



Hybridization and service-providers in international development cooperation: public administration implications for global poverty reduction and sustainable development

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4 **Hybridization and service-providers in international development**
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7 **cooperation: public administration implications for global poverty reduction**
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17 **Abstract:** This study examines how hybridization takes shape in international development
18 cooperation (IDC) service-providing organizations and its public administration implications for
19 sustainable development goals (SDGs). Using actor-network and open-polity perspectives to analyze
20 the Swedish governmental service-providers' experiences in the IDC, the research unveils unique
21 hybridization characteristics in the resource-dependent and networked institutional environments of the
22 IDC policy field. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding the specific institutional
23 context and managing diverse stakeholder expectations to navigate the opportunities and challenges of
24 hybridization. The study contributes to the hybridization literature by offering a comprehensive insight
25 into the politics, potentials and pitfalls of managing context-sensitive public administration
26 organizational and professional changes to address multiple and often conflicting institutional demands
27 that mission-oriented public administration and governance reforms entail. The research encourages
28 further investigation into the drivers, dynamics and effects of hybridization in other complex SDG-
29 related policy networks and the effectiveness of different hybridization strategies.
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45 **Keywords:** Hybridization; service-providing organizations; policy network; sustainable
46 development; international development cooperation
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1. Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable development requires integrative and innovative approaches that can address the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by high and low income countries around the world. One critical aspect of addressing these challenges is the strengthening of public institutions and collaborative actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as implied respectively in the 16th Goal – Peace, Justice and Stronger Institutions, and the 17th Goal – Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). In this context, service-providing organizations involved in delivering global services aimed at achieving these SDGs in low-income countries are playing an important role. Understanding how they navigate the increasingly complex environments and institutional pressures from multiple stakeholders can help advance public institutions and global partnership for achieving the SDGs (Barbier & Burgess, 2021).

Hybridization, broadly understood as the process by which organizations blend different elements, such as models, structures, practices, cultures, from various institutional spheres to address the diverse and complex challenges they face (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), has emerged as a key concept in understanding the organizational dynamics in the public sector (Denis et al., 2015). Hybrids are characterized by their ability to integrate and balance competing demands and expectations from various stakeholders, which can lead to increased flexibility, adaptability, and resilience (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012; Pache & Santos, 2013).

Despite its global relevance to address transboundary public administration and sustainability challenges like poverty, inequality, migration and climate change, understanding of the drivers, dynamics, and effects of hybridization in the everyday functioning of service-provision in the international development cooperation (IDC) public policy field remains limited. Existing hybridization studies in public administration scholarship primarily focus on the internal aspects of autonomous hybrid organizations culture (Billis, 2010; Skelcher & Smith, 2015), while less attention is paid to the interplay of internal factors with external factors (Denis et al., 2015; Ebrahim et al., 2014), such as institutional pressures, resource dependencies (i.e., dependence of organizations on external resources

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3 such as funding, expertise to carry out their activities), or historically imprinted political features
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5 (Waeger & Weber, 2019).
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8 In the context of IDC, hybrid organizations have the potential to leverage their unique
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10 characteristics to span multiple boundaries in delivering global public services and goods (Brinkerhoff
11 & Brinkerhoff, 2011; van Gastel et al., 2012). This article seeks to improve the understanding of
12 hybridization in frontline service-provision in the IDC policy network by exploring the following
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14 research question: How does hybridization take shape in public organizations providing IDC services
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16 aimed at poverty reduction and sustainable development?
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21 Drawing on actor-network and open-polity organizational perspectives, the article examines
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23 the experiences of Swedish governmental organizations involved in supporting public-sector reforms
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25 in low-income countries. Sweden provides an interesting context given its IDC policy's altruistic focus
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27 on poverty reduction and sustainable development outcomes, flexible public administration models,
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29 and involvement of a multitude of actors across different organizational fields. Among Sweden's
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31 ongoing IDC reforms is a newly launched strategy to strengthen the capacity and quality of its services
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33 towards stronger public institutions in low-income countries. The saliency of the IDC services provided
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35 by the focal governmental organizations can be traced back to 1980s, which constitute about 10-15%
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37 (around 600 million SEK or 57 million USD) of Swedish IDC annual budget (Allen et al., 2020).
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39 However, the hybrid universe of the service-providing organizations has received limited scholarly
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41 attention. The present research analyzed the empirical data collected between December 2018 and
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43 December 2019 from interviews with 33 purposely sampled frontline staff, focus group discussions and
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45 archival documents.
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49 This article extends the hybridization literature to the IDC policy field and contributes to a
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51 better understanding of hybridization in public organizations with a multi-faceted and multi-level
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53 understanding of the unique hybridization dynamics of public-service organizations in the IDC policy
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55 field. Doing so, the article also contributes to the literature on public institutions and global partnership
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57 implied in the 2030 Agenda by examining the role of hybrid service-providing organizations in
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59 strengthening public institutions and global partnership for achieving the SDGs (United Nations, 2015).
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3 By exploring the experiences of Swedish IDC service-providers, this study sheds light on the challenges
4 and opportunities associated with leveraging their unique hybrid characteristics (for boundary
5 negotiations, organizational change and professional management, partnership and service innovation,
6 and creativity) in the pursuit of improving their organizational and professional change for global
7 poverty reduction and sustainable development. Finally, this research article has important practical
8 implications for policymakers and frontline practitioners engaged in delivering complex public services
9 in policy networks similar to IDC.
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18 The remainder of this research article is structured as follows. The next section provides an
19 overview of the theoretical background. The subsequent materials and methods section presents the
20 research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The results section presents the empirical
21 findings. This is followed by a discussion section highlighting the theoretical and practical implications
22 of the study, the limitations of the study and some avenues for future research. The final section
23 addresses some concluding remarks.
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34 **2. Theoretical background**

