

Exploring the Interventions of Social Entrepreneurship in Building Sustainable Communities in Polokwane Local Municipality: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

The paper aims to explore how social entrepreneurship may build sustainable communities. Most communities under the Polokwane Local Municipality continue to endure social and economic challenges just like any other communities in South Africa. Even though the Polokwane's Economic Growth and Development Plan (2030) attempts to fast-track service delivery and reduce poverty, there are still social and economic conundrums that need urgent intervention. The plan makes no mention of social entrepreneurship and how social entrepreneurs may contribute towards building sustainable communities. This is what triggered the jotting down of this paper. For that reason, the paper argues that the intervention and recognition of social entrepreneurs by the municipality may play a fundamental role in building sustainable communities. Social entrepreneurs are known to address social and economic predicaments using business models to foster greater social and economic transformation. Social entrepreneurs tend to take the social responsibility in different communities and such a contribution is not recognized and documented by the Polokwane' Economic Growth and Development Plan. Most importantly, the exploration of social entrepreneurship highlights the dual mission of social entrepreneurs as the beacon and paragons of economic transformation in the communities. This paper used a quantitative method and collected data through questionnaires. Data was analyzed through SPSS. It finds that social entrepreneurs play a fundamental role in their communities by offering employment opportunities and addressing social challenges through their dual mission, despite their challenges. This paper contributes to the ongoing policy and practical discourse on how social entrepreneurship may build sustainable communities in the context of Polokwane Local Municipality.

Keywords:

Social Entrepreneurship, Communities, Poverty, Unemployment, Polokwane Local Municipality

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Introduction

This paper explores the intricate connection between social entrepreneurship and LED. Through investigating this relationship, this paper demonstrated that social entrepreneurs serve as advocates for building sustainable communities in a majority of rural and township regions in South Africa. Nonetheless, inadequate acknowledgment of the efforts made by social entrepreneurs in the field is what prompted the creation of this paper. While literature has clarified the idea of social entrepreneurship, it has not sufficiently examined the interconnected relationship between social entrepreneurs and the investigation of sustainable methods for alleviating poverty and empowering communities. By exploring this relationship, the paper provided new insights and methods by which social entrepreneurs strive to enhance the neglected individuals and communities, ultimately aiming to build sustainable communities. Equally, social entrepreneurs bring a refreshing perspective by offering new or creative solutions to tackle both social and economic challenges.

The concept of social entrepreneurship is quickly emerging as a more significant area in South Africa's economy. In a nation facing numerous social disparities, economic imbalances, and ecological challenges, social entrepreneurs have an essential opportunity to establish ventures that foster positive change worldwide, including in South Africa. Initiating a social enterprise in South Africa may be a significant method to aid the nation's progress and tackle its urgent social issues. By merging business savvy with a dedication to social change, social enterprises develop sustainable solutions that benefit communities and the economy (Govinder, 2024). In South Africa's pursuit of a more inclusive and prosperous future, social entrepreneurship emerges as a symbol of hope and innovation, fostering the essential transformations required to create a better nation (Govinder, 2024). Social enterprises distinctly impact the progress of social, technological, and industrial growth in South Africa. The groups are promoting inclusivity in markets that have been traditionally neglected while also striving to demonstrate the economic sustainability of their business approaches (Bhengui, 2025). Nevertheless, as a combination of traditional for-profit and non-profit entities, obtaining the essential resources for expansion and employment generation frequently presents difficulties (Fiseha, 2022). This suggests that financial stability and sustainability present a difficulty for the new social entrepreneurs. Consequently, the essential idea of a social enterprise is to merge operating a lucrative business with providing social advantages for individuals and communities. Against this background, this paper contends that social entrepreneurs act as the missing link between public and private sector in an attempt to build sustainable communities through their business model's intervention. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to explore how social entrepreneurship may build sustainable communities in PLM.

Literature Review

The Dynamics of Social Entrepreneurship

According to Bignotti and Myres (2022), social entrepreneurship is seen as a framework that can strengthen both the economic and social structures of a country, focusing on both financial gain and social goals. In developing nations such as South Africa, social entrepreneurship is vital as the government often fails to meet the considerable social demands of the populace, and the market lacks the ability to accommodate all individuals looking for jobs and economic security (Bignotti & Myres, 2022).

