

# Exploring the Variety of Social Innovation Strategies: Case Studies from Thailand and Taiwan

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## Abstract

There is widespread agreement among theorists of social innovation that the term encompasses both a product dimension to serve social needs, as well as a process dimension leading to the empowerment of vulnerable groups in society. This definition allows for a number of innovation strategies employed by social enterprises that fulfill these requirements. In this paper we will illustrate how these philosophical premises determine divergent conceptions of the product, process, and empowerment dimensions. Building on seven case studies of social enterprises in Thailand and Taiwan pursuing different social innovation approaches will show that it can be understood as either empowerment of a local community or as systemic change by achieving scale. Both understandings have repercussions on how products and processes are understood across different social innovation approaches. By contrasting the manifestations of these defining features across the social innovation approaches we will attempt to construct a comparative framework in order to understand the relationship between strategic choice and type of impact.

**Keywords:** Social Innovation · Case Studies · Thailand · Taiwan · Types of social innovation.

## **Introduction**

When it comes to delineating their research object theorists of social innovation (SI) seem to be in a favorable position as compared to their peers in the field of social entrepreneurship: There is to date widespread disagreement among social entrepreneurship scholars regarding a unifying definition of social enterprise. Following Jacques Defourny and Marthe Nyssens (2016) the search for such a universal definition may even be a counterproductive endeavor as they argue that none of these descriptions is likely to do justice to the diversity of social enterprise types around the world. This is not necessarily the case for the study of SI. Here, it is conceivable that in time different authors converge over a generally accepted definition. Currently, a large number of authors appears to agree that SI involves three defining characteristics, namely that it is a product/service, consists of a process, and is empowering (BEPA 2010: 33; Harrison et al. 2010: 207; The Young Foundation 2012; Moulaert et al. 2013; Sabato et al. 2015; Komatsu et al. 2016: 319).

In the US the Stanford Social Innovation Review offers a similar understanding (see Phills et al. 2008: 36/37) and the authors go on to point out that a main reason for the relative clarity of the nature of SI (as opposed to social entrepreneurship) is due to clearly delineated SI strategies and methods employed for a social goal. SI thus encompasses different approaches, which include strategic choices and combinations of a limited number of methods. Since there are different types of SI, each featuring a product-, process-, and empowerment dimension, we are now confronted with a consecutive challenge (see also Fuge & Agogino 2014): How do actors of social innovation, such as social enterprises, choose among competing approaches available? Is there something like one best approach, or is the choice of methodology contingent on a specific enterprise type/focus area?

We argue that actors and organizations already make choices in how they frame the product, process, and empowerment dimensions. Before we can determine whether certain types of social challenges call for distinct approaches, we thus need to be clear about existing conceptualizations of the SI dimensions, since they determine how social impact is understood in the first place. The types of impact we distinguish are firstly, empowerment of a local community and

secondly, (spatial) scope of impact. In order to achieve either of these two objectives different SI strategies are structured in distinct ways. We will attempt to capture these structural characteristics of different approaches by using the three SI dimensions as summarized by the Young Foundation, namely consisting of “product (meeting social needs), process (improving relationships and capabilities or using assets and resources in a new way) and empowerment dimensions (enhancing society’s capacity to act)” (2012: 18). Using these dimensions, we will highlight critical differences among the various processes and thereby construct a comparative framework which illustrates how organizations design their strategy consistent with the type of impact they wish to achieve. To fulfill this function our framework needs to be inclusive of elements which capture essential differences between the approaches. We will therefore need to show that the three dimensions identified by the Young Foundation satisfy this requirement.

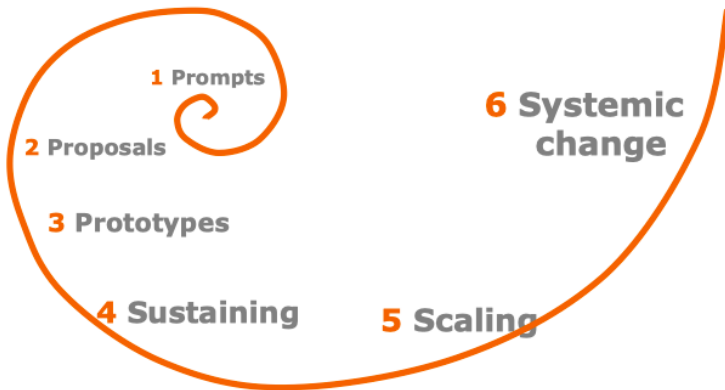
We will start doing so by reviewing contemporary SI classification systems suggested by other authors so far (section 1). Building on this discussion we will elaborate our framework by contrasting four approaches to social innovation using seven case studies from Thailand and Taiwan in order to illustrate how these strategies are being applied in the real world and how they manifest each dimension in practice. These case studies are not meant to be representative of all empirical initiatives making use of these strategies; we do believe, however, that they illustrate discreet manifestations of the interplay of the three defining variables oriented towards a certain understanding of social impact. What our findings offer for SI actors is conceptual clarity about the choice of project designs and types of desired social impact. We will proceed to present our model and hypotheses in section three. The final section will summarize our findings.

