

**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AFRICA:
Why Women Can Play a Critical Role**

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship remains an under-developed field in the entrepreneurship literature and African social entrepreneurship is even less researched. Fewer studies still, ever focus on women social entrepreneurship despite the pivotal role women tend to play in social entrepreneurship. In this review, we proposed to start filling that gap by discussing social entrepreneurship in the African context, looking at the critical role women can play in this field. We offered a proposed model of empathy and prosocial motivation leading to identifying stakeholders' issues, which in turn is the fuel for the creation of women-led social enterprises. Also, we offered propositions to be tested, which contextualize women's role in the creation of successful social enterprises: At the core of all social entrepreneurship activity is the desire of social entrepreneurs to bring solutions to problems that would not have been alleviated without the intervention or use of unorthodox or non-governmental methods; our proposition here is that women may just be the perfect agents to spearhead such worthy endeavors.

Key Words: Social entrepreneurship, role of women, African context, solution to social problems

INTRODUCTION

Africa remains behind on many economic and social development indicators and is described as a poor continent. However, it would be incorrect to classify Africa simply as a poor continent as it is rich in natural resources, such as precious stones, but also iron, steel and wood to name but a few of natural endowments Africa boasts. Thus, it is imperative for Africans to take advantage of these natural resources, to take charge, and start working on alleviating societal problems, even on the margin of what governments in Africa may fail to accomplish. This train of thought is the catalyst for advocating in favor of social entrepreneurship in Africa. This discussion will start with a definition of Social Entrepreneurship and why this review chooses Africa to discuss this construct. Second, this review is going to discuss women particular role in this debate, while stressing that theory plays a critical part in elucidating the process through which women may be in a better position than are men to spearhead and sustain social entrepreneurship in the African continent. In explaining these different components, this discussion will offer a model of empathy and prosocial motivation, and the creation of women-led social enterprises, in contributing to alleviate human suffering in Africa.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to add to the debate on social entrepreneurship in Africa by investigating the role of women in social entrepreneurship. Previous research has examined women entrepreneurship in India (e.g., Datta, & Gailey, 2012; Ghani, Kerr, & O'Connell, 2014; Venkatesh, Shaw, Sykes, Macharia & Wamba 2017), Europe (Suárez-Ortega & Gálvez-García, 2017), and Latin America and The Caribbean (e.g., Terjesen & Amorós), among many other countries. Although this area is replete with research conducted in various parts of the world, there is a dearth of research conducted in Africa, specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Even so, women have shown themselves to be at the forefront of social entrepreneurship, even if this has not always been systematically identified as such. In fact, in the African continent women have been engaged in starting ventures with the goal of stepping in where mainstream government led programs have failed to intervene, thus bringing practical solutions to populations. This study is going to the root of this behavior women have exhibited, showing it may not be coincidental and accidental, but theory driven.

In effect, then, if women-led social entrepreneurship is understood in the context of such a clearly defined context, we can start building theory from observing situations in which women have naturally intervened to ease human suffering in the continent. Engaging in this exercise will make it possible, in an inductive manner, to clearly define the construct of women-led social entrepreneurship. From thereupon, we would offer propositions that could become testable hypotheses about social entrepreneurship as led by women action; this, in turn resulting in an empirical framing of this phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989b; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The ultimate objective besides filling the gap on a dearth of theory-driven research on social entrepreneurship (Bielefeld, 2009) should be to encourage financial institutions willing to intervene in African development to recognize the role women have always played in starting social enterprises and as they acknowledge this reality, to back-up this role by offering financing support and incentives whenever it be available and possible, also to women social entrepreneurs. In fact, simply observing daily reality (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2002; Suddaby, 2006) shows that women may be more naturally inclined to engage in social entrepreneurship than are men and such recognition should benefit all parties to this debate, especially financial institutions at the global and African levels, philanthropic donors, local

micro-financing organizations often put in place on the margin of the banking system, which in Africa is not available to many, let alone women; a study of this nature, quite naturally, would also be of interest to those willing to invest on the Continent. As a case in point, China, through multiple actions, such as intervening in many facets of African economies has signaled an increasing interest in investing in Africa (Liang, 2007; Pokam & Hall, 2011). A study of this nature could guide this noteworthy and laudable endeavor from this emerging economic giant, naturally, among many others with the financial means and the will to invest in the African continent.