Social Entrepreneurship and Youth Unemployment Reduction to Build Sustainable Communities

The persistent socioeconomic challenges in South Africa demand urgent attention. For a prolonged time, people on the ground have encountered and endured the difficulties of poverty, struggles, and rising social and economic inequalities, including youth unemployment, among other issues (Gordon, Booysen & Mbonigaba, 2020). Annually, the South African economy sees a surge of individuals joining its workforce, resulting in dissatisfaction since not all industries can support them, mainly because of the insufficient job availability for the whole populace (Ndlovu, Radebe, Mlambo & Nkonde, 2024). Young people are the ones most affected by unemployment in South Africa. Youth unemployment is a major challenge faced by most South Africans. A large portion of young South Africans encounters issues like unemployment, poverty, and inequality, with many classified as unemployed, uneducated, or unemployable (National Planning Commission, 2020). As Ramphele strongly states, “*Unemployment remains the biggest robber of hope for the young*” (Ofusori, 2023). This clearly demonstrates that unemployment is a barrier to advancement for young individuals in South Africa.

Youth unemployment is an unacceptable 45.6% for those aged 15-34 (Stats SA, 2024). Given this growth rate, social entrepreneurship serves as an effective approach to reduce youth unemployment and create new businesses. Therefore, Ofusori (2023) agrees that social entrepreneurship offers unskilled and unemployed youth an opportunity to establish sustainable livelihoods and a means to re-join society. This would ultimately enhance LED in various communities as young individuals would be empowered or inspired to engage in diverse livelihoods, thus improving their living standards and the overall conditions in the communities. Social enterprises often work together with local communities, acknowledging their needs and leveraging local resources to tackle youth unemployment. Additionally, Govinder (2024) suggests that this community-oriented approach enhances resilience by ensuring that solutions are tailored to the specific situations and challenges of the community. This means that social entrepreneurs operate in particular contexts or locations to address pressing social and economic

issues. While numerous charitable efforts do not meet the expected standards for youth opportunities, it is thought that social entrepreneurship and social enterprises may offer economic prospects for young individuals (Agbenyegah, 2022). There is a movement to promote social entrepreneurship in developing countries like South Africa to generate positive initiatives that inspire young people to broaden their sources of income. The following paragraphs display different methods used by social entrepreneurs to combat youth unemployment.

Methods To Build Sustainable Communities

Social entrepreneurs assume various roles to build sustainable within the communities. These methods are detailed below.

- **Employment Generation:** Social entrepreneurs possess the capability to create ventures and initiatives that provide job opportunities for youth. This may entail establishing enterprises that address community requirements and provide job opportunities for youth across various fields including agriculture, renewable energy, education, technology, and healthcare (Ofusori, 2023). Job creation initiatives can create employment opportunities for youth by launching new enterprises, growing current ones, or drawing investment in diverse industries. Research by Jamiu and Adeoye (2023) indicates that training in social entrepreneurship greatly enhances job creation within the small business sector. Improving skills is essential in tackling youth unemployment, as individuals or community members can acquire particular skills from social entrepreneurs for self-sufficiency and to participate in diverse livelihoods.
- **Enhancement of Skills:** Social entrepreneurship projects and initiatives may aim to offer skills training and capacity-building chances customized to the needs of youth (Ofusori, 2023). Social enterprises can improve their job prospects and assist them in launching their own businesses by providing essential skills, entrepreneurial training, and support. Additionally, offering vocational training programs allows young job seekers to gain essential skills and enhance their chances of employment. Social entrepreneurs who are small business owners and have received training are more inclined to generate job opportunities than those without training (Jamiu & Adeoye, 2023).
- **Fostering and Supporting an Entrepreneurial Mindset:** The objective of the social entrepreneurship training is to familiarise volunteers with the social economy and social entrepreneurship, while fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, initiative, confidence, calculated risk-taking, creativity, organization, and perseverance from the beginning of their service period. Its goal is to assist them in generating concepts for initiatives and activities that will benefit local communities (Selelo & Khwela 2024). The goal is to motivate

community members to view social entrepreneurship as a valid and alternative way of self-employment and generating income. It would foster healthy minds, strengthen community unity, empower individuals, and encourage socio-economic development and progress.

Methods and Data

The paper has used a normative research design which allowed for quantitative research approach to be used to answer its research objective. It has used exploratory research design under normative research design to better fathom how social entrepreneurs' intervention may build sustainable communities. This is a quantitative paper which has collected primary data through questionnaires to achieve its purpose. However, secondary data was collected through a review of literature by accessing journal articles, books, internet sources and government publications. The key words that were used to search for a relevant literature included "social entrepreneurship and sustainable communities". Meanwhile, the paper has sampled 160 participants who are known to be social entrepreneurs through purposive and snowball sampling. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended responses which allowed the participants to only tick the options provided to them. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) with ref number (TREC/1406/2024: PG). Data was Analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The SPSS provided the graphs and tables. However, during data collection, ethical concerns such as informed consent, privacy and anonymity, respect and dignity, benefits, copyrights and plagiarism and harm were taken into consideration to ensure that such ethics are not violated during the process.

