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Resources or race? Explaining (un)equality in international development partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Whereas diversity can be observed in the type of North–South partnerships, overall the call for equality in the partnerships between Northern-based development organizations to their Southern-based counterparts, has hardly been successful. To come to an encompassing understanding of both this diversity and stagnation, in this study we combine two explanatory lines of reasoning: one focused on financial resources and one on racial perceptions. We study partnerships of Dutch-based development organizations working in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Kenya through this analytical lens. The research finds that there are three different narratives held by Northern organizations on citizens of countries where they work and their partner organization: a negative one, an internally inconsistent one and a reflective one. The data also shows there is a relation between the narratives and the type of partnerships: the negative narrative leads to repression, the internally inconsistent narrative to confusion and the reflective narrative to more inclusion. We conclude that histories of perceptions, including racial ones and systems of financial domination and dependence interact in multiple reinforcing ways, leading to different levels of equality in partnerships.

RÉSUMÉ

Alors que la diversité peut être observée dans le type de partenariats Nord-Sud, l'appel à l'égalité dans les partenariats entre les organisations de développement basées dans le Nord et leurs homologues basées dans le Sud n'a guère été couronné de succès. Pour parvenir à une compréhension globale de cette diversité et de cette stagnation, nous combinons dans cette étude deux lignes de raisonnement explicatives: l'une axée sur les ressources financières et l'autre sur les perceptions raciales. Nous étudions les partenariats d'organisations de développement basées aux Pays-Bas et travaillant au Ghana, au Burkina Faso et au Kenya à travers cet angle d'analyse. L'étude révèle que les

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organisations du Nord ont trois récits différents sur les citoyens des pays où elles travaillent et sur leur organisation partenaire: un récit négatif, un récit incohérent sur le plan interne et un récit réfléchi. Les données montrent également qu'il existe une relation entre les récits et les types de partenariats: le récit négatif conduit à la répression, le récit incohérent sur le plan interne à la confusion et le récit réfléchi à une plus grande inclusion. Nous concluons que l'histoire des perceptions, y compris raciales, et les systèmes de domination et de dépendance financières interagissent de multiples façons qui se renforcent, conduisant à différents niveaux d'égalité dans les partenariats.

Introduction

Despite enormous efforts to come to more equitable partnerships in the international development sector, progress has been piecemeal (Brinkerhoff 2002; Fowler 1998; Lister 2000; Olowoore and Kamruzzaman 2019). Research does show, however, that differences in partnerships in terms of division of power between Northern donor organizations and Southern “recipient” organizations can be found (see for example Kinsbergen et al. 2017). This research aims to understand why this is the case. Both in academia and in policy roughly two explanatory lines of reasoning can be distinguished: one focusing on the role that financial flows play in shaping these partnerships (for example, Banks et al. 2024) and another line of reasoning that focuses on the role of racial perceptions (for example, Pailey 2020). To further our understanding, this study adds two novelties. First, the line of reasoning focusing on the role of perceptions, including racial ones, has mostly been applied to critically question development cooperation and partnerships in general. Perceptions can be based on all kinds of identities, such as gender, class and professional status. In this study, we will analyse perceptions, mostly racial ones (while recognizing that the identities on which perceptions are based can be hard to disentangle) as part of our analytical lens through which we will study actual partnerships. Second, so far, there is little cross-fertilization between these two lines of reasoning, something that this article seeks to overcome by combining both lines of reasoning in one explanatory analytical lens.

Building on these literatures, our research question hence reads: how do mutual perceptions, including racial ones, play a role in hindering and fostering more equitable partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs? We focus in particular on the interaction between perceptions and rules about access to (financial) resources. By combining both schools of thought in our analytical lens, we aim to contribute with this study to two distinct strands of literature within development studies. First, our study is embedded in the debate on perceptions, including racial ones, in the aid sector (for example, Kothari 2006). Secondly, we build on and contribute to the academic debate on the study of partnerships in the aid sector, and more particularly on what influences the road towards more equitable or authentic partnerships (for example, Banks et al. 2024). By adding our empirical findings, we aim to contribute to an increased understanding on how mutual perceptions between Northern-based development organizations and their Southern counterparts affect access to financial resources, and following from this, processes of shifting power. We further show how a lack of “shifting

the power” also risks reinforcing negative perceptions and progress with respect to shift the power can reduce negative perceptions. We hypothesize that perceptions matter, and that such more personal factors help explain the persistence of the North–South inequality within the international development sector.

Our research focuses on small-scale, voluntary development organizations, referred to as Private Development Initiatives (PDIs), since recent research has documented in detail how difficult it has been to come to more equitable partnerships for this subset of NGOs (Kinsbergen et al. 2022). First research into why these (Dutch) PDIs remain stuck in certain development ways points at the role of charitable consumerism, philanthropic particularism and unconscious racial biases (Kinsbergen and Koch 2022). This current research zooms in on this last potential inhibiting factor and broadens the analysis by looking at mutual perceptions between PDIs and their partners and at the interplay between these biases and access rules to financial resources.

Conceptual framework: race or resources? Explaining (in)equality of development partnerships

Inequality in partnerships: a critical self-reflection

The concept of partnership between Northern and Southern NGOs in the field of international development emerged in the 1970s, influenced by ideological aspirations of international solidarity (Fowler 1998) and viewed as a means to achieve “more efficient use of scarce resources, increased sustainability and improved beneficiary participation in development activities” (Lister 2000, 228). Despite differences in specific definitions and interpretations, the concept of partnership in the field of international development has come to be widely understood—broadly speaking—as “a relationship based on the principles of equity and mutual benefit” (Ashman 2001, 75).

In subsequent years, and with NGOs becoming more and more prominent players, critical analysis on the impact of NGOs and other aid actors instigated the debate that continues to this day on the importance of local ownership and empowerment (Banks and Hulme 2012; Banks 2021). Despite the longstanding belief in the importance of partnerships, the ideal type of partnership appears rarely in reality (Brinkerhoff 2002; Fowler 1998; Lister 2000; Olawoore and Kamruzzaman 2019).

It was the launch of the #shiftthepower campaign in 2016 by the Global Fund for Community Foundation (CFCF) that gave this longstanding discussion of more equitable partnerships a new influx (Gilbert 2018). Despite all the academic debate and good policy resolutions progress has been lackluster (Green 2023). By engaging in a fine-grained analysis of existing partnerships and changes in those partnerships over time, we aim to understand why inequality persists by analyzing the usefulness of the two lines of reasoning. Before going there, we will critically explore two concepts: power and partnerships.

In his radical analysis of power, Lukes (1974) proposes three sources of power: decision-making power, non-decision making power and ideological power. Especially the latter source of power is relevant to debates on “shifting power.” Ideological power refers to influencing people’s wishes and thoughts (and actions) even if that goes contrary to their interests (Lukes 1974). A true “partnership” in this radical view is rare, as those

holding the power will use their ideological power to maintain the status quo. Those subject to the power will internalize the logic to maintain their current disenfranchisement or will not recognize it as such. This critical reflection on whether true partnership and “shifting power” is actually possible in international aid is also visible in current development debates (for example, Roepstorff 2020).