### **Social Innovation: Process and Types**

SI projects usually occur in place-based contexts, but with an aim that from the beginning transcends the local community. The motivation from the outset, according to the literature (see Mulgan 2007; Young 2012: 41, Haxeltine et al. 2016: 2), is to find a solution to a systemic problem. The solution is a product or service which is “scalable” (Westley & Antadze 2010), meaning that it can be tested success-

fully in one community and then disseminated to serve communities facing comparable issues. Therefore, the choice of the location in which a product prototype is developed matters (Smith & Leith 2014: 16): Communities that are representative of a systemic issue may help accelerate the impact of a social innovation, whereas communities that face unique issues, and thus call for specialized solutions, may impede its marketability and potential reach. Thus, the motivation to effect “systemic change” characterizes the SI process from the very beginning (see figure 1).

[Figure 1: The Process of SI]



Source: The Young Foundation (2012: 34)

Any attempt at classifying SI approaches must therefore take this variety of strategies into account. Some authors, such as the Young Foundation (2012) and Komatsu et al. (2016) have done so by highlighting a certain encompassing element which manifests differently across divergent SI practices: The Young Foundation, for instance, suggests a typology of SIs around what is new about them, namely new products, new services, new process, new markets etc. (2012: 24/25). The foundation does not explicitly refer to its SI definition (including the product, process, and empowerment dimensions) in outlining this typology, but most examples they use fall into the product domain. Komatsu et al. (2016), on the other hand, outline

“SI business models” (2016: 336): They look at different ways of how social value is created, namely through engagement of the target group in the creation of commercial value, by selling social value to the target group, or by involving the community in the innovation process. What both frameworks have in common is that they largely focus on outputs and outcomes, rather than processes.

In the field of social design some writers distinguish between types of SI processes. There have been attempts, for instance, to determine different levels of target group participation, ranging from expert-driven projects towards participatory co-design (Thorpe & Gamman 2011; Manzini 2014; Campbell 2017). Whereas most authors use participation criteria which are independent of underlying SI methodologies, Angus Campbell clearly distinguishes between two main methodological orientations, namely needs-based approaches and asset-based approaches. “Ideal-type” strategies in the former category are top-down and expert-led, outside experts in asset-based community development merely act as facilitators of a development process, and all substantial decisions are negotiated by community members themselves. Campbell moreover notes that asset-based community development starts from a premise, which is completely opposed to conventional SI approaches: Instead of identifying a central issue requiring a solution, the asset-based process starts with identifying local resources and skills which become building blocks in an open-ended development process (Campbell 2017: 46/47). Thus, asset-based community development does not merely involve members of the target group as co-innovators but offers a depiction of the target group as a resourceful community, which in itself is empowering. Campbell therefore points to a fundamental distinction between “needs-based” projects (focusing on a need to be met) and “asset-based” projects (building on existing local assets). This distinction thus not only implies different levels of empowerment, but also fundamental differences in what the SI process is about with repercussions on the product dimension in SI projects: In one case the product at the end of the innovation process respond directly to a central problem, whereas in the other it is a byproduct of a community-building process.

In our view a basic categorization of SI strategies into asset-based and needs-based processes as suggested by Campbell broadens our discussion of SI typologies by providing space for projects which

traverse the problem orientation in conventional SI approaches: The difference between them lies not so much in methods used throughout the process, but they differ in their basic philosophical views in how sustainable social change can be achieved. The advantage of constructing a comparative framework which includes the asset-based-/needs-based distinction as a fundamental form of classification is thus its encompassing nature: Instead of focusing on single variables (i.e. area of novelty, products, and business models), the framework functions as an underlying structuring device, determining the manifestations of variables such as inclusion of beneficiaries, types of enterprises, and types of products.