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36 A multi-level understanding of hybridization in IDC service-providers needs to acknowledge
37 the broader global IDC system which shape and are shaped by public administrative models of
38 conventional IDC donor governments including Sweden, and their associated donor networks. In recent
39 years, globally the IDC contexts have undergone significant changes with increasing hybridization
40 pressures as a key phenomenon for organizations involved. For example, the literature has suggested
41 diversification and proliferation of IDC actors, shifting priorities, and the emergence of innovative
42 funding mechanisms and partnership forms (Gore, 2013, Janus et al., 2014). IDC funders, service-
43 providers, and service-recipients must navigate a range of institutional pressures and resource
44 dependencies, which play crucial roles in shaping their hybridization process and the hybrid forms they
45 adopt (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011). Although hybridization as a process is not new to IDC, but
46 the theorization remains novel in IDC scholarship and offers the potential to address long-standing calls
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3 of scholars for the use of complexity science and systems thinking to better understand the multi-faceted
4 role of context, power dynamics, goal conflicts, agency-structure dilemmas in IDC and other policy
5 network (e.g., Ramalingam, 2013; Boulton, Allen & Bowman, 2015), and their manifestations into
6 donor-recipient relations, the strategies and behavior of frontline organizations (Eyben, 2014; Honig &
7 Gulrajani, 2018).
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14 Institutional pressures refer to the demands and expectations imposed on organizations by
15 external actors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), such as governments, funding agencies, international
16 organizations, and service-recipients. These pressures can originate from regulatory, normative, and
17 cognitive sources. Regulatory pressures stem from formal rules and regulations, while normative
18 pressures arise from shared values, norms, and expectations within the professional community (Scott,
19 2008). Cognitive pressures reflect shared beliefs and understandings of appropriate organizational
20 behavior. In the IDC context, service-providers must respond to these pressures to secure legitimacy,
21 funding, and support (Eyben, 2010, 2013, 2014; Gulrajani, 2011). The present research will focus more
22 on the underexplored normative and cognitive pressures since flexibility is the norm in the case context.
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34 Resource dependencies arise from the need for organizations to access critical resources, such
35 as funding, expertise, and networks, which are often controlled by other actors (Pfeffer & Salancik,
36 1978). In the IDC context, service providers are highly dependent on external funding from donors and
37 governments, which can be tied to specific policies, priorities, and conditions (Brinkerhoff &
38 Brinkerhoff, 2002). This dependence on external resources can create power imbalances and shape the
39 way organizations adapt and respond to the changing environment (Mosley, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2005)
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47 In this evolving landscape, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) offers a useful and relevant
48 framework for a multi-level analysis of how hybridization takes shape in IDC service-providing
49 organizations (Latour, 2007; Denis et al., 2015). ANT emphasizes the role of human and non-human
50 (e.g., objects, artifacts, technologies, or other material entities) actors in forming complex networks and
51 shaping organizational practices (Law, 1991). In the context of IDC, this perspective can help examine
52 the interactions between diverse actors, such as donors, governments, international organizations, and
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3 service providers, and how these interactions influence the development of hybrid organizational and
4 professional practices (Denis et al., 2015).
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8 By incorporating ANT, researchers can better understand the processes through which diverse
9 elements, such as institutional pressures and resource dependencies, are negotiated, translated, and
10 integrated within IDC service-providing organizations (Latour, 1987). This approach can shed light on
11 the dynamics of boundary formation and redefinition, as well as the ways in which novel expertise and
12 knowledge are mobilized across different levels of analysis (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Specifically, the
13 focus on boundary dynamics highlights the multi-level nature of hybridization, occurring at individual,
14 group, organizational, and macro-societal levels. Boundary shifts through knowledge mixing, as typical
15 in the IDC capacity development (CapDev) service category, can happen at individual and group levels
16 without being visible in organizational structures or formal arrangements. Furthermore, ANT can reveal
17 how power relations and dependencies shape the strategies and practices adopted by service-providers
18 in response to the evolving IDC landscape (Callon, 1991).
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31 Denis et al. (2015) acknowledge that while ANT is a valuable perspective for understanding
32 hybridization in public organizations, its analytical power can be strengthened in combination with
33 other theoretical perspectives, especially for a comprehensive understanding of, for instance, how
34 macro-level forces, contextual factors (such as cultural, institutional and political contexts), and
35 boundary dynamics (construction, maintenance or dissolution) shape hybridization in the context of
36 organizations where political factors and boundary negotiations play a crucial role in determining their
37 actions and evolution (Waeger & Weber, 2019). This present research, therefore, incorporates the ANT
38 with the open-polity perspective (Waeger & Weber, 2019) in the research design to focus on the role of
39 historically imprinted political processes in shaping organizational actions. The open-polity perspective
40 highlights the continuous negotiation, contestation, and interpretation of professional, organizational
41 and institutional boundaries, illustrating how these processes contribute to organizational and
42 professional change.
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3. Materials and Methods

