with regard to money and manpower) and effective (goals are being achieved). Various researches have made it clear, however, that some of the PDIs fail to take certain crucial steps before, during and/or after the implementation of development projects. A lack of thorough contextual analysis and evaluations and overly personal cooperation between PDIs and their partners often characterise the work of PDIs and jeopardise the sustainability (i.e. longevity) of their projects.

Chapter 2 clearly shows that notwithstanding that PDIs share some common denominators that distinguish them as a group from other players in the field, PDIs as a group are very diverse. Although we applied a well-defined definition of PDIs, we find a high degree of diversity within the group. Whereas Chapter 2 focuses on the organisations, their members and their activities, in Chapter 3, we zoom in on one of the core distinguishing features of the organisations: their voluntary character.

6.2.2 Time investment of PDI volunteers

In order to understand PDIs as development organisations and to gain insight into if and how the specificity of PDIs affects their role as development actors, it is essential to study volunteers' time investment as one of the basic features of PDIs. Consequently, the conduct of PDI volunteers was central to the analysis. With the use of the same dataset as in Chapter 2, in this third chapter we investigated the determinants of time investment among a sample of 661 PDI volunteers. We wanted to understand which factors make donating time beneficial and interesting for those engaged in voluntary work with PDIs.

The following sub-question was formulated:

What determines time investment of PDI volunteers?

We first of all find that – compared with general volunteers – PDI volunteers give a much larger number of hours, on average 37 hours per month. The average age of 55 years and the high average level of education could explain the comparatively high average number of hours of PDI volunteers. In addition, the specific characteristics of the PDI organisations may constitute an important part of the explanation. Whereas many (non-PDI) organisations mainly engage volunteers to support their paid staff members, the existence of most PDIs is totally dependent on the efforts of volunteers. Most of them were initiated on a voluntary basis and a large majority continue to depend solely on the efforts of volunteers.

Notwithstanding the large average number of hours they give, PDI volunteers face time and budget restrictions. This is partly because of their position in the (paid) labour market. Volunteers who are restricted in terms of time because of having a paid job and with free time that is more costly because of higher income spend less hours doing voluntary work.

Differently from what we expected, we find that volunteers who are sceptical towards established development organisations increase time investment in PDIs. PDI volunteers who have doubts about the effectiveness and efficiency of development organisations may perceive their time investment in PDIs as an alternative and more successful way of expressing their involvement with the lives of people in developing countries and contributing to poverty reduction than supporting established development organisations.

Volunteers that bring frequent visits to developing countries spend more hours on PDI volunteering. This shows that empathy with the lives of people in developing countries – triggered by these visits – makes the distance to beneficiaries smaller and not only positively affects the decision to start a PDI and the willingness to volunteer in a PDI but also increases the time investment of PDI volunteers. The distance to beneficiaries is also mediated through the ethnic background of the volunteer: volunteers with a non-Western ethnic background implementing development projects in their country of origin are more strongly engaged in PDIs.

The results of this analysis show that not only does the supply side of voluntary hours (i.e. volunteers' considerations) affect time investment in PDIs. The demand side of voluntary hours (i.e. organisational characteristics) also influences time investment. We find that more 'professional' PDIs with larger budgets and more staff attract volunteers who spend more hours volunteering. Chapter 3 thus reveals that PDIs can count on a strong involvement of their PDI volunteers and that the degree of their participation is not only determined by personal considerations but is also affected by the organisational characteristics of the PDI. In Chapter 4 we focused on the conduct of another important player in the world of PDIs: private donors.

6.2.3 The quest for donors

Chapter 4 studies how (potential) private donors respond to the diversity of development actors. We included a unique experiment in the existing Family Survey of the Dutch Population (FSDP) and complemented the survey with a section of specific motivational questions (Kraaykamp et al., 2009). The survey experiment allowed us to study the effect of both individual characteristics and organisational features on giving intentions. More precisely, it addressed the question which type of international development organisations is preferred by potential donors. We therefore posed the following sub-question:

How do characteristics of development organisations influence the decision making of potential donors?