In the following section we introduce different strategies which can be aligned within the asset-based-/needs-based continuum. We will first introduce needs-based approaches, including human-centered design, Creative Capacity Building, and Participatory Rural Appraisal. Although all these strategies are essentially oriented towards solving social issues, each provides a different framing of these issues and consequently distinct perspectives on how to deliver solutions. We will make these theoretical perspectives explicit in order to understand the designs of the development processes as well as possible project outputs and outcomes. These designs and outcomes will then be captured by using the defining elements of SI following the Young Foundation, namely product-, process-, and empowerment dimension. The way these three elements manifest themselves across the approaches will be illustrated by providing seven case studies developed through original research by the authors, including interviews with key respondents and review of project reports.

### **Developing a Framework: Review of SI Strategies in Theory and Practice**

Human-centered design (HCD) based on the premise that clients are not consciously aware of their actual needs and it is therefore the job of the designer to deduce these needs through observation of the client's behaviors (Brown 2009: 41; Giacomini 2014: 610).

HCD starts out with an exploration of the lived experience of users through methods such as body language analysis, shadowing, and customer journeys to explore their non-verbal behaviors. At later

stages it involves idea generation methods (e.g. co-design and mash-ups) and prototypes (e.g. storyboards) to arrive at creative solutions (see Giacomini 2014: 616; IDEO 2015).

In our paper the HCD approach is illustrated by the examples of Agrigaia Social Enterprise and OurCityLove Social Enterprise. Both businesses are based in Taiwan and the authors of this paper have interviewed their founders during a 3-months research visit to Taiwan in late 2018. Agrigaia and OurCityLove aim to disseminate technological solutions to solve a complex set of issues within a certain field. Agrigaia focuses on issues in the Taiwanese agricultural sector, which include aging farmers, unstable market prices, and ecological issues due to the use of fertilizer and pesticides (personal interview on 21 September 2018). This biomimicry technology transports water and organic fertilizer directly to the roots of the plants, which prevents the growth of weed and saves water at the same time. This innovation is part of a whole set of solutions, including greenhouse designs for tropical regions, as well as contract farming, in order to combat the various issues faced by farmers in a systemic manner.

OurCityLove Social Enterprise was established in 2014 with the aim to alleviate challenges encountered by people with limited mobility, which include elderly and disabled people (OurCityLove 2018). Similar to Agrigaia, OurCityLove pursues a systemic approach instead of relying on a single innovation: The enterprise has created apps, for instance, to help people with disabilities identify accessible public services. The “Friendly Restaurant Guide App,” for instance, helps the clients to identify accessible restaurants, whereas the “Friendly Hotel” website does the same for hotels. “Friendly driver” taxis operate a wheelchair accessible car, co-designed by OurCityLove’s founder. The solutions which both enterprises offer are standardized services which are suitable for scaling. Agrigaia, for example, markets its products for countries in tropical regions and is currently exploring collaboration with a social enterprise in the Philippines. OurCityLove currently offers its services in Hong Kong, China, and Malaysia.

The central aim underlying the next SI approach treated here, Creative Capacity Building (CCB), is to design technology solutions together with members of a community. Not only will local people thereby be enabled to recreate these technologies, but all involved are encouraged to openly share these solutions with communities else-

where. The objectives of CCB can thus be captured by terms such as “do-it-yourself culture, open-source sharing”, “democratization of technology”, and “grassroots innovation” (Waldman-Brown et al. 2016). CCB is represented by our second case study located in Sisaket province, northeastern Thailand, where an international team of social entrepreneurs and practitioners engaged local farming households in an International Development Design Summit (IDDS) in 2017. The design team consisted of organizers from two Thailand-based social businesses and an international group of practitioners associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The data about the IDDS in Sisaket is based on research reports as well as an interview with a co-organizer on 11 August 2017.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) are often used synonymously and together form the third SI approach discussed in this paper. According to Robert Chambers, a key advocate of participatory approaches, PRA/PLA is based on the idea that the people for whom data is traditionally collected could actually be recognized as legitimate “knowers” (Chambers 2008; also Bottomley 1997), who themselves participate in the development processes including planning, implementation and monitoring, and gradually transform their own conditions and social challenges. Outsiders act as facilitators and effectively hand over control to the insiders for collective analysis and learning.