In recent years, international development terms such as “shift the power,” “localization” and “decolonization” have become buzzwords in partnerships (Sondarjee and Andrews 2022)—buzzwords that also became subject to critique because of these concepts being hijacked by mostly “Northern” scholars, universities and organizations that have been filling these words with meaning and by mastering those meanings. As a result, a distinction has been created between those who speak and those who do not speak that new language of equitable partnerships, which is one of the reasons why certain African philosophers have even argued “against decolonization” (Táíwò 2022). The less Southern NGO workers, activists and scholars make use of these new terms, the more “capacity building” is deemed necessary for them. The rise of these new buzzwords risks perpetuating the same knowledge hierarchies that the concepts claim to dismantle.

Even this research, while truly committed to finding out how more agency can be achieved for organizations in the Global South, risks contributing to maintaining the status quo. While our intention is to expand the accessibility of our findings beyond the traditional power holders, we also realize how hard this is with the limited resources available. Nonetheless, we have strived to make this research a product of collaboration amongst a diverse team of researchers, which made us acutely aware of our own potential biases. We have sustained enriching discussions on what counts as an example of the “subtle” and what does not when it comes to racial perceptions—discussions that allowed us to remain conscious of and to mitigate the risk of the influence of our own racial perceptions on our analyses.

First explanatory lens: it is about resources

According to this first lens, unequal relations can be explained by looking at financial resources. Control over financial resources has been identified as a key obstacle to the realization of equitable partnerships. As found by Lister, “[t]he most frequently cited constraint to the formation of authentic partnerships is the control of money” (2000, 29). It is reasoned that imbalanced financial flows hinder equality, as the power difference based on control over these resources can undermine “the mutuality that characterizes the fullest expression of partnership” (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2011, 11).

A recent survey of over 300 Northern and Southern NGOs studied inequality in partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs and found that “Those who hold the money, hold the power” (Banks et al. 2024, 12). They found that about 80 per cent of respondents from Northern organizations and 54 per cent of respondents from Southern ones found that financial resources—money and the terms of access to it—were the main reasons that “the power *‘doesn’t shift.’*” This is maintained through conditionalities on how funds are spent, a lack of direct funding for Southern NGOs, an unwillingness among Northern NGOs to share the overhead costs of Southern counterparts and the barriers they face to accessing funding on better terms (Banks et al. 2024, 13). Whilst in the

same survey over 20 per cent mentioned that “racism/eurocentrism / colonial attitudes” were also an important obstacle to more equality, the conclusion focused exclusively on the resources hypothesis. This blind spot of those focusing on resources concerning “racism/eurocentrism / colonial attitudes” also reverberates in the large donor initiatives, such as the Grand Humanitarian Bargain. While there are targets for instance on getting more funding to local organizations directly (25%), there is no reference to more sensitive, underlying issues such as perceptions, including racial ones, in the sector.

Nevertheless, in academia, there is a shift in attention from the institutional to the personal level in partnerships. Scholars have been urged to look at patronizing and stereotyping behavior by aid workers (Bandyopadhyay and Patil 2017) to analyse (the role of) the white savior complex, other forms of explicit racism and unconscious biases (Balaji 2011; Benton 2016; Redfield 2012). The underlying assumption is that how development partners perceive each other, matters for their partnerships and, in the end, their joint efforts. It is to this second lens that we now turn.

Line of reasoning 2: it is about race

Critical race theory scholars, namely Bell, as well as racial formation scholars, such as Omi and Winant, have long underpinned the ways which seemingly race-neutral social institutions of power are in fact *colorblind*—unaware of how their own makings are constituted by historically prejudiced allegories and imaginations of people with different racial identities (Bell 2023; Omi and Winant 2012). There is also a long tradition in development studies that considers international aid as a prolongation of colonialism and hence racism (Kothari 2006). The colonial currents throughout the history of the contemporary development sector also deduce that the North–South stratification of knowledge is intrinsically contingent upon how racial identities are perceived (Bian 2022). Race—and more specifically racial subordination taking the forms of white saviourism or black inferiority—is a “foundational aspect of how humanitarianism functions” (Benton 2016, 98). Race, in turn, plays a resounding role in the international development sector knowledge hierarchy—within which “whiteness is associated with progress, power, and higher status,” and “those in the global South have lower capacity for development” (Bandyopadhyay and Patil 2017, 652). Such narratives have infantilizing implications that may undermine the agency of local development actors for self-development (Smillie 2001).

Lane and Beamish highlight that, throughout their research, they have “encountered numerous instances of culturally conditioned assumptions and behavior preventing North American executives and their companies from being successful in cooperative ventures” (1990, 88). Indeed, existing studies have identified the tendency for individuals to perceive themselves as more virtuous, morally disciplined and honest than their peers. Additionally, they can also perceive others as lazier, more deceptive and less trustworthy, particularly when they have pre-formulated self-imageries of their own moral superiority (Alicke 1985; Epley and Dunning 2000; Narsa, Dwiyantri, and Narsa 2020).

Local development staff and organizations risk being perceived as unable to effectively facilitate aid and development programs independent from international oversight, as they may be considered not professional, knowledgeable and accountable enough to manage scarce aid resources and maximize the impact of their distribution. Even

when local staff's contextual knowledge is recognized as necessary for aid and development operationalization, "repeated assertion of racialized difference" between the international and the local persists (Heron 2007, 150). We can hence observe that the expatriate-local, international-national dichotomizations of staff and organizations in the aid-development sector regularly characterizes a persisting form of knowledge hierarchy, within which exists an unwarranted discrediting of historical, local knowledge and overt preference for internationally generated, contingent and thematic expertise.

Our study focuses on Dutch PDIs. Also in the Dutch colonial history, imaginaries of the "lazy" and "untrustworthy" natives who needed to be disciplined (Bremner 2024) abounded (for example, Wekker 2016). The colonial origins of the development sector are particularly pronounced in the Netherlands as the same people who served in the colonial administration in Indonesia and New Guinea in the 1940s and 1950s became the development workers in the 1960s. Even more poignantly, one of the reasons that the Dutch government started bilateral development programs was to create jobs for former colonial administrators (Malcontent and Nekkers 2000, Introduction). White Dutch development professionals and volunteers, who drew from the same "cultural archive" based on colonialism and racism (Wekker 2016), were sent abroad as they were considered to possess knowledge on development that local development actors did not. Racialised identifications of the incapable locals and the skilled expatriate have, in that sense, long been made and sustained by international development efforts. In turn, Pailey concluded that "until white development workers and scholars confront how they benefit from the racial hierarchies that underpin this field, and actively work to upend their unearned privilege, development will always suffer from a 'white gaze' problem" (2020, 19).

The limits of reductionist explanations: towards a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between resources and race

While we recognize that the two academic lenses did not operate in complete isolation from each other, according to our knowledge, no systematic research has taken place that combines both lenses. We therefore propose a conceptual framework in which resource flows interact in a myriad of ways with perceptions, including racial ones.

Although access to resources matter as it increases the agency of local actors, local actors can still be constrained as their "development allies" in the Global North may not consider them fully because of colonial attitudes. The reverse is also the case: hierarchical relations between capital-based Southern NGOs and their rural-based community-based organizations cannot be fully explained by looking at racial explanations only: hierarchical dynamics between local NGOs can also be related to other identities, such as perceived professional status and class. In short, reductionist explanations fall short in explaining the observed diversity in inequalities encountered in this research.