The research aims to explore the research question: How does hybridization take shape in public organizations providing IDC services aimed at poverty reduction and sustainable development? The study employed a qualitative case study approach, drawing on the theoretical perspectives presented. A case study approach is well-suited for in-depth exploration of complex and context-specific phenomena, as well as for examining the interplay between micro, meso, and macro-level factors (Yin, 2014; Flyvberg, 2006) in the context of hybridization in IDC service-providing organizations.

The study focuses on the experience of a Swedish network of 20-25 governmental organizations (SSGOs) engaged in international development cooperation capacity development services for low-income countries. The unique characteristics of the hybridization and boundary dynamics with their public-sector peer and funder, Sida, provided an interesting research context. Majority of the network's organizations engage voluntarily in international development cooperation service-provision, and their services spanned from enhancing the knowledge base and ability of service-receiving organizations to formulate public policy and implement public reforms. The network employed at least 830 professionals in 2018, and traditionally, services were organized around bureaucratic twinning arrangements and technical knowledge transfer from Sweden to state actors in institutionally stable contexts. In recent years, more diversified organizational forms (viz. cross-sector partnership with non-state, private, regional and global actors) and professional practice change had been visible aimed at address more complex capacity challenges. There had also been increasing institutional pressures to serve in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and comply with socio-ecological transformational principles such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. At the time of the study, Swedish IDC served some 35 low-income countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. About five months prior to this study, the government launched a new 2018-2022 IDC strategy, "Strategy for capacity development, partnership and methods that support the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development" (hereafter referred to as the "Strategy") (GOS 2018).

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Access to the case was gained through a larger research collaboration between the author's university and the network funded by the Strategy to explore the experience of SSGOs in changing IDC contexts. To address potential bias stemming from the research funding and the author's prior experience in another IDC fields, a pilot study workshop was conducted in Stockholm on 5 December 2018 with the network, comprising various SSGOs and Sida representatives who regularly met to discuss common issues in the IDC contexts. Twelve representatives from the group attended the workshop, during which the research purpose and its independent nature were presented. The workshop also helped contextualize the current hybridization pressures, identified general opportunities and challenges of hybridization in practice.

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The data collection process followed the ANT approach to understand how human and non-human (e.g., policies, management technologies) interact and create networks that shape organizational and professional practices (Denis et al., 2015). To capture the complexity of this specific CapDev service category, the data collection process involved a combination of methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and archival documents. In total, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 informants between February and September 2019. The informants were identified by the network representatives from three of the longest serving SSGOs (Alpha, Bravo, and Gamma) in the network through snowballing techniques, based on their diverse professional categories, recent and direct service engagements (see Appendix A). The interviews aimed to elicit in-depth qualitative and historical accounts of personal experiences and allowed for data breadth and depth in understanding the institutional pressures in the internal and external organizational environments, opportunities and challenge for hybridization on their organizational and professional practice. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, conducted in English in their respective offices or virtually.

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Two FGDs were conducted in Stockholm with 17 SSGO and Sida participants each. The FGDs provided complementary data to the interviews, validating the preliminary findings and mapping out in more detail the policy, procedures, and practices in the current network and Sida-SSGO coordination mechanisms of the service category. Complementing and triangulating the interview and FGDs was 30

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3 purposely selected archival documents as non-human actors, including Swedish IDC strategies, service-
4 provision guidelines, performance reviews, and project-specific internal information (see Appendix B
5 for an overview). The documents provided technical details of their 'hybrid universe' as being depicted
6 in the more formal boundary constructions and negotiations with specific internal and external
7 stakeholders.
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14 The multi-level analysis on how hybridization takes shape in the case context were conducted
15 in several main steps guided by the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) and reflexive interpretive
16 approaches (Gabriel, 2017). The first step involved data immersion and initial coding to capture
17 recurring patterns or themes in the data (revealing boundary negotiation, resource dependency, and
18 institutional pressures in organizational and professional processes of SSGOs). The second step
19 involved grouping similar codes together to form broader themes (such as the internal and external
20 drivers of hybridization, opportunities and challenges associated with hybridization, and the role of
21 boundary dynamics in shaping organizational and professional practices.). The third step involved
22 continuously refining the themes based on reflexive interpretation and contextualization Gabriel (2017)
23 to contextualize and critically assess the identified themes and patterns. This involved considering the
24 researcher's positionality, preconceptions, and assumptions, as well as reflecting on the broader socio-
25 political and historical contexts of the IDC field. Inputs from the FGDs, researcher collaborators in the
26 larger research collaboration project, and peers in IDC research community were sought and critically
27 reflected upon for deeper understanding of the context-contingent the social, cultural, and historical
28 particularities, complexities, and contradictions (Gabriel, 2017; Flyvbjerg 2011; Miles et al., 2014)
29 associated with hybridization of the case. The final step involved integration of the findings and
30 theoretical perspectives by combining the themes, evidence from the data, and relevant hybridization
31 literature. This integration helped shed light on the multi-level nature of hybridization, the role of human
32 and non-human actors in shaping organizational practices, and the continuous negotiation and
33 contestation of professional, organizational, and institutional boundaries.
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4. Results

4.1. Institutional pressures of hybridization

Analysis of the empirical data revealed that the institutional pressures for hybridization in SSGOs' IDC service-provision were both internal and external in nature and influenced by their organizational motivation and priorities in their institutional shift towards hybrid forms and practices.