Two community development initiatives are used to illustrate the application of this SI approach. The Thai NGO Pattanarak Foundation, for instance, has since 2007 initiated a savings group network in ethnic Mon and Karen communities in Kanchanaburi province. These migrant communities had originally migrated to Thailand from neighboring Myanmar in the early 2000s. Following a PRA process exploring local livelihood issues the NGO’s leader, Seri Thongmak, sought to convince the Mon and Karen groups to establish saving groups, because he believed these to be the most sustainable solution for community empowerment. The Kayan Community Development Services (KCDS; since 2014) is a grassroots NGO with leaders from Kayan communities in Myanmar and Northern Thailand. The NGO provides educational services to members of the ethnic group. Besides, KCDS runs several projects that focus on restoring unity and pride among Kayan people, developing and improving access to resources



in their region, and celebrating Kayan traditional culture. It runs an 18 months long “Financial Literacy Training” project with the goal to improve financial understanding and management skills and to provide job-related training to help improve household income in Myanmar and northern Thailand (KCDS 2014a). Under the project KCDS provides interest free small credit loans to the project participants as a starter for their small business. Whereas information on the work of the Pattanarak Foundation has been gathered in the course of an extensive research project in 2016/2017, KCDS has made available progress reports about its educational programs for the purposes of this study.

Asset-based community development (ABCD), finally, focuses on the (tangible and intangible) assets, priorities, and aspirations of disadvantaged communities (see McKnight & Kretzmann 1996; Mathie & Cunningham 2003). This focus informs an open-ended research process with the objective to improve social practice and work towards positive change (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003: 13). Same as with PRA/PLA the role of outside researchers is that of facilitators of a community-led process. Our case studies for illustrating ABCD processes are the Inpaeng Network in Northeastern Thailand, as well as the cooperative Chewa Withi in Northern Thailand.

Inpaeng was initiated following an ethnographic study of a Bachelor student in the mid-80s in a village in Sakon Nakhon province (located about 600 kilometres northeast of Bangkok), who since has become a community member. Based on his research findings on local culture and traditional resources the student joined with a small group of alternative farmers in order to identify ways of how these resources could help solve local livelihood issues such as rising debt levels through reliance on cash crops (see Rattana et al. 2005: 12). In contrast to most villagers, the group of alternative farmers changed their economic activities towards utilizing local resources to become independent of outside buyers. They have sought to maintain traditional farming skills and biodiversity, adapting this knowledge to improving their lives. The group has attracted like-minded farmers from different locations over the years and Inpaeng is currently present in five northeastern provinces.

Chewa Withi is a cooperative owned by its workers, 721 people in total, who are all from Nam Kiang subdistrict in Nan province.

It was established in the late 1990s with the objective to reduce the use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides and to earn its workers additional income. People in Nam Kiang have extensive knowledge of the use of local herbs, including of how to process them into soap and shampoo. The founders of Chewa Withi turned this traditional knowledge into business opportunities. The cooperative's core business is herbal cosmetics products for hair face, and the body, but has also ventured into herbal tea and traditional weaving products. The data on the Chewa Withi cooperative used for this study is based on two visits to the cooperative and an interview with two managers in June 2019.

### **Product Dimension**

All projects in our study result in products and services. However, these products and services are the visible manifestations of distinct objectives which become apparent if we look at the theoretical approaches underlying the cases. Among our case studies the activities of Agrigaia and OurCityLove are closest to the textbook understanding of SI, as they provide products and services that either directly empower their target group or alleviates their problems. The founder of OurCityLove realized that people with disabilities face multiple limitations in the public space, including travel arrangements. Their quality of life has been deeply impacted as they struggled to identify accessible transport, lodging, and restaurant services. At the same time, hotels and restaurants which had made investments in providing accessible facilities have had difficulties to reach people with disabilities as customers. OurCityLove thus not only empowers its beneficiaries by enabling them to make use of recreational and mobility opportunities, but also helps businesses to access this type of customer. The enterprise thus provides B2B2C (business-to-business-to-customer) services (personal interview on 4 November 2018). Agrigaia on the other hand, offers products and services which aim to alleviate the issues related to farming: Its underground irrigation system is a cost-effective way to cultivate fruits and vegetables, and in combination with its greenhouse technology also makes the use of pesticides and herbicides unnecessary. Agrigaia staff moreover trains farmers in organic agriculture and offers them a contract with guaranteed prices and markets, which likewise reduces the pressure for farmers to identify these opportunities themselves. Instead, they can focus on their

core profession, which is farming.