To answer the research question, this article aims to establish which type of narratives exist among Northern development organizations, assess their relative significance and explore their influence on partnerships and access to resources for local partners. The combination of perceptions of Northern NGOs on the knowledge, skills and moralities of their counterparts is what we call the "narratives." The validity of local and expatriate knowledge, as well as the relationship between Northern and Southern

NGOs within the development paradigm, is contingent upon normative, social constructions. Regardless of one's experience and qualifications, organizations rely on the perceptions of others to be recognized as trustworthy, knowledgeable and professional (Bian 2022). In our case, it can be presumed that the way in which Northern NGOs manage their perceptions towards the professional practices of their Southern partners impacts their partnership practices and the access to resources that are granted to Southern partners.

In addition, this study also focuses on how certain practices can shape perceptions. Very stringent practices in international development (for example, performance-based financing) are found to have contributed to different types of "gaming" by local actors (Turcotte-Tremblay, Gali, and Ridde 2022). Gaming by local actors contributed to international actors losing trust. This in turn led to extra donor-imposed verification processes to combat gaming by local actors (Turcotte-Tremblay et al. 2017), who subsequently became even more creative in circumventing these rules. In the end, access to resources for local actors became increasingly complicated as international perceptions worsened, showing continuous interaction between perceptions, including racial ones, as well as practices and vice versa.

First hunches of interactions between perceptions and resource management can be found in earlier studies on partnerships of private development initiatives. A study on Dutch PDIs working in the Gambia, learned how Gambian counterparts adjusted their behavior in anticipation of negative perceptions held by their Dutch partners with regards to Gambian trustworthiness (Schipper 2022).

Building on the key concepts above, we will look at how both parties in a partnership think about each other and about people in the Netherlands, Ghana, Kenya and Burkina Faso in general with respect to knowledge, skills and morality. We will subsequently explore how this influenced the partnerships. We observed different clusters of narratives and found out how they played out differently in partnerships. We will further aim to show how rules around access to resources also reinforced certain perceptions, including racial ones.

Schematically, our contribution to the literature is that inequality in partnerships can be explained by both resources and by perceptions, including racial ones. Yet, partnerships also shape how resources are allocated and perceptions are shaped, creating virtuous or vicious cycles. This makes them co-constitutive (Figure 1).

Data and methods

This study was conducted in close cooperation with Wilde Ganzen Foundation, a non-governmental organization that provides financial and non-financial support to PDIs in the Netherlands. In consultation with Wilde Ganzen Foundation, we selected Kenya, Ghana and Burkina Faso because of the importance of these countries to the developmental work of the organization. A total of 26 partnerships between Dutch PDIs and their counterparts in one of these three countries were studied: 11 partnerships operating in Kenya, 9 in Ghana and 6 in Burkina Faso.¹ The share of the countries in the study reflects the relative size of the number of Dutch PDIs operating in the three countries. Table 1 presents the overview of our sample. The research employed a unique mixed-method research design, combining key informant interviews with 52 surveys and 52

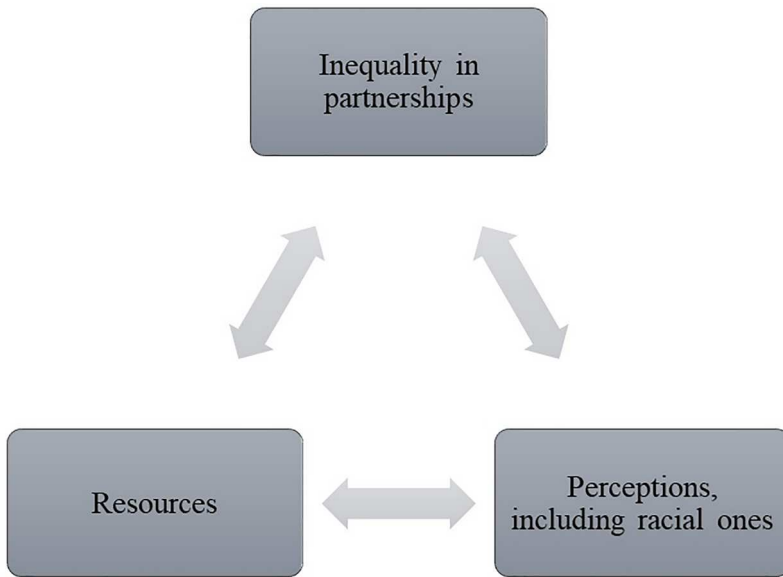


Figure 1. The co-constitution of resources, perceptions (including racial ones) and inequality in partnerships.

Table 1. Overview sample.

	# of partnerships
Kenya	11
Ghana	9
Burkina Faso	6
	26

in-depth interviews. To perform our research six steps were performed in the period from March 2021 until March 2022.

Step 1: prepare the ground for coding: content analysis

To familiarize ourselves with potential narratives we started by analyzing the newsletters and websites of PDIs in the Netherlands, including outside of our final sample. We made use of transcripts of earlier interviews conducted in previous research on PDIs and their partnerships. This content analysis showed a distinction—which would later return in the interviews—between respondents who were explicit in their stereotypes (including with racial undertones) and those who had negative views about partners but expressed themselves in more subtle wordings about it. Based on this content analysis a rudimentary coding system was developed.

Step 2: key informant interviews to determine sample, survey and interviews

As a second step with the aim of gaining insight into potential experiences and implications of mutual perceptions in partnerships between Dutch PDIs and their Southern

counterparts in Kenya, Ghana and Burkina Faso, five key informant interviews were conducted with core staff members of the national counterparts of Wilde Ganzen Foundation in the three countries of study. These organizations work closely with community-based development initiatives that cooperate with Northern-based development organizations; hence, these interviews contributed to a better understanding of partnerships between Dutch PDIs and their Southern counterparts and confirmed the relevance of studying the potential role of mutual perceptions considering these power imbalances.

Step 3: a survey to collect quantitative information on PDIs, perceptions and partnerships

Starting from a database of Wilde Ganzen Foundation that included all PDIs they worked with in the three countries, we selected our sample via stratified sampling. To assess the potential influence of characteristics of the PDI (leaders), their counterpart (leaders) and their partnership, we aimed for a diverse sample in terms of age of the organizations, duration of the partnership, gender of the PDI leaders and initiatives both with and without diaspora background.² All PDIs and their respective counterparts were invited via mail to join the study. The actual participants were either the founder and/or the current leader of the organization. Their formal role varied in the Netherlands from chair or board member of a PDI, to director of a community-based organization to headteacher of a school. All participants were guaranteed that the data would be presented anonymously, therefore no names of organizations or individual participants are mentioned in this article. More information on the survey and the survey questions can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Step 4: interviews to collect qualitative data on perceptions and partnerships

Following this, semi-structured interviews took place with the 52 respondents. The interviews took between 1 and 1.5 hours and were held online via Zoom or WhatsApp. The interviews comprised three parts: (1) a general introduction to the organization (2) an elaboration of the survey input given by the respondent (3) and a discussion of the respondent's ideas of and experiences with mutual perceptions in their own partnership and in North–South development partnerships in general. In [Appendix 2](#), the interview guide can be found.

Step 5: the qualitative cluster analysis

We employed a qualitative cluster analysis following Guest and McLellan (Guest and McLellan 2003). This analysis “entails negotiating the interplay between raw data, semantic themes or codes, and the overarching conceptual framework” (186). Cluster analysis, combined with our in-depth familiarity with the raw data, allowed us to construct three narratives on perceptions that are grounded in data. The qualitative cluster analysis consisted of three sub-steps: (a) establishing potential cluster of partnerships, (b) assigning partnerships to the three clusters and (c) checking for differences between the narratives

and commonalities within them in terms of socio-demographics, features of the organizations and the partnerships.