One important institutional pressure was the Swedish government's commitment to achieving poverty reduction, SDGs and other cross-cutting transformative objectives, reflected in various Swedish IDC policy and strategy documents. These documents outlined the key elements of what the CapDev service category entailed and provided guidance on how SSGOs should approach the service-provision. The imperative to achieve the SDGs was clearly a prominent regulative and normative institutional pressure driving Sida's institutional shift towards emphasizing sustainability outcomes in the IDC service-provisions. Analysis of the Strategy, as an example, showed that although it did not directly refer to any specific public administration models, the underlying principles portrayed hybridized contexts in which Swedish IDC had been administered in general. The document emphasized the core elements of post-new public management (NPM) logics (e.g., cross-sectoral collaboration, multi-stakeholder partnership, flexibility, and context-sensitive approaches to meeting the specific needs and contexts of partner countries) while promoting NPM's managerial logics (e.g., alignment with Agenda 2030 and other international standards, norms, principles, and frameworks as institutional referents for CapDev service-provision, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the aid effectiveness guidelines and standards promoted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC). The need for effectiveness, results-based management, and the importance of monitoring and evaluation was highlighted in other SSGOs project documents. In other words, the Swedish government's global commitment to poverty reduction and SDGs, and the regularly and normative institutional shift in IDC service-provision, as reflected in the administrative priorities of Sida, was a major external driver of hybridization for SSGOs, as exemplified in these two quotes, "There is a lot of

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3 political pressure for SSGOs to work with and through the state agencies” (Interviewee 25) and “All of
4 our IDC projects are kind of demand-driven. We cannot do it with our own funds” (Interviewee 10).
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9 Internal institutional factors also drove hybridization within SSGOs. All SSGOs informants had
10 a common understanding of what the guiding principles for their serve-provision in the specific IDC
11 CapDev category should entail, not just to translate the institutional demands embedded in the Swedish
12 IDC policy and strategy documents, but as rational means to realize the poverty reduction and
13 sustainable development objectives. For example, all interviewees stressed the importance of taking a
14 long-term and context-specific approach that takes into account the needs and perspectives of service-
15 receivers in partner countries. Others, particularly those in the senior/project management and long-
16 term expert categories, highlighted the importance of diversifying partnership arrangements in
17 achieving sustainability outcomes, as more hybrid organizational forms would allow actors from
18 different organizational fields to work together and build a shared vision. This objective statement of
19 one ongoing SSGO project in the Balkans illustrated how hybridization manifested in the organizational
20 design of SSGOs’ service provisions, “The overall project objective is to contribute to the strengthening
21 of the capacities of [service-receiving authority] to carry out its core activities in a [EU] standardized
22 and independent manner as well as strengthen their management and coordination capacities...The
23 project is managed by EU and Sida and supported by [SSGO] and involves a wide range of stakeholders
24 in the host country including line ministries, central bank, municipalities, and business associations,
25 who can benefit from using [improved public services].” (Project 4, archival document, dated 2018)
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47 ***4.2. Opportunities and challenges of hybridization***