Results

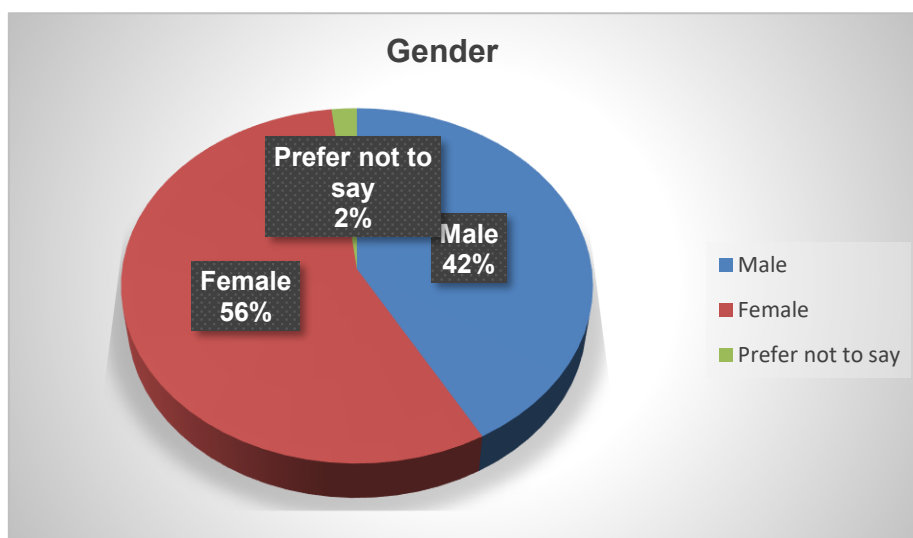


Figure 1: Gender

Figure 1 above demonstrates the gender background of the respondents. This was necessary to check the gender that is most effective in solving social and economic challenges in the communities. The study found that majority of the respondents at 56% are females who are actively involved in social entrepreneurial activities in the communities. This suggest that females are now becoming the economically active social entrepreneurs in Polokwane Local Municipality. Whereas, the study also found that only 42% of Males are represented in social entrepreneurial activities within the study area (PLM). Meanwhile, only 2% of the respondents did not disclose their gender, which did not really have adverse impact on the findings of the study. Therefore, Males need to come on board to be competitive in local economy to also bring changes for the marginalized communities and build sustainable communities.

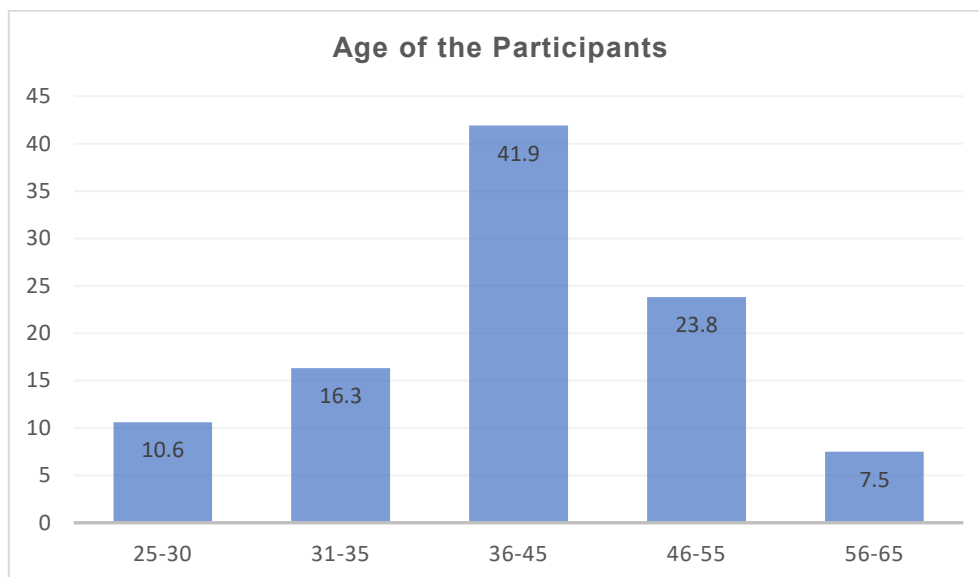


Figure 2: Age

Figure 2 above illustrate the age of social entrepreneurs. The study found that the highest percentage of the respondents is in the 36-45 age group, making up to 41.9% of the total sample. This suggests that the study is primarily focused on middle-aged individuals. Therefore, the results of the study are expected to represent the viewpoints, experiences and action characteristic of this age group. The subsequent largest group is individuals at the age of 46-55 making up 23.8% of the sample. This indicates that the study emphasizes mature and working age individuals, who are most relevant in providing social and economic opportunities to the communities.