Step 5a: establishing the preliminary clusters

The interviews were transcribed, and the data were analysed with the software ATLAS ti. For the analysis of the interview data, we used a theoretically founded pre-established coding scheme combined with an open coding strategy. The final list of codes consisted of four main topics: (1) perceptions with respect to people from the global South and Dutch people in general; (2) perceptions with respect to their counterparts and Dutch organizations (3) the level of independence of counterparts (both from the perspective of PDIs and their counterparts) (4) and past and future trends in independence of Southern organizations (both from the perspective of PDIs and counterparts). After analysis of about a third of the data, two easily recognizable preliminary clusters of partnerships emerged on the four topics: a “negative” and a “reflective” narrative. Once we had identified these two clusters on the outer bounds of topics, a third cluster emerged in the middle. This third cluster was less straightforward to identify initially, as sometimes the quantitative and qualitative data contradicted each other, but it was exactly this contradiction that turned out to be a defining feature of this partnership. We have labeled this narrative the “internally inconsistent” narrative. Our study explored a possible relationship between perceptions and partnerships. Although our data do not allow us to make claims about a possible causal relation, the research does allow us to establish whether such a relationship is plausible.

Step 5b: finalizing the clusters and assigning all partnerships

Since the three clusters were established based on about one-third of the data, we could use the remaining two-thirds to further finetune the narratives. In this process, the remaining partnerships also needed to be categorized. This categorization was initially done by the research coordinator, and for 30 per cent of partnerships (8 out of 26—those that were hard to classify) a second blind categorization took place. If there was a difference between the two independent categorizations (in 2 out of the 8 cases), a detailed conversation on the interpretation of the qualitative data took place, which contributed to agreement on the final classification of a partnership.

Step 5c: taking into account socio-demographic differences

Finally, we explored if those who held the different narratives differed from each other with regard to socio-demographic characteristics of the PDI leader, their counterpart and the partnership in which they are involved.

Step 6: verification

To verify the findings on the clusters of narratives two sub-steps were taken. First, a roundtable discussion was organized with experts from the global South that are active as academics, policy makers and/or practitioners in “shifting the power” in the field of international development. The roundtable led to a refining of the language used in the narrative. Secondly, a roundtable discussion was organized with staff members of

the Wilde Ganzen foundation to discuss the three clusters. They recognized the three clusters from their cooperation with PDIs and their counterparts.

Findings

In this section, we will present the main findings of our research. Before we do so, we briefly introduce the partnerships we have studied. After this, we describe three different narratives of PDI leaders that we distinguished from the data. Secondly, we present the observed differences in terms of socio-demographics of the beholders of the narratives and the features of the partnerships. Finally, we describe if and how the different narratives appear to affect the partnerships.

Table 2 presents the main characteristics of the respondents, their organizations and partnerships. On average, PDI leaders are older compared to the founders or directors of their counterpart organization. Thirty-two per cent of the PDI leaders have a migration background from the country where they are currently intervening with their PDI. The characteristics of the PDIs and their leaders are similar to previous PDI studies (Kinsbergen et al., forthcoming). On average, PDIs and their counterparts were initiated 15 years ago and started cooperating 10 years ago. Interestingly, the average budget of counterparts is significantly larger compared to the PDIs with whom they cooperate. On average, counterparts receive 54 per cent of their budget from the PDI that participated in our study.

When it comes to their perceptions on the knowledge, skills and morality of the counterpart, it is striking to notice that PDIs are more critical on these aspects compared to the counterparts themselves (see Table 3). This difference is especially striking when it comes to the reliability of the counterparts, of which PDIs tend to be very critical. Counterparts are particularly valued for their knowledge on what is needed for development and their financial management. Counterparts themselves are most critical of their own fundraising skills compared to those of their Dutch counterpart.

Three narratives on perceptions and partnerships

Based on the qualitative cluster analysis explained above three distinct narratives among the PDIs emerged. The narratives demonstrate how PDIs think in general about their counterparts (focus on knowledge, skills and morality). The three narratives can be classified as (1) negative; (2) internally inconsistent and; (3) reflective. Table 4 presents an overview of the presence of the three narratives, which we will discuss in more detail in the separate subsections. Overall, the findings do not show striking differences

Table 2. Descriptives of surveyed organizations and their partnerships.

	PDI	Counterpart
Gender (Male)	50%	64,50%
Age (yrs)	56,21	47
Diaspora (yes)	32,4	NA
Expat (yes)	20,6	NA
Age of organization	14,3	16,5
Annual budget (euro)	55.769	141.643
Duration partnerships (yrs)	10	

Table 3. Perceptions on knowledge, skills and morality.

	PDI	Counterpart
Local organization has better knowledge on what is needed for development	4,10	4,24
Local organization is better in fundraising	2,48	2,84
Local organ is better in financial management	3,07	3,17
Local organization is more reliable	2,34	3,02
Local organ is more proactive	2,44	2,98
Average total score	2,89	3,25

Table 4. Narratives (n = 26).

Narratives	
Negative	6
Internally inconsistent	6
Reflective	14

among the three different countries in terms of the prominence of the different narratives. However, we did not come across an internally inconsistent narrative among partnerships operating in Burkina Faso. Our sample size, especially in Burkina Faso, is too small to draw firm conclusions on this. In the three countries, the reflective narrative is the most prominent, followed by the internally inconsistent narratives in Kenya and Ghana. In the three countries, the negative narrative forms the smallest group.

The negative narrative

The first narrative we were able to identify is defined by its negative character. Of all PDIs that participated in our study, six organizations fall under this classification. The respondents in this group are mostly elderly men, with none of them having a migration background and none having ever lived in the country where their PDI is operating.

The negative dimension of this narrative is first of all manifested in overall negative perceptions of respondents with respect to local people in general. Typical for respondents that match this negative narrative is the absence of nuance and understanding for local circumstances, as shown in the next two quotes.

I can give more examples if you want: of their plain thinking-level. We visited a school in the Netherlands [...]. Well, it was like they saw water burning!³

Well, that applies for example. I think this is a good example. Well, maybe it's not directly development, but about that pipe, you know with the little holes. It's often the case that we say, how come you guys don't ... It makes us think: how could you possibly not have that idea yourselves? They are very, so to say, dependent. They're not as resourceful and innovative as we are.⁴

Next to negative perceptions with respect to people from the Global South in general, our survey data reveal that these respondents have similar negative perceptions with respect to their Southern NGO counterparts. They are convinced that their own organizations are generally more capable compared to their counterparts when it comes to fundraising and financial management. They are also critical about the planning and management skills of their partners, even considering them incapable of thinking independently.

But sometimes, they just don't think hard enough in my eyes, (name partner) as well.

Well then the project is just stuck for months on end. That wouldn't actually occur to us. We would try and find a solution. But no, they think let's just wait until that person is better.⁵

There's no pressure, they're, and if it's inconvenient or it doesn't go smoothly then they just leave it. You're not coming to check anyway, so it doesn't really matter and at a distance you can't steer them anyway.⁶

Importantly, those PDIs with such negative perceptions often tend to resist the idea for their counterparts in retaining more independence in operational decision-making. The dominant role of these PDIs is visible in the perceived strong need to check and control their counterparts' activities and performance, as well as in their top-down approach when it comes to initiatives undertaken by their counterparts, revealing pre-supposed moral superiority attitudes. This dynamic can indicate, as discussed in the earlier theoretical reflections of this article, Northern development actors' pre-existing biases towards the performativity and reliability of their counterparts.