Although this chapter focused on the relation between organisational characteristics and giving behaviour, the individual characteristics of (potential) donors were also included in the analysis. We find, among others, that women, religious people and frequent church attendees are more inclined to donate (more). Older people and better educated people are not more inclined to donate but those who donate have a higher probability of donating higher amounts. Interestingly enough – and seemingly contrasting with the results of Chapters 2 and 3 – we also find that, for potential donors, visits to development countries have an inhibiting effect on their willingness to donate money to development organisations. More in line with Chapters 2 and 3 we find that those people who already donate to development organisations are inclined to donate higher amounts when they have visited a developing country. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that bringing the beneficiary closer, among others, through visits to development countries positively affects the decision to become active in a PDI and increases the number of voluntary hours in a PDI. We need to acknowledge that the studies central in these two chapters could suffer from selection bias since they were conducted among a group of people already active in a PDI.

With regard to organisational characteristics, the results of our study first of all show that next to characteristics of (potential) donors, organisational features have a substantial effect whether or not potential donors decide to donate and the amount they donate. (Potential) donors are clearly in favour of experienced development organisations that are familiar to them and that are mainly run by volunteers. As we expected, overhead costs of development organisations have a strong negative influence on the giving intentions of (potential) donors. When, however, organisations are mainly run by paid staff potential donors are in general more tolerant of higher overhead ratios. By and large, organisational characteristics have the same effect on giving behaviour for different types of donors, but we find that religious people and frequent church attendees are especially inclined to donate (more) to religious development organisations. In addition, we find that those donors with stronger beliefs in development organisations are somewhat more tolerant of overhead ratios.

The ideal development organisation is a hybrid type combining features of small(er) voluntary organisations and large(r) professional organisations. Development organisations with the highest probabilities of receiving a donation and of receiving a donation higher than 40 euro are, in general, familiar, have 10 to 20 years of experience, have no religious background, are active in more than one country, do not have any overhead costs and are mainly run by volunteers. Most, if not all, of the traditional, established, large-scale development organisations are run by professional (i.e. paid) staff. Hence traditional development organisations do not constitute the 'ideal' organisation. Although PDIs are mainly run by volunteers, they are, in general, not the ideal organisation either, as most PDIs are active in only one developing country and many have only been established recently. PDIs can, however, take advantage of donors' preference to donate to familiar development organisations since they mainly recruit donors in their personal network.

Therefore there is a higher probability that (potential) donors are not only familiar with (the name of) the organisations, but also with the person requesting a donation.

This analysis clearly demonstrated the importance of organisational characteristics in the donors' decision-making process. Differently from what is sometimes assumed in the public debate on the diversification of the field of development actors, donors are not unambiguously in favour of small-scale development organisations. In other words, from the donor's perspective, *small is not always beautiful*. After focusing on the structure of PDIs and the conduct of their volunteers and donors (in Chapters 2, 3 and 4), Chapter 5 discusses the performance of the organisations.

6.2.4 The sustainability of PDI interventions

In the fifth chapter of this thesis, the performance of PDIs has been analysed. More precisely, PDI interventions are classified according to their potential sustainability. In addition, the determinants of different intervention strategies are distinguished. This analysis is based on unique qualitative data collected during field research in the Netherlands, Kenya and Indonesia among 49 PDIs, their local partners and their development interventions. The key question addressed in this chapter is:

What determines the sustainability of PDI interventions?

Our classification of PDI interventions results in four different groups. We find that there is a relatively large group of PDIs whose intervention strategy puts at risk the sustainability of the intervention because their intervention strategies are mainly aimed at delivering direct relief with rather limited involvement of local stakeholders. There is also, however, a group of PDIs that adopts a different intervention strategy with greater potential for making a sustainable contribution to poverty reduction.

We do not find evidence for an evolutionary process: we did not find age to be a straightforward determinant of the potential sustainability of PDI interventions. The different groups we distinguished cut across age, with some relatively young PDIs supporting interventions that are at lower risk regarding their sustainability compared with interventions of older PDIs. The results clearly show, however, that organisational features do relate to the sustainability of PDI interventions. The structure, conduct and performance of PDIs are hence not self-contained facets but strongly related parts. We find that the scale of the organisation (*structure*) affects the type of interventions PDIs (can) support (*conduct*) and by doing so the sustainability of the interventions (*performance*): PDIs mention that the available time (determined by the number of PDI members) and money are factors affecting the type of intervention they undertake.