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49 The empirical data revealed both opportunities and challenges in the resource-dependent
50 institutional environments for SSGOs to hybridize their organizational and professional practices.
51 While the aforementioned institutional pressures provided SSGOs with hybridization opportunities by
52 leveraging diverse resources, expertise, and networks, doing so also created tensions, ambiguities, and
53 conflicts among stakeholders and partners.
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3 One key opportunity was the institutional flexibility with the service-provision partnership
4 forms and constellations, which enabled SSGOs to access and integrate diverse knowledge and
5 expertise from various organizational fields. As highlighted by the archival data, SSGOs collaborated
6 with a wide range of partners, including international organizations, other government agencies, civil
7 society organizations, private sector entities, and academic institutions. This collaboration enabled
8 SSGOs to leverage diverse resources, knowledge, and skills both in Sweden and other countries to
9 achieve their development objectives. For example, one novel global governance project justified its
10 partnership with a UN agency for the first time in order “to draw on their infrastructure, global presence
11 and entry points into governments, institutions and other actors at all levels of the society” to
12 complement the SSGO’s “long-term experience and expertise” to bring together “stakeholders with
13 interest and role in the public administration domain and the broader social, economic, and
14 environmental governance issues” (Project 5, archival document, dated 2014). Such collaboration
15 allowed SSGOs to incorporate diverse perspectives, needs, and priorities in their service-provision, to
16 enhance their ability to address complex development challenges, and adopt innovative and adaptive
17 approaches to the design and management of service-provision initiatives.
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36 However, the study revealed also several challenges of hybridization in SSGOs’ organizational
37 and professional practices given their resource-dependent IDC institutional environments. One key
38 challenge was the need to manage competing institutional logics, expectations and organizational
39 cultures across diverse stakeholders and partners across their service networks. For example, while
40 obligated contractually to promote Swedish IDC priorities and interests, SSGOs were expected to
41 prioritize the needs and interests of service-receiving organizations, aligning with IDC principles and
42 norms of “working from within local partners, rather than we coming and imposing on them”
43 (Interviewee 7). Most of SSGO informants shared the notion of “bowing to two gods” as “we have to
44 adapt to the partners’ strategies and the prioritizations. We also have to align with the Swedish IDC
45 strategies like gender and environment. That can sometimes be difficult” (Interviewee 10). Many
46 informants cited that this was because “at the end of the day, it’s up to [service-receiving partner
47 organization] to make a change. We can give the conditions but if they don’t want to change, there will
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3 be no change.” (Interviewee 5).
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7 Moreover, Sida’s demands for measurable outcomes might not always align with the demands
8 for participatory decision-making. This quote from a SSGO project manager highlighted this tension,
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11 “Three years ago, we reported too much on outputs and technical stuff, and not enough
12 about what kind of change towards achieving the development outcomes which are hard
13 to describe and measure. It would be good if Sida or embassies could give us and
14 partners more guidance.” (Interviewee 9).
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20 Most of Sida and embassy informants acknowledged that “Our agreement templates and legal
21 requirements do not really go hand-in-hand with this kind of development, making it a constant struggle
22 for SSGOs”. (Interviewee 25). The lack of clarity and guidance on how macro-level hybridization
23 demands should be operationalized in practice evidently created confusion and uncertainty among
24 SSGO, Sida and embassy staff, and service-receivers which impeded effective collaboration and
25 hybridization.
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33 In addition, the findings suggested a mismatch between the policy demands for hybridization
34 in the service-provision, and the resources available to service-providers to effectively translate these
35 macro-level hybridization demands. As this SSGO project manager highlighted, “It takes a lot of time
36 to try to understand what local partners actually do. It’s a matter of trying and mixing different ideas.
37 Then to listen what they already do, and try to see if they need some kind of adjustments” (Interviewee
38 1). A majority of SSGOs lacked budget appropriations and full-cost recovery for this kind of fact-
39 finding missions, proposal formulation, and continuous learning. They also lacked an internalized
40 “structures and methodology” (Interviewee 4) to guide their context-specific hybridization.
41 Additionally, IDC service provision was often seen as a “loosely coupled” side business in contrast to
42 SSGOs domestic mandates. While designing more innovative IDC service-provision was encouraged
43 by some SSGO senior management, the resource challenge was expressed in this quote from a SSGO
44 project manager, “Every time I tried to propose something, my boss is like: ‘Wow! Do it! But I hope
45 this will not take a lot of time. Otherwise why don’t you just do the traditional” (Interviewee 30). This
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3 reality was reflected in the path-dependent rather than innovative practices that SSGO often “end up
4 with, according to traditions, doing one type of IDC for a long time with the same type of stakeholders,
5 and the same type of processes.” (Interviewee 33)
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10 Another challenge of hybridization in SSGOs concerned the lack of professional competencies
11 to manage the complexity of collaboration and coordination with multiple stakeholders, including
12 governments, embassies, local organizations, and communities. The interviewees noted that it required
13 a deep understanding of the partner’s mandate, role, and context to develop effective and sustainable
14 partnerships. This entailed a significant investment of time, resources, and cultural sensitivity to build
15 trust and develop collaborative relationships. Additionally, the institutional and professional cultures of
16 different stakeholders may clash, leading to conflicts and misunderstandings as these quotes
17 highlighted, “It’s complex just to have the traditional government-to-government projects. The more
18 organizations and the more change agents you involve, the more complex it becomes. It’s going to
19 create a lot of different complex problems too.” (Interviewee 13), “there are many unknowns”
20 (Interviewee 33).
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34 However, mobilizing or developing relevant professional expertise was challenged by a lack of
35 funding and support internally given the prioritization of domestic over IDC engagements. There was
36 a constant need to “justify the financial and organizational benefits of such work” (Interviewee 9), and
37 develop new professional expertise, as this informant highlighted, “We have new colleagues joining
38 but they do not usually have a background in IDC or a sense of complexity.” (Interviewee 15). The lack
39 of institutionalization made hybridization efforts vulnerable to changes in personnel or leadership
40 priorities, as many informants reported on, and often relied on individual champions within SSGOs.
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51 ***4.3. Boundary dynamics and negotiations***