Still, at a certain point they asked us: they said well, let's build that school. At that point I said, well, then set up a budget for how much we should contribute. Well, they ended on 450 000 euros (laughing). Yeah, that's, that's not possible. So let's start with two or three classrooms, a small library and a toilet, and uh, well [...] with the possibility to expand in the future.⁷

Respondents ascribed to this narrative tend to display little reflexivity when it comes to the power dynamics between themselves and their counterparts. The data reveals that PDI leaders matching this narrative show minimal intentions to increase opportunities for their counterparts' decision-making or to rethink and transform their partnership.

The data of the counterparts show a rather ambiguous picture. On the one hand, in the survey data, counterparts give the idea of a relatively large degree of ownership. Yet, on the other hand, when asking these counterparts during the interviews to describe the cooperation with their Dutch counterpart, most of them turned out to have limited decision-making and independence within their partnership.

The decisions have to be top down. They make the decisions. Even if, for example, projects are suggested by the implementing office on the ground, it is the supervisors, or the fundraising national offices, that would make the decision that these are the activities that would be done and these are activities that cannot be done.⁸

On multiple occasions, PDIs explained that they had developed detailed reporting formats to get the correct information. Once these detailed formats were not filled in diligently, it confirmed their views that their partners did not have the required skills and could not be fully trusted in managing financial resources, creating a vicious circle between perceptions and reduced agency of local partner organizations (LPOs) over resource management. This is a notable example of how embedded colonial logics of many Global North development approaches set LPOs up to failure. Local organizations are asked to subscribe to foreign ways of practice and communication that they are not familiar with and did not need to be familiar with prior to becoming partners of global North NGOs. The accountability mechanisms, assessment forms and standardized operational procedures that are considered universally legitimate and technically "right" by many Northern NGOs are in fact arbitrary and not what most Global South NGOs

had to work with—as they themselves possessed their own knowledge inculcated through their contextualized experiences.

The incapability of LPOs to perform development practices in ways that Northern NGOs are capable to understand is often perceived as incapability of doing development “right” (see Bian 2023). In this process, the “local” is set up to “fail:” the induced failure of meeting global North standards in turn perpetuates the racialized perception that the “local people”—who are always people of color—lack capacity for development.

The internally inconsistent narrative

The second narrative that we have identified is characterized by its internal inconsistency. With six organizations being ascribed to this narrative, this group is of similar size to the negative narrative. Most of the respondents in this group are female (80%) and are on average the youngest PDI leaders.

Inconsistency is noticeable in several ways when it comes to the stories of those respondents who share this narrative. On the one hand, compared to those part of the other two narratives, the internally inconsistent respondents are positive about people in Southern countries in general, which is reflected in their critical remarks about “West knows best attitudes.” They criticize fellow development workers for pretending to know what is needed in the communities where they operate better than the local inhabitants themselves. On the other hand, in the interviews these respondents expressed more critical ideas about the culture of the country within which they operate compared to the respondents that fall in the reflective narrative.

Peter (a Dutch relative who operates in Ghana) is originally an IT guy, but right now he’s building a three-story school for someone else. [...] in a few months, he has to build a hospital for a Dutch doctor. Because he really wants Peter to do it, because he also knows how the Ghanaians work. They don’t work, that is it.⁹

A similar inconsistency is visible in perceptions with respect to counterparts more specifically, especially when it comes to the knowledge of their counterparts in terms of what is needed for development and in terms of their proactiveness. Internally inconsistent PDI leaders seem to find themselves in a constant internal struggle between their conviction that independence of counterparts is considered something to strive for on the one hand and their doubts about the capacity of their counterpart to manage things on their own on the other. Indeed, our analyses of the interview results suggest that these PDIs engage in both empowering and controlling behavior simultaneously. The respondents mention that they strive to aim for more equal decision-making and for higher independence of their counterparts. They are aware of the debates of shifting power and decolonizing development. Such awareness is often supported by intentions to design concrete exit strategies, to get rid of donor-driven initiatives, to improve Southern ownership and to stimulate self-sustainability in terms of knowledge and financial resources. Nonetheless, while respondents argue that more independence is needed, they simultaneously reveal a lack of trust in their counterparts’ knowledge, skills and morality, reflected in an urge to check and control their counterparts’ actions and decisions.

The reflective narrative

The final narrative that we have identified is defined by the reflective attitudes of respondents. With fourteen organizations being ascribed to this narrative, this is the largest group of all three narratives. This group has the highest percentages of former expats and diaspora in its midst.

Respondents in this group overall expressed more positive and nuanced perceptions with respect to the knowledge, skills and morality of people in Southern countries. These respondents tend to show more understanding for contextual circumstances in comparison with those respondents falling in the negative and internally inconsistent narratives, acknowledging, for instance, the role of challenging circumstances such as unemployment, poor educational systems or poverty. Similar reflexivity is noticeable in the perceptions of these respondents with respect to their counterparts. In comparison to PDIs that fall under the first two narratives, survey results show that these PDIs are most positive about their counterparts overall. When these respondents do convey negative perceptions with respect to counterparts, interview data reveal that critical perceptions are more often put into context by acknowledging the challenging circumstances in which those counterparts operate.

Yes, I see that in all the countries where I work. Going to university for their status and nothing else, no ambition. They may never work, yes they won't [...] Because of course they also have little prospects [...] There is such a high unemployment rate.¹⁰

In comparison with negative and internally inconsistent respondents, interviews show that reflective respondents are most considerate and critical with respect to their own positionalities and how they potentially affect their partnerships. Contrary to the respondents in the other groups, they do not consider their partnerships with Southern organizations as static but as constantly evolving towards increased independence and ownership of their counterparts. In general, counterparts get more leeway in reporting, and once these counterparts perform well, it reinforces the perceptions of the PDIs that their counterparts are capable of performing well and they subsequently relax reporting requirements more as the time passes, on request by their counterparts. Similar to the negative narrative, the data confirms the interaction between perceptions and management of financial resources and related accountability mechanisms.

Socio-demographic differences between respondents of three narratives

Before we analyse further how these narratives affect the partnerships, we want to enlarge our understanding of those holding these narratives and explore possible important differences. The survey data point to an apparent relation between features of PDI leaders, their counterparts and the partnerships and the expressed narratives and belonging partnerships. [Table 5](#) presents the key features.

First, it is interesting to note that, compared to the other narratives, PDI leaders of the negative narrative stand out in terms of their gender and age. Seventy per cent of these respondents are male with an average age of 64 years old. In addition, it is apparent that none of these negative respondents has an expat or migration background. It is also interesting to see that, compared to the other narratives, the respondents in this negative narrative are typically known for their oldest partnership of 14 years on average with also the

Table 5. Characteristics PDI leader, organization and partnerships.

	Negative	Internally inconsistent	Reflective
Gender (Male)	72%	20%	66%
Age PDI leader (yrs)	64,3	51,4	56,3
Age PDI (yrs)	17,28	10,33	14,70
Diaspora (yes)	0%	40%	40%
Expat (yes)	0%	20%	33%
Budget (euro)	47.871	25.000	97.861
Duration partnership (yrs)	14,28	7	11
Share of counterpart's budget provided by PDI	53,12%	62,92%	49,44%

PDIIs having been established in average 17 years ago. Carefulness is needed when trying to interpret this finding. Whereas it could be that through time, negative experiences stimulated these PDI leaders to become more controlling, it could also be indicative of a generational effect, with older generation PDI founders being brought up in a time that has rendered them more prone to developing these negative perceptions. PDIIs part of the internally inconsistent narrative are the youngest organizations and so are their partnerships. The soul searching we come across with these PDI leaders might be related to the fact that they have had limited experiences in their dealings with local organizations and still have to be convinced of their capacities.