In a similar manner, the fact that PDIs are mainly supported by private donors (*structure*) with an overall preference for investing as much money as possible directly in the development interventions (*conduct*) also determines the type of interventions PDIs support and the extent to which they are involved in the implementation and therewith the potential sustainability of these interventions (*performance*).

Finally, the voluntary character of PDIs turns out to be of decisive influence: most PDIs are mainly run by volunteers (*structure*) and they do so with great devotion (*conduct*). The fulfilment of their motives affects both the extent to which volunteers are involved in the design and implementation of the development interventions (and thereby, the extent of local ownership) and the type of interventions supported. Salamon (1987) refers to the latter as 'philanthropic particularism'. This implies that the tendency of non-profit organisations to provide certain types of services to specific groups of people is (partly) based on their own particular interest and preferences. We do not suggest that the same inclination is absent among paid staff of established development organisations. We do find indications, however, that because of their voluntary character PDIs are potentially more vulnerable to philanthropic particularism. It is namely plausible that volunteers - possibly more than paid staff members - are driven by an internal motivation that can, as the data show, be powered by the type of interventions supported (e.g. visible results) or the extent and type of involvement in the work of the PDI (e.g. hands-on involvement).

Looking at the determinants of the intervention strategy, one could wonder whether the preference of private donors to donate to organisations mainly run by volunteers is – from a development perspective – in congruence with their desire to make impactful donations. In addition, the results from our study suggest that being an older organisation – with age functioning as a proxy for experience – does not turn out to be a guarantee of higher (potential) sustainability of PDI interventions.

The results of this final chapter show that PDIs are not only diverse regarding their internal structure but also vary considerably with respect to the potential sustainability of their development interventions. Moreover, the results show a certain link between the organisational characteristics of PDIs and the diversity that we found regarding the sustainability of their interventions. Two important points need to be made, however. First, although we aimed to compose a sample of PDIs and interventions that offered an adequate reflection of PDIs as a group, we must be cautious about generalising the results to the entire PDI population. Second, without undervaluing the results we found, caution is required in assuming excessively simple, one-on-one causal relationships between characteristics of PDIs, the type of interventions supported and the sustainability of their interventions. The exact influence exerted by

these factors is dependent – among others – on the specific circumstances in which the organisation is operating as well as the characteristics of local actors, such as the capacity of their local counterpart.

Reflecting on the findings of the different chapters and relating them to our central research question, we find evidence that two crucial features of PDIs shape the nature of PDIs and the sustainability of their development interventions. As summarised above, both their voluntary character and their small scale (i.e. number of members and budget) are distinguishing features compared with other development actors. Second, more than merely typifying PDIs, these organisational features turn out to be important factors in understanding PDIs as development actors. These two structure-related elements are pivotal to understanding both the conduct and performance of PDIs as alternative development actors. In conclusion, it can be said that both features are key to the identity of PDIs as a phenomenon in general and to the understanding of PDIs as alternative development actor in particular.

6.3. Scientific relevance

In the introduction we argued that our study relies on a particular analytical approach based on two key principles: (1) integrated analysis and (2) contextualised analysis. The first premise means that attention is focused on the linkages between three PDI components: structure, conduct and performance (*'what they are'*, *'what they do'* and *'how they do it'*). The second premise implies that we do not study PDIs in a vacuum but we take into account the (Dutch) context wherein PDIs are operating.

As shown in Section 6.2.4 the integrated character of structure, conduct and performance of PDIs becomes particularly apparent in the analysis presented in Chapter 5 and even more when these results are related to those of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. We found, for example, evidence that the characteristics of the volunteer to a large extent influence the voluntary work of PDI members. Whereas financial and time restrictions affect the time spent on voluntary work, frequent visits and direct encounters with people in developing countries initially enhance voluntary engagement. In a similar vein, time spent on PDIs is strongly enhanced by value motives and social encounter reasons, both by founders and members. In addition, available budget and staffing enhance volunteers' time spending whereas lifecycle aspects tend to counteract this tendency. Subsequently, in Chapter 5 this voluntary character of PDIs turns out to be of influence on the performance of PDIs.