The Pattanarak Foundation and KCDS understand their services as tools for the empowerment of disadvantaged groups. According to Seri Thongmak, the former executive director of Pattanarak, saving groups foster management skills, financial independence, and mutual trust, which are a basis for long-term development (see Seri n.d.). Likewise, KCDS views its educational services, such as its financial literacy training, as a way to improve the targeted communities' overall economic situation and to promote women's empowerment (KCDS 2014a). The Inpaeng Network and Chewa Withi, finally, aim to empower villagers by grounding the local economy on the basis of local strengths. Inpaeng activities are especially far-reaching in this regard as these transform the local economies through integrated farming, reforestation activities, running cooperative businesses, and saving groups (see Rado 2013).

In sum, most SIs include concrete products and services, but these are part of different objectives, which meet social needs in varying ways. In HCD these objectives are relatively narrowly defined: The services offered directly reflect the SI objective of empowerment through better income opportunities or enhancing the quality of life. As such, HCD bears the closest resemblance to the idea that SIs result in products or services satisfying a specific need. The IDDS in Sisaket, on the other hand, results in products for skill-training. In this way it features a combination of elements which makes it unique among the approaches discussed here: On the one hand it involves a direct correspondence between a central issue and a solution targeting that clearly defined issue (which is typical of commercially oriented SI approaches such as HCD). At the same time, it is highly empowerment-oriented, which is a feature CCB shares with the community development strategies discussed below.

In the case of the participatory community development processes the services offered by both Pattanarak and KCDS are embedded in a more general objective: They play an instrumental part in the broadly defined objectives of financial independence and improvement of living standards. The activities of the Inpaeng network and Chewa Withi, finally, are likewise part of a broader objective, i.e. the transformation of economic systems. Here, products and services can take a variety of forms since they reflect local characteristics rather than

a defined problem. It is foremost the HCD and CCB approaches, which feature a close connection between products and social objective. Since products and services differ in terms of their significance across the approaches, we believe that the underlying social missions are more informative as distinguishing features between different types of SI than products they result in, because products are meaningful in different ways across the approaches: They are the solution in HCD, whereas in CCB the solution consists in the ability to manufacture products. In PRA/PLA services enable self-determined economic activity, whereas in ABCD products are manifestations of community strengths.

### **Process Dimension**

Agrigaia, OurCityLove, and IDDS provide empirical examples closely resembling the SI process in figure one. Both Taiwanese social enterprises respond to a societal issue, but communicate their motivation to help through personal stories. Accordingly, Chong-Wey Lin, the founder of OurCityLove became aware of how decreasing mobility leads to social isolation by observing his grandmother's gradual withdrawal from social life (personal communication on 4 November 2018). The founder of Agrigaia has a medical degree, and was hence inspired by his knowledge of the human anatomy to develop the underground irrigation system. He developed and tested the prototype for three years before creating a social enterprise to bring the innovation to the market.

IDDS is illustrative of the connection between product development and scaling in many SI projects: The objective transcends the immediate geographical context. Local participation in the co-creation process is therefore not vital for the project to move forward, even though it is sought after. For participatory development projects as undertaken by Pattanarak, KCDS, Inpaeng, and Chewa Withi the situation is very different: These are usually focused on the empowerment of place-based target groups, which means that a lack of participation will result in project failure. The Pattanarak Foundation, for example, has applied PRA (see Chambers 1994) in the process of establishing savings groups in Kanchanaburi province. As in HCD, PRA projects commence with the identification of a problem area or specific motivation. Once this thematic field is established, members

of the local community carry out most of the research and data analysis in exploring the area of interest, whereas outsiders act as facilitators.

In the example of Pattanarak most NGO members are themselves from the local target population. They spent two years exploring community livelihoods and problems. From the beginning the NGO sought to convince locals to institute savings groups: The Pattanarak team therefore investigated prevalent attitudes towards the idea and pointed out the advantages of establishing savings groups. In 2007 finally, the first savings group was created and other districts followed during the next decade. Today there are six groups with more than 1,000 members in total (personal communication, 7 September 2016). Pattanarak's objective is for all groups to become fully independent. Being a community-led organization KCDS likewise uses local experience and knowledge as the starting point for its skill training projects. The team thus already shares a deep understanding of local livelihoods and development issues. Prior to establishing the financial literacy training, for instance, KCDS complemented this knowledge through a PLA process, conducting interviews in Kayan villages in Myanmar and northern Thailand. The community organization then implemented the project by providing training to ethnic Kayan from different villages in Mae Hong Son province in 2014. The training participants then returned to their communities in their home villages around the Thai-Myanmar border to run financial literacy workshops providing training in budgeting, financial planning, and business management skills (KCDS 2014b).