Second, the reflective PDI leaders also distinguish themselves in some ways from the other PDI leaders. Thirty-three per cent of them lived for a longer period of time in the intervention country and 40 per cent of them has a migration background. This is higher compared to the other narratives. Although our data does not allow us to make firm (causal) statements on this, the findings seem to confirm the idea that people with more lived experiences in the country of operations (diaspora or individuals with an expat history) are more familiar with local circumstances and are better able to bring up understanding for the implications of this in, for example, running an NGO.

Third, the data conveys that counterparts of the reflective narrative are the largest in terms of budget and also operate most independent in financial terms from the Dutch PDI with whom they cooperate. This seems to confirm the idea that there is a positive relation between financial independence and overall independence. However, counterparts of the negative narrative who experience least room to manoeuvre, are also more financially independent from their PDI compared to the ones that are part of the internally inconsistent narrative.

The above seems to provide support for our suggestion that the commonly held assumption guiding a lot of capacity strengthening programs that “financial independence is positively related or even leads to overall independence,” does not always hold.

Different perceptions and distinct partnerships

As the final step of our analysis, we now explore if and how narratives are reflected in the partnerships.

A first interesting finding is that there is a striking difference in perceptions between PDIIs and their counterparts with respect to the perceived independence of the latter. Table 6 shows that in 67 per cent of the cases, PDIIs answered the questions on decision-making power with “yes” (suggesting their counterpart is in charge of this

Table 6. Decision making power (0–1).

	PDI's	Counterparts
Funding requests	0,85	0,53
Reporting guidelines	0,48	0,15
Thematic focus	0,71	0,44
Target group	0,50	0,50
Daily running organization	0,93	0,58
Frequency reporting	0,38	0,30
Average total score	0,67	0,42

particular aspect of the partnership). This contrasts with the 42 per cent for their counterparts. Hence PDIs tend to perceive the level of decision-making power of their counterpart higher compared to the counterpart itself. Whereas these questions were initially meant as factual questions on the division of roles, they turned out to reflect interesting insights in how partnerships are being experienced.

Secondly, our data confirms that mutual perceptions of PDIs and their counterparts affect their partnerships. The three different narratives are reflected in three different types of partnership. Building on the qualitative and quantitative data, for every narrative we distinguish an associated type of partnership: (1) a repressive partnership for the negative narrative, (2) a confusing partnership for the internally inconsistent narrative and (3) a respectful partnership for the reflective narrative.

The *negative narrative* shows that the PDI is the most dominant and controlling in the partnership. According to the counterparts, for a well-functioning partnership it is conditional for them to be accountable, honest and deliver timely reports to their PDI. Counterparts of PDIs with an *internally inconsistent narrative* experience relatively more room to manoeuvre independently, compared to counterparts in repressing partnerships. However, counterparts receive more mixed signals in terms of their role and position. Whereas on the one hand, they are asked to step up the game, they are requested to do so mostly within the strict boundaries set by their Dutch partners. PDIs that are part of the inconsistent narrative explain how control forms an important part of their role. Ultimately, this leads to confusing partnerships with counterparts explaining how they sometimes find it difficult to assess what roles they can take up.

Finally, PDIs that are part of the *reflective narrative*, which is the most prevalent one, grant their counterparts most freedom to operate independently. PDIs ascribed to this narrative describe their role as merely supportive. That is not to say to that they do not control the work of their counterpart, but it does not take up such a prominent part in the role of PDIs. We typify this partnership as respectful. PDIs with reflective narratives demonstrate significantly more acceptance of ideas of increasing the independence of counterparts. In most cases, the mature nature of these partnerships is the result of continuously consolidating collaborative progress between both PDIs and their counterparts. In fact, although several counterparts of this group have expressed criticism about the unequal structure of their partnerships in the past, they have also explained how their partnerships have grown and improved overall.

Table 7 highlights how different narratives are associated to different levels of decision-making power of local counterparts.

In their view, PDIs with a reflective narrative grant more decision-making power to their counterparts in four of the six categories (the power to make funding requests to

Table 7. Effects of narratives on partnerships (0–1).

Decision	Responses by PDI			Responses by counterpart		
	Negative	Internally inconsistent	Reflective	Negative	Internally inconsistent	Reflective
Funding requests	0,71	0,90	0,93	0,67	0,43	0,50
Reporting guidelines	0,50	0,44	0,50	0,33	0,00	0,13
Thematic focus	0,50	0,78	0,86	0,50	0,50	0,31
Target group	0,57	0,29	0,64	0,67	0,38	0,44
Daily running organization	0,86	1,00	0,93	0,50	0,75	0,50
Frequency reporting	0,57	0,33	0,23	0,50	0,00	0,40
Average total score	0,67	0,65	0,68	0,50	0,38	0,38

other donors, to make use of their local reporting guidelines and to decide their own thematic focus and their own target group). However, the responses of the counterparts do not mirror those of their PDIs. Table 7 highlights that the counterparts of PDIs with a negative narrative experience more freedom with respect to sending out funding requests, reporting guidelines, thematic focus and target group and the frequency of reporting compared to counterparts in the other narratives. Whereas this seems to contradict the narratives as explained above, we suggest that this might reflect the more critical attitude towards their position, role and partnership of counterparts that are part of the internally inconsistent and reflective group and the more accepting stance of the counterparts of the negative narrative—with the latter being perhaps more easily satisfied.

To investigate this further, as a final step, we questioned all participants about whether they had experienced the counterpart becoming more independent of the PDI in the last five years. Table 8 presents the findings.

First, there is a substantial difference between how counterparts and PDIs see the trend. Whereas 80 per cent of the PDIs see progress in this domain, this is only the case for 60 per cent of the counterparts. Secondly, the data confirms that differences with regard to increased independence can be found across the three different narratives. Counterparts that are part of confusing and respectful partnerships experienced most progress in terms of their growing independence over time. In interviews with these counterparts, they expressed more critical attitudes regarding their partnerships and seemed most ambitious in the goals they had in terms of their growing independence. The interviews confirm the growing ownership of counterparts and their decreasing acceptance of the status quo. Counterparts in negative partnerships experienced the least progress. Interestingly, these counterparts in general express little criticism towards their PDI or the partnership and tend to accept the current division of roles, with a relatively prominent role for their Dutch counterpart. Considering that, overall, these are the oldest partnerships, a picture emerges of counterparts that have been

Table 8. Perceptions on increased independence counterparts (0–1).

Negative	Responses by PDI		Responses by counterpart		
	Internally inconsistent	Reflective	Negative	Internally inconsistent	Reflective
0,83	0,63	0,88	0,50	0,67	0,60

socialized in a certain role characterized by more traditional power relations, limiting prospects for a genuine power shift from North to South.