52 The empirical data of interviews and FGDs found that the boundary dynamics for hybridization
53 in SSGOs were constantly in flux and subject to negotiation, and coordination support mechanism from
54 Sida or embassies fell short. This suggested that effective negotiation and collaboration between
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3 different actors in SSGOs' service network were required for hybridization (FGD, December 2019).
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5 This would depend on their ability to understand power dynamics in the network, willingness to be
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7 flexible and adaptable, and a common ground between different actors with different priorities and
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9 values.
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12 An SSGO informant highlighted the important quality of project leadership for effective
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14 negotiation and collaboration in the service network,
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17 “It’s critical that you at least have been a project manager or some kind of leadership
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19 position to get the team behind you, both from Sweden and from the partner country to
20
21 work together to reach a common target. As a long-term advisor you are here to create
22
23 sort of a network and create trust. That is also hugely important personality aspect that
24
25 likes to engage with people, to be out there, talk to the people, managers, donors, and
26
27 create these informal networks to drive your project forward and to drive change.”
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30 (Interviewee 10)

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32 However, mobilizing this kind of leadership would require a professional and organizational
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34 cultural shift, as one Sida/embassy informant noted in the annual report of a complex project with
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36 multiple funding sources and partnership arrangements,
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39 “It is not sufficient for the Swedish experts to have the relevant technical expertise but
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41 they also need to have the pedagogical skills, as well as the cultural understanding to
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43 know how to navigate within the partner institutions they work with... All partners are
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45 open to explore collaborations although some are hesitant due to limited staff resources
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47 and/or capacity.” (Sida project annual progress Report, Asia).
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50 The hybridization process required the renegotiation of boundaries with internal managers and
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52 experts as well as external actors such as development partner organizations, governments, and donors
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54 in the service network. The blurring of boundaries between actors and organizations implied a need for
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56 new boundary management strategies, and potentially shifting roles. As one SSGO interviewee stated
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58 about their unique characteristics of SSGO and the interdependency of hybridization in boundary
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60 negotiations,

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3 “I think Sida sometimes sees us as any other service provider, a private entity, or an
4 NGO. It doesn't really matter. We are treated in the same way. But to me it is a bit of a
5 difference because we can work more closely together as sister organizations. We are
6 public servants after all. So we should have sort of the same approach to this kind of
7 work” (Interviewee 13)
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12 Effective negotiation and collaboration between SGAs and actors in the network required
13 effective communication, transparency, and accountability, where trust-building played an important
14 role, as one SSGO informant suggested,
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20 “We do engage with other development actors in the country. Sometimes we do things
21 together like they send their experts and we send our experts on the same field missions.
22 But they cannot disclose certain documents while we need to actually know what they
23 are doing. It's a matter of building trust.” (Interviewee 4)
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28 The lack of formal referencing in the institutional environment for hybridization underscored
29 the role of individual's agency in hampering or fostering innovation and creativity in organizational and
30 professional changes. The study suggested the path-generating or path-dependent negotiation potential
31 in a decentralized and flexible institutional environment, as illustrated in this quote from one project
32 manager, “We don't have a standard job description but there's nothing that limits me to do more. Some
33 people do as little as possible while others are very engaging. We are individuals in the end of the day,
34 even in the embassies”. (Interviewee 4).
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43 In conclusion, the study found that effective negotiation and collaboration between different
44 actors in the service network were essential in SSGOs' hybridization for meeting poverty reduction and
45 sustainable development objectives.
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52 **5. Discussion**

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55 The present research seeks a multi-level understanding of the drivers and dynamics of
56 hybridization in public service-providing organizations in the complex IDC policy network which has
57 globally relevance to achieving Agenda 2030. Specifically, it focuses on the institutional pressures and
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3 resource dependencies constituting multiple coexisting and conflicting institutional demands between
4 the service-providers and their stakeholders in the network. Consistent with the extant hybridization
5 literature in public administration (Denis et al., 2015; Fossetøl et al., 2015; Skelcher & Smith, 2015),
6 the case study establishes the increasing prevalence yet fragility of hybridization in public
7 organizations. The findings clearly repudiate their claims that hybridization is a complex and evolving
8 process, contingent of a range of internal and external factors. The case study highlights the different
9 sources of institutional pressures and drivers of hybridization, and the need for organizations to adapt
10 to changing institutional environments and respond to diverse stakeholder demands (Denis et al., 2015).
11 The importance of social and political skills as well as coordination mechanisms that the case study
12 highlights is consistent with the IDC literature to ensure effective sustainability outcomes of the policy
13 field (Savage, 2013; OECD, 2019; Sawadogo, Sané & Kaboré 2022).

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27 Moreover, the study emphasizes the opportunities and challenges associated with hybridization,
28 such as improved responsiveness to stakeholder needs and potential tensions between different actors.
29 This is in line with the literature on the management of multiple identities and roles in hybrid
30 organizations. The study's findings on the importance of boundary dynamics and negotiations in
31 shaping the hybridization process also align with the development of hybrid professionalism in the
32 context of frontline managers and public reform (Breit et al., 2022; Giacomelli, 2020; Nederhand et al.,
33 2019) to understand power dynamics, navigate various stakeholder expectations, build trust, find
34 common ground and align professional practices with desirable organizational objectives. While the
35 present study and the extant literature (e.g., Perkmann, Phillips & Greenwood, 2022) both highlight the
36 role of individual actors in shaping hybridization, the present study takes a broader network perspective
37 on the unique, context-contingent and historically imprinted characteristics of actor-network dynamics
38 in shaping the hybridization process.