The Inpaeng Network and Chewa Withi resemble KCDS insofar as they are community-driven initiatives with broadly defined empowerment objectives. At the same time their approach is fundamentally distinct from all SI processes discussed above. In HCD and PRA/PLA the process is organized around a central issue, which limits the project scope to some degree. The ABCD strategy, on the other hand, is an open-ended approach. When the Inpaeng Network started its activities in the 1980s local problems included household indebtedness and biodiversity degradation in northeastern Thailand. As for Chewa Withi the main issues in Nam Kiang subdistrict had been drugs and gambling, as well as loss of forest cover. Instead of tackling these problems directly the ABCD strategy entails that community members reorient their livelihood activities towards local strengths and

the sustainable use of local resources (Rado 2013). From the beginning Inpaeng started to map local strengths and resources through ethnographic research, gathering data on local biodiversity, and learning from regional farmers about alternative farming methods. Based on their findings they experimented with new techniques in their own fields and created seed banks. Some members have even grown small forests on their land. Network activities have gradually extended beyond matters of farming and biodiversity conservation into the creation of cooperative enterprises, which process agricultural raw materials. Thus, Inpaeng activities do not target individual problems directly, but instead transform the local context, and with it the development issues that had arisen.

Chewa Withi likewise started as a small initiative and members first produced soap and shampoo from locally available herbs for their own consumption in order to reduce expenditures. Soon the villagers started to form a cooperative business, but it took ten years until it became financially viable. Today, the cooperative has grown into an enterprise selling ten thousand bottles of shampoo per month with both domestic and overseas markets. Its products are therefore sold under two brand names, “Chewa” for the domestic market, and “Chewana” for international buyers.

The Inpaeng network has likewise spread its reach beyond a single village. Today it has members in five provinces in northeastern Thailand. Most member communities are engaged in integrated farming and reforestation activities, but the products they create for sale are as diverse as the skills and natural resources across the network (Rado 2013). This shows that projects emerging from ABCD processes also have the capacity to expand, but what unites member communities is not the use or production of single services, but confidence in local capacities and a certain process of how these resources are to be identified and used. The emphasis on process over product is closely related to another defining aspect of asset-based community development interventions, namely the diminished role of outside experts: In contrast to all other approaches discussed here they are not involved in defining project contents, but instead guide community members through the predefined stages of the process (see Cameron & Gibson 2001; Ashford & Patkar 2001). As is the case in the preceding subsection with regard to the broadening of SI objectives, we can observe a

tendency across the different case studies: Outside experts continue to play a decisive role in the HCD process throughout the project. In the case of PRA/PLA the role of outsiders is already less pronounced: NGO staff defines a problem area at the start of the project but hands it over to members of the local community in subsequent stages. In asset-based approaches the outsiders' role is limited to project facilitation including the design of data gathering stages (see Cameron & Gibson 2001).

### **Empowerment dimension**

The question of what kind of results different SI approaches aim to achieve, as well as what methodologies they employ in the process, can be answered in a relatively straightforward way. Whether a certain SI approach - such as HCD or ABCD - generally fosters empowerment, is to a large extent subject to retrospective analysis, e.g. through impact measurement tools (see Zappalà & Lyons 2009). However, as has been shown in the previous discussion of the product and process dimensions, the empowerment dimension is likewise connected with these two dimensions in distinct ways across the approaches. Thus, an empowerment aspect is intrinsic to the dimension's objective and process.

All case studies in this section aim to foster the active participation of project beneficiaries: OurCityLove social enterprise includes members of the target group as surveyors and consultants, whereas IDDS includes an international community of trainers in the entire co-creation period. Generally, human-centered design manuals advise practitioners to include community members throughout the SI process if possible (see IDEO n.d.: 53). For participatory community development approaches as applied by Pattanarak, KCDS, and Inpaeng the agency of local beneficiaries is a requirement (Chambers 1994: 1254; Pretty et al. 1995: 56/57). All case studies moreover feature objectives, products, and outputs, which likewise foster empowerment, such as income generating activities, skill training, or the revaluation of local resources. Community development schemes such as PRA/PLA and ABCD lack a narrow focus on products and services; here, all stages in the SI process are meant to enhance the capacities of the target population (Chambers 1994: 1265/66). Consequently, the savings groups initiated by Pattanarak and the educational services offered by KCDS

are likewise tools for the broader objective of socio-economic empowerment.