Discussion and conclusion

Main findings

As discussed in the introduction, despite the increasingly prominent call in recent years for “shifting power” from development organizations in the Global North to their Global South counterparts, progress so far appears to be limited. Various factors have been identified in extant literature to explain this lack of progress, with many studies pointing to imbalances in the control of financial resources—which is to say, financial dependence of one organization on the other. At the same time, an increasing number of research articles point to other types of factors, more personal in nature, that might explain the persistence of the North–South inequality within the international development sector. Building on these studies, this article has sought to move beyond the traditional focus on financial dependence, looking at how perceptions permeate North–South partnerships. More specifically, we explored if and how perceptions, including racial ones, play a role in hindering more equitable partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs, thereby contributing to an enhanced understanding of relevant processes of power-shifting and localization. In general, the findings on perceptions indicate that (1) PDIs are more negative about partners’ knowledge, skills and morality; (2) partners are more negative about the room to manoeuvre they have than the PDIs think they give to them; (3) PDIs are more positive about increased independence of their partner, whereas the partner thinks: “so much has not changed and do not experience so much freedom.” This does not paint a very rosy picture. There is room for improvement when having organizations become more conscious about such perceptions (something which will be discussed in more detail in the section on “Policy implications”). Next to this, we see that, as expected, (4) there are different narratives among PDIs; (5) there is a relationship between narratives and the characteristics of the PDI, partner and partnership; (6) there is a relationship between perceptions and partnerships.

In sum, this research finds that a large diversity in types of partnerships exists. Singular explanations that focus either on “resources” or “race” would not have been able to explain this diversity, as all the partnerships take place in a largely similar system of resource scarcity and dependence and a similar system of race relations. Rules about access to resources were found to interact with perceptions, including racial ones. Until now studies that focus on access to financial resources and decision making have not focused on racial perceptions, and vice versa. This makes this study innovative.

On the more positive side, we did find evidence of “authentic partnerships” or at least elements thereof, in about half of the partnerships we analysed. This might provide a slightly more hopeful picture than the one painted by Fowler (1998) and Brinkerhoff (2002) when they stated that these types of partnerships rarely exist in practice. However, at the same time, we also found that “knowledge hierarchies” and “race” played a role in the narratives, reflected in placing lower value on the knowledge of the local counterpart and expressing tales of white savior or black inferiority. We hence suggest that moving forward, studies on partnerships take more explicitly

perceptions, including racial ones, into consideration. Policies on shifting power could gain from a more fine-grained analysis of the interactions between perceptions and financial management and accountability mechanisms. True progress on the #shiftthepower agenda will remain elusive if this isn't addressed. In this research we have taken on the challenge of doing empirical research into the thorny issue of the role of perceptions, including prejudices, in the aid sector. We have only focused on one "donor" country (the Netherlands) and one type of aid actors (small scale development initiatives). With the aim of contributing to "decolonizing development" we hope that our first findings inspire more empirical research in this domain, covering different countries and actors.

In this research, we have aimed to look beyond financial determinants of partnerships, but at the same time we have still considered financial aspects, such as the size of budget of local organizations and the relative share of the budget provided by the counterpart. We did not find evidence that the share of budget that the counterpart received from the PDI was an important determinant of the level of equality between the organizations (see Table 5). This lends further support for our analytical starting point that there is more than just financial relationships that determines power relations within partnerships. We also found that inequality in partnerships can reinforce stringent resource allocation rules and negative perceptions, including racial ones. These stringent resource allocation rules and negative perceptions, including racial ones, make it hard to overcome inequality in partnerships. We therefore conclude that perceptions, including racial ones, require systematic attention when studying partnerships.

Policy implications

To stimulate equality and inclusiveness and hence a shift of power in partnerships, a different and differential approach to capacity building is needed. What needs to be different from common practice? Currently, many capacity building programs that contribute to a shift in power target counterparts in the Global South. Counterparts are, for example, taught how to engage in local fundraising. However, our analysis in this article demonstrates that training Southern NGOs on how to become financially independent will not suffice. Joint trainings and discussions between Northern and Southern organizations are required if more equitable partnerships are to be obtained. Conversations about mutual perceptions (including prejudices) and how these affect partnerships need to be part of these trainings, especially for organizations holding an internally inconsistent narrative.

The risk of avoiding the courageous conversations on mutual prejudices in partnerships and opting straight away for technical solutions is that we avoid tackling root causes of inequalities in partnerships. After these courageous conversations, partnerships that are more equitable can emerge, with less (mutual) frustration, which will not only be more effective but also more rewarding in the end.

Notes

1. Wilde Ganzen Foundation was not involved in the selection of partnerships and has not been informed on the final sample.

2. A diaspora initiative means that the PDI was founded by a first- or second-generation migrant from the country where the PDI is supporting development interventions.
3. Interview with PDI board member, operating in Burkina Faso, 5 November 2021.
4. Interview with PDI board member, operating in Burkina Faso, 5 November 2021.
5. Interview with PDI founder, operating in Ghana, 28 October 2021.
6. Interview with PDI board member, operating in Kenya, 14 October 2021.
7. Interview with PDI board member, operating in Burkina Faso, 5 November 2021.
8. Interview with LPO founder, operating in Kenya, 11 November 2021.
9. Interview with PDI treasurer, operating in Ghana, 23 December 2021.
10. Interview with PDI founder, operating in Kenya, 26 October 2021.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

First, respondents were asked to complete a short online survey. The survey started with a set of questions allowing to map the socio-demographics of the respondents and organizational characteristics: (1) the age and (2) gender of respondents, (3) their role in the organization, (5) age of the PDI/counterpart leader, (6) the annual budget of the organization and, finally (7) the duration of the partnership between the PDI and its counterpart. To get an understanding of the extent to which the PDI leader is familiar with the country where the PDI is operating, PDI leaders were asked 8) if respondents have a diaspora background, meaning they or their parents were born out of the Netherlands and, (9) if they have an expat background, meaning having lived in their project country for a minimum of two years. Finally, to get insight in the level of financial dependence of the counterpart on the PDI, counterparts were also asked to indicate the share of counterpart's budget provided by PDI.

In the second part of the survey, we measured the independence of the counterpart vis-à-vis the PDI with whom they cooperate by asking how key decisions are being taken. The key questions were: (1) Can you send out funding requests to other donors? (2) Can you decide on your

own reporting format and (3) the timing of those reports? (4) Can you decide on your own thematic focus and (5) target groups? (6) Can you make decisions with respect to the daily running of the organizations? All these questions could be answered by ‘no’, ‘yes’, and ‘not applicable’. The more questions answered with yes, the more independent the PDI counterpart is considered. A final question of this part questioned both the PDI and the counterparts on the perceived increased independence of the counterpart over the years. To analyse whether the counterparts have become more independent over time we asked the question: has the local partner become more independent over the last 5 years? This question as well could be answered by ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

The final part of the survey measured the perspectives of respondents vis-à-vis each other and the respective country population with respect to *knowledge* (what is needed for development), *skills* (fundraising and financial management) and *morality* (reliability and proactiveness) in comparison to that of their counterparts. The statements in this part of the survey questioned participants on (1) who has better knowledge of what is needed for development, (2) who is stronger in fundraising, (3) who is more reliable, (4) who is stronger in financial management (5) and, who they consider to be more proactive. Respondents were asked to express how much they agreed with these statements on a scale from 1 to 5. Via similar statements, we asked both PDI and counterpart to also reflect on these aspects for the Dutch population in general and the population of the respective country where the counterpart is operating. In Appendix 1, the survey questions can be found.

Q1 Thank you for participating in this survey of the Radboud University.

This survey is part of our study on the relationship between your organisation and your partner organisation. By this study we hope to create a better understanding of partnerships between Northern and Southern development organisations.