The importance of contextual characteristics for PDI performance is addressed in particular in Chapters 2 and 4. In order to understand (the rise of) PDIs it is not sufficient to study PDIs and their members as we also must into account the broader environment wherein PDIs are positioned and how this environment responds to PDIs. The dependence of PDIs on private donors makes their perception of and their donation intentions to PDIs and other types of development actors crucial. Although we do not find unambiguous support for small-scale, voluntary development organisations, we do find that familiarity, governance costs (low overhead) and voluntary staffing are considered as key characteristics that can play to the strengths of PDIs in their quest for financial support.

Although we mainly paid attention to the Dutch context wherein PDIs operate, in Chapter 5 it becomes apparent that the context in the developing countries wherein PDIs intervene does not always receive sufficient attention. PDI members devote considerable importance to projects that focus on investments resulting in improved access to basic services like education and health care. The design or implementation of a development project is usually not preceded by a sound context analysis, however. Moreover, the PDI partnership is usually based on very personal relationships with local agents who may occupy a particular position in their communities. Whereas enthusiasm is widely available, implementation risks involved with reaching desired, sustainable, development outcomes tend to be high. This is indeed confirmed in the analysis of the prospects for sustainability of PDIs presented in Chapter 5. Even though there is a large diversity amongst PDIs, the fact that internal organisational characteristics to a large extent drive the choice of intervention strategies strongly challenges the likelihood of sustainability.

Understanding the linkages between the structure, conduct and performance and taking into account the context wherein PDIs operate is fundamental to our understanding of PDIs as an alternative development actor. The different central perspectives of the chapters in this thesis broadened our understanding of PDIs and brought to the fore a more diversified picture than hitherto known. The SCP paradigm combined with the contextualised approach has hence been valuable and perhaps even indispensable in answering the central research question and in reaching the research objective.

6.4 Methods, constraints and avenues for future PDI research

We did not only reach the research objective with the integrated, contextualised approach. Applying mixed methods throughout the different chapters on different type of data turned out to be beneficial in terms of reaching the central research objective and answering the central research question and sub-questions. A survey among PDIs made it possible to question a large number of them, which was necessary for defining and characterising PDIs as a group and understanding PDI volunteering. The survey experiment offered a unique opportunity to study the preferences of donors and to analyse the effects of both individual and organisational characteristics on giving behaviour. Since we had access to a large-scale database of PDIs, which contained a large amount of background information on the

organisations, we were able to draw up a solid sub-sample of PDIs to participate in the field research in a structured manner. This strengthened the quality of the data collected during the field research and the subsequent analysis.

Looking at the findings of our study, we must make two important points. First of all, although every effort was made to compose a representative sample of PDIs, since the total population of PDIs is unknown caution is required as regards generalising the results of Chapters 2, 3 and 5 to the entire PDI population. Since we do not find strongly anomalous results regarding features of PDIs and PDI members compared with other PDI studies, we believe that we have been successful in obtaining a certain degree of representativeness.

Second, in this thesis, no actual comparison has been made between the functioning of PDIs and other development actors, such as established development organisations. Hence, prudence is needed in the comparison of PDIs with other development actors based on the results of our study. Although we were able to make some comparisons based on our findings and made some cautious statements about how for, example, differences in structure may affect differences in performance, for future research it would be worthwhile to compare the functioning of NGOs and PDIs in a structured manner.

The limitations formulated above and the insights gained in the different chapters and the thesis as a whole, suggest several new research topics. First of all, further research is needed to enhance our understanding of PDI volunteering and PDI volunteers. In particular, more research – preferably with data that allow controlling for problems of endogeneity – is required to explain why PDI volunteers spend more time on voluntary work than general volunteers and why volunteering of PDI founders differs from that of general (PDI) volunteers.

Second, a representative dataset including both PDI members and founders and (non) donors of development organisations would increase our understanding of the influence of the perceived distance to beneficiaries on charitable behaviour (i.e. voluntary time investment and financial donations) and on how encounters with these beneficiaries – through for example journeys to developing countries – affect this behaviour.

Both Chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis made a contribution to the study of charitable behaviour by analysing the relation between donating time & money and organisational characteristics. Our contributions showed that organisational characteristics have an influence on charitable behaviour and indicate that they require a more prominent position in studies on donations of time and money to charities. Further research could enlarge our understanding of the role of organisational characteristics in charitable behaviour. This could be done by studying this relation in different types of charitable sectors (e.g. health care) or by constructing different scenarios; for example, scenarios including information on the type of support offered to beneficiaries.