WHAT IS SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Observe a group led by women who travel from North America; let us say for the sake of argument from the United States or Canada to a country in Africa and deliver beds to a medical center in a certain village. After the trip to the hospital center, they visit various schools in the same village and deliver school supplies. Before heading back to the US or Canada, they visit an orphanage and deliver clothing, shoes, beauty supply and a considerable amount of money to help feed the orphans at that institution. Noteworthy, they set up a micro-training unit in the village by researching in the village, retired professionals who can teach the youth some marketable skills: Such skills could be, again for the sake of argument in the case of young girls, hair grooming, clothes making, professional cuisine and baking, and for young boys, mechanics, micro-farming using modern techniques, and driving.

Furthermore, this group of women offer also to finance these micro-enterprises, in order to start them up, but also indicate to those who will take over the management of these units how to make these sustainable by charging a minimal fee to those trainees who can afford to pay, while also admitting for training those other potential trainees, indigent to the point of not even being

able to pay the fee charged for them to be trained, as minimal as it may be. This example, as fictional as it may sound mirrors the reality of many women group-led initiatives often and regularly put in place in order to benefit needy populations in Africa (Lee, 2008), thus stepping in to intervene in the place of the local governments who often, have failed to deliver to their populations, the minimum acceptable standards of living. And, thus, reading through this example, one can witness women-led social entrepreneurship in action. Social entrepreneurship, born of a recognition of social problems, again, often left unaddressed by local governments seeks, after assessing and recognizing areas of lack in the population, to exploit and offer to the targeted populations, opportunities adding social value (Lepoutre, Justo, & Terjesen, 2013; Perris-Ortiz, Rueda-Armengot, & Palacios-Marques, 2006). In other words, social entrepreneurship, in as much as it may eventually result in economic benefits for both the instigator of the social enterprise and the recipient of this enterprise, has a social motive at its core.

Why Africa

Said differently, the social entrepreneur is different from the economic entrepreneur or other entrepreneurs for that matter in its objective, social in nature, rather than economic or financial only. In other words, when a social entrepreneur identifies an area of concern, usually neglected by local governments and frankly society at large, this individual then engages in an enterprise which often is solely guided or motivated by the desire to do good deeds which will help improve society's condition: In a continent such as Africa, it is common knowledge that governments tend to neglect many segments of their population. In effect, those are the segments most prominent in the common literature on Africa and on the news, and one could argue, rightfully so.

As way of putting things in perspective one should note it is not the whole of Africa which is indigent. In effect, some segments of the African population would have no need for social entrepreneurs, let alone women social entrepreneurs: These are made of individuals, in Africa, and these can be found in every African country, whose annual incomes simply defy imagination. Not surprisingly, no one hears of such individuals on mainstream global media or even in the literature on Africa because portraying such individuals would not be aligned with the image of Africa the media has perpetuated: The myth of a continent so poor that many in that continent cannot afford even a meal per day.

In as much as this is a fictional cliché, though, there do exist segments of populations in the African continent which would, and often do benefit from the welcomed attention of social entrepreneurs. These segments comprise mainly individuals in impoverished villages. Such like individuals have not been able to make it to the economically thriving towns and often lack the bare necessities of life. The government does not seem too eager to address their needs, and observing the livelihood of these individuals would break many a heart. And break hearts, indeed this condition does, especially the hearts of women, who it has been well documented, tend to be more empathetic, due to their emotional nature; and this, in turn, is the catalyst for many women-led social initiatives.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Few would deny the role of emotions in socially-led entrepreneurship (Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009; Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Pieters, 1998; Grant & Berry, 2011; Miller, Grimes, McMullen, & Vogus, 2012). This line of thought provides the back drop for framing women's role in the creation of socially-inspired enterprises as follows:

(1) Emotions and the goal-directed behavior these induce are what drive the actions of many social-entrepreneurs, particularly women, who in engaging in social entrepreneurship, respond to the needs they identify by creating social initiatives or enterprises, thus leading to a resolution of the problems identified. (2) What is recognized as empathy in women is the response of their heart to issues of importance in individuals' lives, individuals with whom women tend to relate, and easily so, even if only because of their intuitive nature, inclining them to paying more attention to the daily realities of those left unattended to by mainstream society. (3) In the same intuitive manner (Renko, 2012), women can just understand what exactly needs to be done in working to alleviate human suffering in those segments of the population which seem nearly non-existent to local administrations, or which these administrations have neglected heavily. (4) Women are simply more prone to contributing to others' welfare, because of their caring and nurturing nature. (5) Pro-social motivation has often been linked to the tendency for one to be more concerned for others than for self as women generally tend to be. (6) Another reason women are the right constituents to engage in social entrepreneurship is the fact that contrary to their male counterpart, women appear to be less enticed by financial success than are men. For this reason, Panel Studies of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED I and PSED II) revealed that women appeared to be more successful at pro-social endeavors than were men. (7) In effect, women believe that when one intends to help, as is often the case when women engage in social-entrepreneurship, failure is only on the radar if that intention is not met: However, once the need is identified and the enterprise is set in motion to fill that need, the said enterprise can only be successful. (8) For this reason, women have no problem with survival bias which more than often refrain men from engaging into social-entrepreneurship, because of women inherent persistence, resilience, and stoicism. If there were ever individuals who could persist and show

determination in the face of challenges it is women: This very characteristic is one of those that make women natural successful social-entrepreneurs. (9) Even if often admitted that entrepreneurs are not born but made, in the case of women, it can be said that women are born social-entrepreneurs: What is left is to give these women a catalyst and a financial push to get to the point where women would succeed in getting Africa to start addressing the needs of its most neglected stakeholders, helping the continent to rise to the level of other more developed nations.

Why Focus On The Role Of Women?

Notwithstanding the frame described above, and besides the tenacity, consistency and determination already mentioned that are natural characteristics women show in their daily endeavors, all qualities needed for successful social-entrepreneurship, there is one other condition which makes it relevant to advocate for the importance of women's contribution in the field of social-entrepreneurship. In order to succeed in social-entrepreneurship, one needs to convince the concerned stakeholders of the usefulness of the proposed venture. In such instances, there are no actors better than women to passionately argue for the practical relevance and projected success of the project the social-enterprise may be seeking to implement, with the purpose of solving clearly identified and real societal problems prevalent in the community, for the benefit of all stakeholders involved.

If one wanted to frame this differently, it could be said that (1) the empathy women naturally show is what engenders in them pro-social motivation; (2) in turn, pro-social motivation leads women to identifying problems in areas which were not targeted by mainstream government programs; (3) this, in turn, results in the creation of women-led social enterprises; (4) since these social enterprises are created to specifically target identified problems, these endeavors result in the resolution of real problems which qualify these as being successful enterprises; (5) success

breeding success, as other players observe the success of the existing social enterprises, other women can only be encouraged to start similar social-enterprises. This scheme leads us to offer the following proposed model of empathy, prosocial motivation, and women-led social enterprises which has been described above, and graphically looks as follows:

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This model depicts the following propositions:

P1: Empathy drives prosocial motivation

P2: Prosocial motivation leads to identifying stakeholders' issues, not targeted by government-led programs

P3: Identification of stakeholder's issues leads to the creation of women-led social enterprises

P4: Creation of women-led social enterprises results in the resolution of societal problems targeted

P5: Resolution of societal problems leads to framing of women-led social enterprises as successful

P6: Successful outcomes of those women-led enterprises will result in expanded creation of women-led social enterprises also targeted at solving identified problems.