Business Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing systems	Total
Medical Services	8,1% (13)	-	56,7% (102)	3,8% (6)	24,4% (39)	-	100% (160)
Agriculture	17,5% (28)	-	52,5% (84)	4,4% (7)	25,6% (41)	-	100% (160)
Wholesale	6,3% (10)	-	61,3% (98)	4,4% (7)	28,1% (45)	-	100% (160)
Internet café	1,3% (2)	-	63,7 (102)	3,1% (5)	31,9% (51)	-	100% (160)
Child Care Centers	1,9% (3)	-	65,6% (105)	2,5% (4)	30,0% (48)	-	100% (160)
Transport/Logistics	11,3% (18)	-	58,8% (94)	3,1% (5)	26,9% (43)	-	100% (160)
Fast Food	11,9% (19)	-	63,1% (101)	1,3% (2)	23,8 (38)	-	100% (160)
Construction	18,1% (29)	0,6% (1)	58,8% (94)	1,9% (3)	20,6% (33)	-	100% (160)
Other	23,8% (38)	-	-	-	-	76,3% (122)	100% (160)

Table 1: Types of Business Sector Running

The table 1 above shows that multiple social enterprises exist within Polokwane Local Municipality. This variety of businesses is crucial for building sustainable communities. Sustainable Communities may include various social enterprises addressing both social and economic issues encountered by individuals living in poverty. According to the table above, it was observed that most respondents (18.1%) operate construction businesses, 17.5% work in agriculture, 11.9% in fast food, 8.1% in the medical field, and 11.3% in the transport/logistics industry. These results are unsurprising as the researcher employed snowball sampling to gather social entrepreneurs. Evidently, the researcher

utilized referrals to connect with various social entrepreneurs. Moreover, it was discovered that a significant portion of the respondents, at 23.8%, selected the “other” option to express that they operate additional businesses apart from those listed in the questionnaire. The “other” category encompassed industries like engineering, laundry, suppliers, textiles, tourism, fashion and beauty, and poultry, among others. Therefore, all these industries are essential for the progress of the communities to enhance the quality of life for individuals. Consequently, it can be asserted that the research findings depict Polokwane Local Municipality as being characterized by these social entrepreneurs.

The initial reason to start a Business	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing Values
Employment creation	73,8% (118)	22% (35)	1,3% (2)	1,3% (2)	1,3% (2)	0,6% (1)
Make extra income	52,5% (84)	31,9% (51)	8,1% (13)	5% (8)	2,5% (4)	-
Build a family legacy	53,8% (86)	23,1% (37)	14,4% (23)	6,3% (10)	2,5% (4)	-
Be a change maker	52,5% (84)	24,4% (39)	11,9% (19)	6,9% (11)	4,4% (7)	-
Empower the disadvantaged	56,3% (90)	27,5% (44)	6,3% (10)	5,6% (9)	4,4% (7)	-
Improve living standards	65,6% (105)	26,3% (42)	3,8% (6)	1,3% (2)	3,1% (5)	-

Table 2: The Initial Reason to Start a Business

Traditional entrepreneurs establish companies for numerous motives. Thus, social entrepreneurs are. The causes vary. The research aimed to investigate the motives for creating the businesses. The research revealed that most of the participants (73.8%) stated that their primary motivation for starting a business is to generate jobs. Thus, unemployment is a regrettable situation that young individuals encounter. A significant portion of the respondents consists of those who have registered their enterprises as private businesses. Merely 6 participants stated that their primary motivation for starting

a business is unrelated to job creation. The unanswered question had one missing value from a respondent. Which does not significantly influence or have an effect on the overall results of the study.

Enabling underprivileged individuals and enhancing living conditions might have motivated certain respondents to start their businesses. This is due to the fact that social entrepreneurs aim to create improvement in their communities and reduce poverty. Consequently, the research determined that 56.3% and 27.5% of those surveyed initiated their enterprises to support underprivileged individuals. Empowerment may take the shape of offering financial support, skills, and training, enabling individuals to pursue their own livelihoods and enhance sustainable communities of their communities. Similarly, Sen, Karmakar, and Adhikari (2023: 1) define empowerment as "the degree of autonomy and self-governance of individuals and communities". Moreover, 6.3%, 5.6%, and 4.4% of the participants disagreed that they launched their businesses to empower individuals. Of the respondents, 65.6% and 26.3% stated that their primary motivation for starting a business was to enhance the living conditions of the community. This indicates that the respondents have an essential role according to tables 3 and 4 concerning social and economic goals. Enhancing the living standards of individuals can also lead to a thorough LED. Nonetheless, minority respondents (3.8%, 1.3% and 3.1%) reported that they did not launch their businesses for the purpose of enhancing living standards. The table above matches the figure below. The diagram below shows the motivational elements for social entrepreneurs.