5.1. *Theoretical contributions*

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58 This study makes, at least, two main theoretical contributions to the literature.
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Firstly, the multi-level analysis of the study contributes to the growing body of literature on public administration and governance for the SDGs by exploring the hybridization process in underexplored public-service organizations in the SDG-relevant policy field of IDC. The study shows that hybrid organizations, with their unique cross-boundary dynamics, have the potential to effectively address the interconnected public administration and governance challenges of implementing mission-oriented public policy ambitions. This finding emphasizes the importance for a broader and multi-level understanding of the institutional environments of public administration and governance reforms as a shared responsibility across public, private, and civil society sectors with implications on hybrid organizational and professional practice. In line with Meuleman (2021) who proposes a “metagovernance” approach for the SDGs, where understanding different public administration and governance cultures across levels is needed to navigate the complex and interlinked nature of public services needed to achieve the goals.

The present study demonstrates the importance of a similar metagovernance approach to support hybridization, flexibility and creativity of different sectors to collaboratively address SDG-related and other complex and interconnected challenges. In the context of IDC, the multi-level focus helps to analyze how service-providers navigate conflicting institutional pressures and their blurred traditional boundaries to transition into hybrid organizational and professional practice. The study aligns with the existing hybridization literature to suggest that in the IDC policy contexts hybridization can occur at various levels, from individual frontline staff adapting their professional practices to the integration of organizational cultures and administrative procedures for more effective IDC services and outcomes (OECD, 2019; Savage, 2013; Sawadogo, Sané & Kaboré, 2022).

Secondly, the study contributes to how the role of context in the hybridization of public organizations in complex public policy networks as IDC can be better understood by drawing on actor-network and open-polity theoretical perspective. This perspectives helps to conceptualize hybridization as a dynamic, multi-faceted and ongoing process that involves the formation and transformation of relationships and networks between actors. The combined perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of hybridization as a dynamic process involving actors, networks, power dynamics, and

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3 context, which deepens our knowledge of specific conditions and contingencies enabling or hindering
4 organizational change and adaptation in the face of institutional complexity (Denis et al., 2015; Waeger
5 & Weber, 2019). This integrated approach allows the research to delve deeper into the complex and
6 dynamic nature of hybridization and examine the underlying mechanisms that explain why hybrid
7 structures may not always lead to hybrid practices (Gulbrandsen et al., 2015) or vice versa (Waring,
8 2015), by illuminating the role of autonomous actors in the hybridization process and the impact of
9 power dynamics on the formation and transformation of relationships and networks among these actors.

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19 In addition, this perspective is crucial in IDC, as political factors and power imbalances play a
20 significant role in shaping the relationships among stakeholders and in determining the success or
21 failure of development initiatives. Moreover, by situating hybrid organizations within their broader
22 institutional context, the study can explore how external pressures, norms, and expectations shape the
23 process of hybridization and the subsequent practices that emerge. Furthermore, this integrated
24 approach acknowledges the agency of individual actors and their capacity to influence the development
25 and outcomes of hybrid organizations. It reveals how these actors can navigate institutional complexity,
26 negotiate conflicting logics, and respond to shifting power dynamics. This understanding contributes to
27 a more nuanced and comprehensive explanation of the diverse outcomes and practices that can emerge
28 from hybrid structures, helping to demystify the “black box” in hybridity research and advancing our
29 knowledge of organizational and professional practice change.

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42 Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on hybridization in public organizations
43 by providing insights into the dynamics and effects of hybridization in the specific context of IDC. It
44 provides a nuanced understanding the complex interplay between different actors, sectors, and
45 organizational characteristics that shape the hybridization process.

52 53 ***5.2. Practical implications***

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56 The findings of this study have two main practical implications for policy-makers and
57 practitioners involved in complex policy networks associated with and beyond IDC.

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Firstly, policy-makers should recognize the potential of hybrid organizations involved in policy implementation and their institutional context in enabling and hindering hybridization. They should create administrative structures and regulatory frameworks that enable boundary negotiations and provide adequate institutional support and resources to manage the challenges and opportunities of hybridization.

Secondly, hybrid service-providers need to recognize their unique institutional characteristics for hybridization, and develop effective negotiation and collaboration processes, tools and skills to manage their specific boundary dynamics and negotiate diverse stakeholder expectations. They should invest in leadership development, communication, transparency, and accountability and adopt new worksets that embrace experimentation, continuous learning, and adaptation, as well as develop frontline managers and staff social, political and culturally-sensitive skillsets and mindsets that cultivate a sense of agency, value collaboration, innovation, open communication, and shared responsibility and decision-making. These new worksets, mindsets and skillsets should enable service-recipients to engage actively in boundary negotiations of their service design, implementation and evaluation to ensure that their needs and expectations are met.

5.3. Limitations of the study and future research recommendations

This study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. Firstly, the generalizability of the findings is limited due to its focus on the Swedish government's IDC setting and experiences of governmental service-providers. The sample is small and specific, representing only actors serving in particular areas of the SDGs. The findings may not be generalizable to other policy contexts, organizational fields, or different IDC service categories.