In sum, following the outline of each approach in this section, as well as the manifestation of the product-, process-, and empowerment dimensions in each of them we can now discern how the set of defining elements is aligned in each approach. Projects with a strong product orientation tend to be expert driven, which limits their capacity for community empowerment. However, as noted earlier, this can be seen as a trade-off between local empowerment and scaling impact in favor of the latter. On the other hand, the more participatory an approach is, the more difficult it becomes to disseminate the resulting SI beyond the community. This is especially the case for ABCD, which is the opposite of an issue-based approach. The CCB approach aims to combine both types of empowerment through a strong product-orientation as well as community participation in the SI process. Different CCB projects may vary in how they achieve both objectives: The IDDS in Sisaket province failed to include local participants as had been envisioned initially and therefore resulted in weak community empowerment. The inclusion of international experts in the process of prototyping products is at the same time a strong indicator for the achievement of scale.

### **A comparative framework**

In the previous section we have compared different strategic orientations to SI by highlighting the manifestation of the product, process, and empowerment dimensions in each approach. We have used seven case studies in order to provide empirical examples. Our findings suggest that the theoretical frameworks underlying these empirical examples tend to align the three elements in consistent ways. In this discussion HCD stands for business approaches which are closest to the text-book idea of SI: It is focused on a clearly defined issue with the aim to solve this issue through a product or service. This product-orientation requires expert knowledge, which may impede local participation and empowerment. At the same time the SI may be scalable, which means that this type of approach foregoes intensive (i.e. local) empowerment in favor of extensive (i.e. covering multiple constituencies) impact.



Asset-based approaches are characterized by the opposite strategy: They involve open-ended explorations since the emphasis is on community ownership. This exploration process is community-driven, and products and services that result from this process are manifestations of local agency. However, because these outputs may strongly reflect local particularities, they may not be suitable for diffusion beyond the local context. Here, the intention is to create intensive empowerment, rather than extensive empowerment effects. However, the ABCD process itself can be recreated in other contexts. The remaining SI strategies exhibit characteristics of both asset-based and needs-based approaches: CCB shares with HCD its focus on products to solve a single issue, but combines this with a strong focus on participation. PRA/PLA consistently exhibits in-between manifestations of the product-, process-, and empowerment dimensions.

The discussion thus shows us that the asset-based/needs-based divide can be superimposed on these strategies. As has been shown in our theoretical discussion in section one and illustrated through our case studies in section two we can make a basic distinction between asset-based approaches (here represented by the activities of the Inpaeng network and Chewa Withi) and needs-based approaches. Whereas the nature of objectives, processes, and empowerment vary among the case studies, most examples share a basic orientation in that they are focused towards problems, regardless of whether they are broadly or narrowly defined. The difference between asset-based and needs-based approaches is thus the more fundamental distinction. In summary, we can posit HCD and ABCD on opposing sides of an asset-based/needs-based continuum, whereas the NGO-initiated participatory community initiatives can be found between these extremes (see figure 2).

[Figure 2: An SI Comparative Framework]

SI Dimension	Asset-based		Needs-based
<b>Objective</b>	Integrated	Broadly defined	Specific products/services
<b>Process</b>	Community-driven	Participatory	Expert-driven
<b>Empowerment</b>	Intensive	Scalable	Extensive

On the left side of the table we have arranged the particular manifestations of each element as envisioned in an asset-based process. This approach is contrasted on the right-hand side with elements of a needs-based project. What is notable in the second row of the table is that we have replaced the term product dimension with an objective dimension. As mentioned in section 2.1. products have different meanings according to the objectives underlying different SI strategies. Rather than making a distinction between the significance of products in each approach (e.g. “manifestation of local strengths”, “empowerment tool”, and “solution”), we find the classification according to objectives to be more straightforward and precise. Regarding the third row, OurCityLove does involve its beneficiaries in the design process and, as mentioned, HCD manuals discourage projects solely driven by outside experts (see Peters 2011). However, extreme manifestations of both types need to be considered in order to be inclusive. The middle column in the table is inspired by the applications of PRA/PLA in the previous section.