As most observed, with women, it usually is “do or do.” Women, for good or bad, have mastered the art of “*jusqu'aboutisme*,” French expression which translates the determination to stay one's course to the bitter or sweet end regardless of the difficulty and challenges one may encounter. Armed with the conviction that social entrepreneurship solves societal problems while adding value to all stakeholders involved in the process by making these stakeholders

successful is a catalyst for women determination when engaged in social entrepreneurship. Even so, the fact that social entrepreneurship still combines two faces, one social and the other economic explains the dual nature of this phenomenon and the reason social entrepreneurship may often be difficult to capture and define. In fact, in as much as entrepreneurs may be solely interested in creating economic value even as they purport to act to fill a need, social entrepreneurs are more driven by the urge to add social value and enrich all stakeholders concerned; furthermore, social entrepreneurs do this by addressing issues that may otherwise have been left unresolved by local governments, and may have continued being ignored would it not have been for the intervention of these social entrepreneurs (Dacin, Dacin, & Tracy, 2011; Grimes, McMullen, Vogus, & Miller, 2013; Hanson, 2009; Holmquist & Carter, 2009; Lee, 2008; Naudé, 2010).

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Social entrepreneurship, then, can be accurately framed as entrepreneurship driven by compassion, motivating those who are willing to act not in the interest of self only, but that of other. Indeed, there is not a dearth of stories and accounts of ventures, small and less small, started only because the person involved witnessed human suffering and felt compelled to act with the purpose of alleviating the pain they saw (Lee, 2008; Renko, 2013; Santos, 2012). These accounts further show that in the process of working to alleviate the pain seen, the social entrepreneur not only solved the problem witnessed, but the venture thus created added economic and financial value to society at large, and did not only benefit the initiator of the project and individuals directly affected. For this reason, placing this reflection within the context of social exchange theory and stakeholders' theory would only add richness to this debate (Weick, 2007).

Social exchange is driven by a desire to encourage or maintain a positive attitude from other group members, while instrumental exchange is a means of obtaining behavior from others which ultimately is meant to promote the self-interest of the actor.

At this point of the current reflection, it is clear that prosocial motivation theory, the desire to bring advantageous benefits to others and the need to exert effort based on a concern for helping or contributing to other people's welfare, can rightly be aligned with social exchange theory and even stakeholders' theory to enrich this debate; what is typical about social exchange, among theoretical patterns, is the view that social action is contingent upon rewarding reactions from others, and it will cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming. From the perspective of the social-entrepreneur, once the action is initiated in the form of identification of issues leading to initiatives taken to solve identified problems to benefit the stakeholders, the social action would have been considered as rewarding for the stakeholders involved. Even as all actions inspired by an expected benefit or reaction from others fall under the heading of exchange, (Heath, 1976), it remains that the social exchange initiated by social-entrepreneurs is, at the core, motivated by a need to promote, maintain, and expand a positive outcome and accrue benefits from other group members; as contrasted with instrumental exchanges which are solely geared toward obtaining benefits from others and ultimately promoting the self-interest of the actor.

Furthermore, the recognition that social-entrepreneurship creates opportunities to act in benefitting all stakeholders involved also places this debate in the context of stakeholders' theory. In fact, in noting some activities social entrepreneurs spearhead: i) Adult day care and childhood learning centers; ii) low-income housing, iii) vocational training and employment programs for the youth; iv) home modification services for the disabled and elderly; v) hospice

care; vi) outpatient mental health and rehab services, vii) computer-based education for self-paced learners; viii) alternative schools for potential high school dropouts, ix) private universities, x) wind farms; x) psychiatric and substance-abuse centers; xi) home care for the elderly, and multiple other enterprises spearheaded within the context of social-entrepreneurships, it is clear that social-entrepreneurship is all about putting the welfare of stakeholders, to the front, beyond all other considerations.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND ORIENTATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