The survey starts off with a few personal questions, followed by some questions on the features of the organisation you are involved in. In the second part of the survey, several statements on decision-making will be presented. In the final part of this survey, you will be asked to give your opinion on a few statements regarding perceptions.

We would like to emphasize that **there are no right or wrong answers, as all statements in this survey concern your opinion**. Hence, please feel free to answer candidly.

Expectedly, filling out the survey will take **approximately 15 minutes**. If you experience connection problems or close the window halfway through filling out the survey, the questions will automatically be saved. Therefore, you can simply refresh or reopen this window and continue where you left off.

After completing this survey, your input will be discussed during your interview with a member of the research team. This will allow you the opportunity to elaborate on any of your given input. The research team guarantees discretion when it comes to the survey and the interview data, with all information being processed anonymously.

If you have any further questions concerning this survey or the study in general, please do not hesitate to contact us by sending an e-mail to Frederique.been2@ru.nl.

Best regards,

On behalf of the research team

Q2 The following questions will focus on your personal background and the features of the organisation you are involved in. If you are involved in multiple development organisations, please complete this survey from the perspective of the organisation that was invited to participate in this study.

Whenever the survey refers to your ‘Dutch partner organisation’, we are referring to your Dutch partner mentioned in the most recent email you received from us.

Q3 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q4 What is your age?

- Younger than 25 years (1)
- 25 – 35 years (2)
- 35 – 45 years (3)
- 45 – 55 years (4)
- 55 – 65 years (5)
- 65 years or older (6)

Q5 Are you the founder of your organisation?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Q6 What is your role in the organisation?

It is possible to select multiple answers

- Founder of the organisation (1)
- Chairperson (2)
- Vice-chairperson (3)
- Secretary (4)
- Treasurer (5)
- Board member (6)
- Project coordinator (7)
- Volunteer (8)
- Other: (9) _____

Q7 When was your organisation founded?

Founding year (1)

- ▼ 1940 (1) ... 2021 (82)

Q8 What is the country of establishment of your organisation?

- Kenya (1)
- Ghana (2)
- Burkina Faso (3)

Q9 When did you participate in the Change the Game program of Wilde Ganzen?

- In 2015 (1)
- In 2016 (2)
- In 2017 (3)
- In 2018 (4)
- In 2019 (5)
- In 2020 (6)
- In 2021 (7)
- I have not participated (8)

Q10 Was your Dutch partner actively involved in the founding of your organisation?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Q11 What is the duration of the partnership with your Dutch partner organisation?

- 0 – 5 years (1)
- 5 – 10 years (2)
- 10 – 15 years (3)
- 15+ years (4)

Q12 What is the annual budget of your organisation?

- 0 – 350.000 GHC (1)
- 350.000 GHC–710.000 GHC (2)
- 710.000 GHC–1.400.000 GHC (3)
- 1.400.000 GHC–2.800.000 GHC (4)
- 2.800.000 GHC or more (5)
- Unknown (6)

Q13 What percentage of your annual budget is funded by your Dutch partner?

- 0%–5% (1)
- 5%–15% (2)
- 15%–30% (3)
- 30%–50% (4)
- 50% or more (5)
- Unknown (6)

Q14 In the following section of this survey a few statements on decision-making will be posed. You will be asked to express whether you agree with these statements or not.

Whenever the statements refer to the ‘Dutch organisation’, we are referring to your Dutch partner mentioned in the most recent email you received from us.

Q15 Do you agree with the following statements?

	<i>No (1)</i>	<i>Yes (2)</i>	<i>N/A or I do not know (3)</i>
My organisation can send out funding requests to other donors without approval of the Dutch organisations (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation has to report on the basis of the financial guidelines of the Dutch organisation (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation can decide by itself when it comes to determining the overall thematic focus of our project(s) (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation can determine the ‘target group’ of our project(s) without involving the Dutch organisation (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My organisation can decide by itself when it comes to day-to-day decisions concerning the implementation of our project(s) (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the board of my organisation there is a member of the Dutch organisation (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Dutch organisation determines how often reports are due by us (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Has your organisation become more independent over time from the Dutch organisation?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

- The partnership is too new to make any statements on this (3)

Q17 You have reached the final part of this survey. In the following section you will be asked to express how much you agree or disagree with several statements. Please be aware that the first statement of each question concerns your perspective on Dutch people and people (in intervention country) in general, while the second statement of each question aims to capture your opinion on your organisation and your Dutch partner organisation. We would like to remind you that no wrong answers can be given, as all statements concern your personal opinion.

Whenever the statements refer to the 'Dutch partner organisation', we are referring to your Dutch partner mentioned in the most recent email your received from us.

Q18 On a scale from 1 – 5, how much do you agree with the following statements?

> 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5)

In general, people (in intervention country) have better knowledge of what is needed for their development than Dutch people (2)

In general, my organisation has better knowledge of what is needed for our development than my Dutch partner organisation (3)

Q19 On a scale from 1 – 5, how much do you agree with the following statements?

> 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5)

In general, Dutch people are stronger than people (in intervention country) when it comes to fundraising (2)

In general, my Dutch partner organisation is stronger than my organisation when it comes to fundraising (3)

Q20 On a scale from 1 – 5, how much do you agree with the following statements?

> 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5)

In general, people (in intervention country) are more reliable than Dutch people (2)

In general, my organisation is a more reliable organisation than my Dutch partner organisation (3)

Q21 On a scale from 1 – 5, how much do you agree with the following statements?

> 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5)

In general, Dutch people are stronger than people (in intervention country) in financial management (2)

In general, my Dutch partner organisation is stronger than my organisation in financial management (3)

Q22 On a scale from 1 – 5, how much do you agree with the following statements?

> 1 equals strongly disagree and 5 equals strongly agree

1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (3) 4 (4) 5 (5)

In general, people (in intervention country) are more proactive than Dutch people (2)

In general, my organisation is more proactive than my Dutch partner organisation (3)

Appendix 2: Interview guide

[This guide is formulated for the interview with a representative of a counterpart of a Dutch PDI. Interview guides for PDI representatives had a similar set up]

ID number:

Interviewer:

Name organisation of interviewee:

Name interviewee:

Date:

Duration interview:

1. Introduction

Central aim: Introduction of the interviewer, the research project and the structure of the interview conversation

2. Open questions and elaboration on the questionnaire

Central aim: to understand the underlying reasons and meanings of the respondents' input in the questionnaire – thorough understanding of the respondents' perceptions of, ideas of and experiences with unconscious biases in their own partnerships or in other partnerships

1. Would you like to elaborate on any of the posed statements in the previous sections? (or ask the respondent to elaborate on specific remarkable answers given in the previous sections)
2. Do you think that among Dutch partner organisations there exist prejudicial perceptions with respect to organisations or people (in intervention country)? If yes, which prejudicial perceptions circulate (if possible from your own experience)?
3. Have you adapted your behaviour as a response to these prejudicial perceptions?
4. Do you think that among organisations (in intervention country) prejudicial perceptions with respect to Dutch organisations or Dutch people exist? If yes, which prejudicial perceptions circulate (if possible from your own experience)?
5. Do you think that these prejudicial perceptions hinder the empowerment of local organisations. Can you give an example (if possible from your own experience)?

Specific topics to discuss:

- General description of how the partnership is being experienced – how they typify their partnership
- Incorporation of exit strategy

- Role and experience of site visits of Dutch PDI
- Experience of cultural difference in cooperation

3. **Wrap up**