Secondly, the study mainly relies on interviewee data, which, despite triangulation and validation efforts, might not fully reflect the 'hybrid universe' of the organizations. Future research can address these limitations by broadening the sample of organizations and employing various methods, such as quantitative analyses, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of hybridization

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3 processes. Moreover, to address the potential loss of depth and rigor in multi-level analyses, future
4 studies could delve further into the significance of sectoral characteristics and further adopt the actor-
5 network perspective to examine hybridization dynamics across different sectors and contexts, including
6 first-hand service-receiving perspectives.
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12 Additionally, future research could investigate the impact of hybridization or the effectiveness
13 of different hybridization strategies on organizational and professional performance, and the
14 achievement of SDGs, with a focus on the link between the 16th and the 17th goals. Exploring the
15 effects of collaborative approaches, such as co-creation and co-design, on innovation and learning in
16 international development cooperation could also provide valuable insights.
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23 In summary, future research should build on these findings to develop a more comprehensive
24 understanding of hybridization processes in public organizations, and identify effective strategies and
25 models for enhancing innovation and learning in the pursuit of SDGs, particularly at the intersections
26 between the 16th and the 17th goals.
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32 **6. Conclusion**

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34 Today's complex sustainability challenges call for integrative, innovative, pragmatic and
35 context-sensitive public administration and governance reforms and strategic choices (Torfing et al.,
36 2020). Hybridization has emerged as both an inevitable result of and catalysts in this evolving context
37 not just in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012) but also in public sector (Denis
38 et al., 2015). This study drawing on the Swedish case in the donor-driven IDC policy network
39 demonstrates the politics, potentials and pitfalls of autonomous frontline service organizations in
40 contributing to mission-oriented services for creating a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future.
41 However, this would require both internal and concerted efforts in the policy network to adapt to diverse
42 tasks, political ambitions, organizational and professional cultures beyond political, institutional and
43 mental silos (Meuleman, 2021).
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Disclosure statement

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3 The author declared no potential competing interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or
4 publication of this article.
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For Peer Review

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Appendix A

Table 1. Interviewees

Interviewee	Role categories	Gender	Organization	Project/focus
1	Project manager	Male	ALPHA	Albania, Cambodia, Kosovo
2	Project manager	Male	ALPHA	Balkans, Somalia
3	Project manager	Female	ALPHA	Balkans, Cambodia, Mali
4	Senior manager	Male	ALPHA	Overarching
5	Project manager	Male	ALPHA	Albania, Kenya
6	Project manager	Female	BETA	Belarus, Macedonia, Serbia
7	Project manager/Short-term expert	Male	BETA	Eastern Africa
8	Senior manager	Male	BETA	Overarching
9	Project manager/Long-term expert	Male	BETA	Rwanda
10	Project manager	Female	GAMMA	Global
11	Project manager	Male	GAMMA	Global
12	Sida focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	BETA
13	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	Other SSGO
14	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	SSGO network
15	Sida focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	Other SSGOs
16	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	Other SSGOs
17	Sida focal point	Female	Sida headquarters	BETA & GAMMA
18	Sida focal point	Male	Sida headquarters	ALPHA, BETA, other SSGOs
19	Sida senior manager	Female	Sida headquarters	All IDC service-providers
20	Embassy focal point	Female	Swedish embassy	ALPHA
21	Embassy focal point	Male	Swedish embassy	ALPHA, other SSGOs
22	Embassy focal point	Female	Swedish embassy	ALPHA, other SSGOs
23	Long-term advisor	Male	ALPHA	Kenya
24	Long-term advisor	Female	GAMMA	Global
25	Short-term expert	Female	ALPHA	Organizational focus
26	Short-term expert	Female	ALPHA	Technical focus
27	Short-term expert	Female	ALPHA	Technical focus
28	Short-term expert	Male	ALPHA	Technical focus
29	Short-term expert	Male	BETA	Technical focus
30	Short-term expert	Male	BETA	Technical focus
31	Short-term expert	Male	BETA	Technical focus
32	Short-term expert	Male	BETA	Policy focus
33	Short-term expert	Female	GAMMA	Technical focus

Appendix B

Table 2. Archival documents (30) included in the study

Type	Source (Quantity)
<i>General/strategic documents about SSGOs' work in general</i>	
The new government capacity development strategies	Sida (1)
Facts and figures about the SSGOs involved in the 2018-2019 funding period and basic information about their ongoing projects (e.g. themes, timeline, budget, and countries of operation).	Sida (1)
Capacity development manual and guidelines (for all grantees)	Sida (2)
Sida annual report 2018	Sida (1)
SSGOs inputs to Sida annual report	Bravo (1)
Meta SSGOs-related evaluation reports/studies	Sida (2)
<i>Project documents from the three SSGOs</i>	
Project proposals	SSGOs (6)/embassy (1)
Partnership agreements	SSGOs (4)/embassy (1)
Fact-finding missions reports	SSGOs (2)
Concept notes	SSGOs (1)
Monitoring and evaluation reports	SSGOs (5)/embassy (2)