In summary, women play an important role in social entrepreneurship and the characteristics they naturally exhibit do support the notion that women entrepreneurs would not only create economic value but also add social value that enhances the wellbeing of various stakeholders. Said even more appropriately, women-led social enterprises can only be successful even if only because of women intuitive nature, and the passion and unwavering commitment with which they tackle the endeavors in which they engage, continuing successfully and unbridled despite the challenges. One only can look at Serena Williams winning the Australian Open while pregnant; and Beyoncé, also pregnant, winning the “Best Urban Contemporary Album” during the 2017 Grammy’s and managing to deliver a memorable and spectacular performance in which she incidentally underscores that women “Could not be contained.” We are not even delving into Hilary Clinton bouncing back from an expected and one could even say inexplicable election downfall, defeated, yet unstoppable and uncontained.

Women’s fortitude and uncontainable will to succeed and benefit others is a rare fuel for social entrepreneurial success, one that should spur society towards entrusting women with the means and resources to start many social enterprises, especially in a continent such as Africa. In fact, it is to be stated that contrary to what goes on with other developing nations, financial institutions

such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have not customarily supported the African continent, regardless of their claims to the contrary: Even as these Institutions have often donated funds to many developing countries in the Continent, they also have pardoned debt to still other countries in other continents; however, this has rarely if ever been the case for countries in the African continent. Often, when the WB and the IMF have given funds to African countries, the terms of such engagements have been at best difficult and at worse could be qualified as predatory. It is so bad that many projects supposedly financed by these prominent financial world Institutions were bankrupt at inception. From then on, these projects never could accomplish the purpose they were purportedly meant to achieve, leaving the country targeted worse off than it was before these Institutions' intervention: Examples of such happenings are only too common in Africa and their discussion will require an entirely different study, one on which the current review is simply not focusing: Suffice it to say that often these Institutions' involvement in the African continent has often resulted in more hurt than help.

On the other hand, the United Nations has long recognized the pivotal role of women in successful enterprises in Africa, especially, social enterprises. Thus, when funding social projects in African countries, the United Nations has often arranged for these funds to be disbursed to women: In effect, the UN had confidence the latter, better than men, would be more inclined to use the given resources to implement the intended projects than to squander the appropriated funds on projects other than those funded. In other words, the UN through experience and observation, having noticed that women were better and more effective managers of the funds they awarded to address social problems in African countries, determined to distribute the said funds to women whom they trusted more to use the funds on social enterprises benefitting all concerned stakeholders.

For this reason, we developed a conceptual model that is supported by social exchange theory and prosocial theory. Accordingly, our model, offering that empathy drives social entrepreneurs, proposes that prosocial motivation would determine the identification of stakeholder issues not supported by government-led programs, leading to the creation of women entrepreneurship which in turn, would result in women-led social enterprises addressing and contributing to the resolutions of issues targeted; these successful outcomes, in turn, would spur others to engage in even more numerous and successful women-led social entrepreneurship. Even at this stage, this discussion is contributing to the debate on social entrepreneurship, first by offering the above conceptual model which is to be tested, and second by adding to this discourse the dimension operationalizing and capturing women contribution and their pivotal role, neglected so far, in the achievement of successful social enterprises.

One limitation of this study resides in its mere conceptual description. It is imperative that future studies operationalize the factors identified herein in this proposed model and conduct the empirical analysis of these factors to determine the validity of this model. Another limitation of this study is that it does not consider the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in serving the areas that are neglected by government-led programs. Future studies should integrate the role of NGOs in supplementing the efforts of women entrepreneurs as well as providing assistance to women social entrepreneurs. Another limitation of our study is that our model, by purpose, was developed for Sub-Saharan countries and in so doing, limited its generalizability to that context; thus, it may not be generalized to other developed countries and emerging markets, unless empirically tested to accomplish such purposes. In closing, it appears that even as it is often said that this is a men's world, maybe it really would not be the world as we have come to know it, if it failed to embrace women's essential role in successful social entrepreneurship.

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Model 1: Proposed Model of Empathy and Prosocial Motivation and Women-led Social Enterprises

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