Building on the findings of this thesis, it would also be worthwhile enlarging our understanding of PDI interventions in developing countries by conducting ex post sustainability and impact studies. Such studies would make it possible to deepen our understanding of PDI interventions, and more precisely to gain a better insight into the effect of PDI interventions on the lives of the beneficiaries and a better understanding of the factors determining this. Over the past few years, PDIs have slowly become part of the system of development cooperation in the Netherlands, and are increasingly recognised as such. A large number of trainings have been developed for PDIs, network days are organised and PDIs have even established their own branch organisation (Partin). Future research will learn what will happen to the PDIs of today. Will they transform into the ‘Oxfams’ of tomorrow? And if so, will a possible third wave of socialisation bring new blood to the sector of international development cooperation? Will the PDIs of today come to an end with the natural disappearance of the baby-boom generation that is in charge of many PDIs of today? Or will other generations take over?

6.5 In retrospect, in prospect

In the Netherlands, a large number of people are involved in several thousand PDIs. These people are part of the socialisation or mainstreaming of international development cooperation. Helping the poor in developing countries is increasingly becoming part of everyday life, with almost everyone knowing someone involved in a sector that used to be the exclusive preserve of a small number of actors. At the pay desk of your local bakery you can read about the baker’s daughter who started a day-care centre in Ghana after she went there on a holiday, your neighbour is making a door-to-door collection to renovate a school in Ecuador which he visited during an exchange trip and during the annual flea market the staff of the local hospital are raising funds for their next medical mission trip to Indonesia by selling homemade cookies.

These thousands of individuals devote – paid or voluntarily and for different reasons – many hours to small-scale, development organisations aimed at improving the lives of individuals, families or villages across the world. Their strong, enthusiastic involvement in the work of these PDIs results in enormous recruiting power; the willingness among private donors to donate to PDIs is apparently large. Established development organisations and the Dutch government also see potential in this group of active world citizens. They perceive PDIs as intermediaries that are able to inform and involve the Dutch public in the complex world of development cooperation and/or they expect the work of PDIs to complement the efforts of other development actors in developing countries.

In developing countries, too, local people can reap the benefits of the strong engagement of PDI members as a large number of valuable development projects are (successfully) initiated and/or supported by PDIs. The results lay bare the tension between *what PDIs are* (small-scale, voluntary development organisations) and *what they (want to) do* (contribute to poverty reduction). Considering the results of this study, we wonder whether PDIs can always live up to their own expectations regarding their role as development actor or the expectations of their supporters.

The results show that the strong engagement of PDI members is the driving force behind PDIs necessary – among others – for raising funds and for (co-) designing and implementing development interventions. At the same time, however, it is this engagement that can – among others – hamper the sustainability of PDI development interventions (see Section 6.2.4 and Chapter 5). Yet this thesis does not want to issue a call for the professionalisation of PDIs. At least not the type of professionalisation that led many development organisations established in the 1950s and 1960s away from their core values and turned them into overly managed institutions (Elbers, 2011). Such a process would abolish the passion of PDI members that keeps the organisations running.

This thesis instead wants to make a call for critical reflections by PDI (members) and their (institutional, governmental or private) supporters. PDIs are challenged to reflect on the change they want to see within the context where they are active, to think through what is needed (both 'today' and 'tomorrow') for such a change and critically assess their abilities to contribute to the transformations they envision. It is a balancing act between staying true to their identity and at the same time keeping in mind what is required for a valuable contribution to poverty reduction. Established development organisations and the government are called on to critically reflect on the 'why' and 'how' of their involvement with PDIs. In addition they are challenged to design a cooperation strategy that is – more than in the past – based on what PDIs are, what they do and what they are capable of instead of what they expect PDIs to do or want PDIs to do. The results demonstrate that when studying PDIs as development actor or when supporting them because of their alleged contribution to poverty reduction we need to formulate expectations that take into account the individuality of PDIs as small-scale, voluntary development organisations. PDIs, those engaged in the work of PDIs and those who study them are all called to look critically *behind the pictures*.