Each dimension of figure two may roughly exhibit the following manifestations:

**Objectives** range from integrated, unspecified objectives (asset-based) over broad socio-economic objectives (e.g. economic independence) to the delivery of specific products or services to solve a clearly identified problem (needs-based).

**Processes** range from cases in which the target group is the main driver of innovation (asset-based) to cases in which the target group plays no role in the innovation cycle (needs-based); there are different in-between degrees of target group participation, incl. consultation or joint research (see Pretty et al. 1995: 61).

**Empowerment** effects are of two main types: Intensive empowerment refers to enduring changes driven by the target group's own initiatives. Due to an emphasis on people's existing skills and creative capacities, this type of empowerment may lead to changes in various livelihood aspects. Extensive empowerment may also lead to profound changes within the community, but they result from the solution of a central issue. At the same time such solutions have a potential for wider spatial reach. Again, there are in-between types here, which are represented by PRA/PLA.

This preliminary framework is designed to encompass a variety of possible SI approaches. It is not only meant to compare what could be seen as "ideal forms" of SI, but moreover allows for the depiction of SI processes which combine components from both sides of the asset-based/needs-based spectrum: To take an example, we would place the CCB approach in the needs-based column in terms of objective, but in the middle column in terms of process and empowerment. We also believe that this model is broad enough to be inclusive of non-codified, intuitive processes, meaning SI practices, which do not follow any formalized strategy. At the same time, we argue that the framework is specific enough to highlight the relevant differences between different approaches: In section two we have highlighted distinct methods used within each broad approach, but we do not believe that the use of these specific methods in itself presupposes a certain strategic orientation. For instance, commercially oriented entrepreneurs in the tourist sector could employ ABCD or appreciative inquiry methods to identify marketable resources in a community, for instance. In the reverse case, Inpaeng members are using SWOT analysis (which includes weaknesses and threats), when exploring community livelihoods (Rado 2016). However, they do so with a motivation to use local resources, which is an orientation underlying asset-based approach.

Reflecting on possible applications of the above framework, we see its immediate use in conceptual clarity and for practitioners considering a certain type of social impact. Since our framework is based on established strategies developed for use in certain contexts, we can derive from it a set of hypotheses, which require further testing. Our model suggests correspondences between the design of the three defining elements of SI and types of social impact. The model moreover suggests that innovations which are meant to be "owned"

by members of a community require their active participation in its development. Asset-based community development strategies emphasize target group empowerment more than other strategies. We would therefore expect that the manifestations of the three dimensions as shown in the asset-based column would act as predictors for changes in multiple areas of life, including changes in several economic activities. We also expect that the manifestations of the three dimensions on the opposite side of the table generally affect a limited range of life circumstances, but at the same time act as predictors for products with high potential for diffusion. If these assumptions stand up to empirical testing our framework can be developed further to guide projects in achieving successful and sustainable social impact.

Finally, another interesting research agenda emanating from our study is testing the applicability and predictive power of the framework in regards to successful projects which do not follow any codified SI approach: Will such intuitive processes “naturally” align each dimension in a consistent fashion? CCB, for instance, has developed in a trial-and-error process and it does seek to achieve both community empowerment and the achievement of scale (i.e. reproduction of the SI products in other contexts). However, it does so by combining an expert-driven process with a participatory process, meaning that local community members are integrated in a team of international practitioners. Both sets of stakeholders continue the SI in different ways: Community members use it for local empowerment, whereas international practitioners introduce it in other parts of the world.

## **Conclusion**

What we have presented here is a preliminary comparative framework for SIs based on a review of similar attempts by different authors, as well as by use of five SI case studies. Building on the definition of SI by the Young Foundation (2012) our framework includes the objective-, process-, and empowerment dimensions as central features of comparison. The objective dimension is clearly defined in needs-based approaches but increasingly vague the more participatory the SI process is. The process dimension points to the level of target group participation, which tends to increase in community development interventions, and is highest in asset-based projects. The empower-

ment dimension finally, refers to the desired type of impact which the SI process is supposed to yield. There are thus distinct manifestations of each dimension, which can be represented along a continuum of asset-based and needs-based orientations. Thereby we have attempted to create a flexible model which can accommodate the full range of types of SI. This will help in identifying different patterns of processes feasible for various development contexts.

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