Social Impact	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing systems
Donate food/ clothes	35% (56)	24.4% (39)	27.5 (44)	5.6% (9)	6.9% (11)	0.6% (1)
Reduce poverty	42.5% (68)	29.4% (47)	15.6% (25)	4.4% (7)	8.1% (13)	-
Offer sponsorship	20.0% (32)	16.3% (26)	41.9% (67)	8.1% (13)	13.1% (21)	0.6% (1)
Donate to charities	25.0% (40)	20.6% (33)	35.6% (57)	4.4% (7)	14.4% (23)	-
Contribute towards education	26.9% (43)	22.6% (36)	32.1% (51)	5.0% (8)	13.2% (21)	0.6% (1)

Contribute to crime reduction	18.8% (30)	17.5% (28)	38.1% (61)	7.5% (12)	18.1% (29)	-
Donate to school	21.3% (34)	20.0% (32)	38.1% (61)	6.3% (10)	14.4% (23)	-
Contribute to infrastructure development	20.1% (32)	13.8% (22)	36.5% (58)	8.2% (13)	21.4% (34)	0.6% (1)

Table 3: Social Impact by Social Entrepreneurs

A unique role undertaken by social entrepreneurs is creating social impact. This presents a small distinction from conventional entrepreneurs who primarily concentrate on maximizing profits. In reality, this represents one of the two objectives of social entrepreneurs. A total of 59.4% of the respondents reported that they support the communities through donations of clothing or food. This type of donation is provided to the needy and often overlooked individuals in the underprivileged neighbourhoods. A key aspect of a comprehensive LED is to address the needs of individuals and at least fulfil the basic standards for a respectable quality of life. Additionally, 42.5% of the participants stated that they contribute to their communities by alleviating poverty. Therefore, alleviating poverty can take various forms, including providing food, supporting education, and aiding infrastructure development, among others. This role is indispensable in creating sustainable communities.

Table 3 above showed that 20% of the participants provide sponsorships. This might indicate that social entrepreneurs can support specific events in the communities as a method of contributing to them. Sponsorship can involve backing a soccer tournament, educational initiatives, or various other events within the communities. Therefore, the kindness of social entrepreneurs is what inspires and compels them to enhance the quality of life for individuals. Moreover, 25% of the participants expressed that they support the communities by contributing to charities that strive to promote social and economic transformations in those areas. Not all social entrepreneurs contribute to charitable organizations. Consequently, 35.6% stated that they neither belong to nor contribute to the charities

Education is a key element that acts as the foundation of independence. It is one method for enhancing the circumstances of the impoverished. Through education, individuals can navigate and combat social and economic challenges. Similarly, social entrepreneurs recognize the importance of education in changing LED. Consequently, 26.9% of participants reported that they play an essential role in supporting educational initiatives across various domains. This role might encompass mentoring and

the enhancement of skills. This is backed by 31.3% of the participants who stated that a portion of their social mission involves contributing to schools in order to enhance the quality of education in various communities. Contributions can consist of food, school attire, or even monetary help if required.

Economic Impact	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing Values
Employment creation	70.6% (113)	27.5% (44)	1.3% (2)	-	0.6% (1)	-
Offer financial to households/ organizations	11.9% (19)	26.3% (42)	38.8% (62)	11.3% (18)	10.0% (16)	1.9% (3)

Table 4: Economic Impact by Social Entrepreneurs

A significant economic effect that social entrepreneurs have in the communities, is job creation. This is vital in combating the rise of joblessness across the nation. Due to unemployment continuing to be a persistent issue for the government. Consequently, 70.6% of those surveyed reported that they generate jobs, at least to reduce unemployment in various communities. Considering that social entrepreneurs generate job opportunities to improve LED. This forms a component of their economic objective. Nonetheless, just 1.3% stated that they do not generate job opportunities. These are the NPOs that align with the type of business registration regarding its legal status. Additionally, 11.9% of the participants reported that they provide financial support to households or organizations. Most of the participants (26.3%) reported that they do not provide financial support.

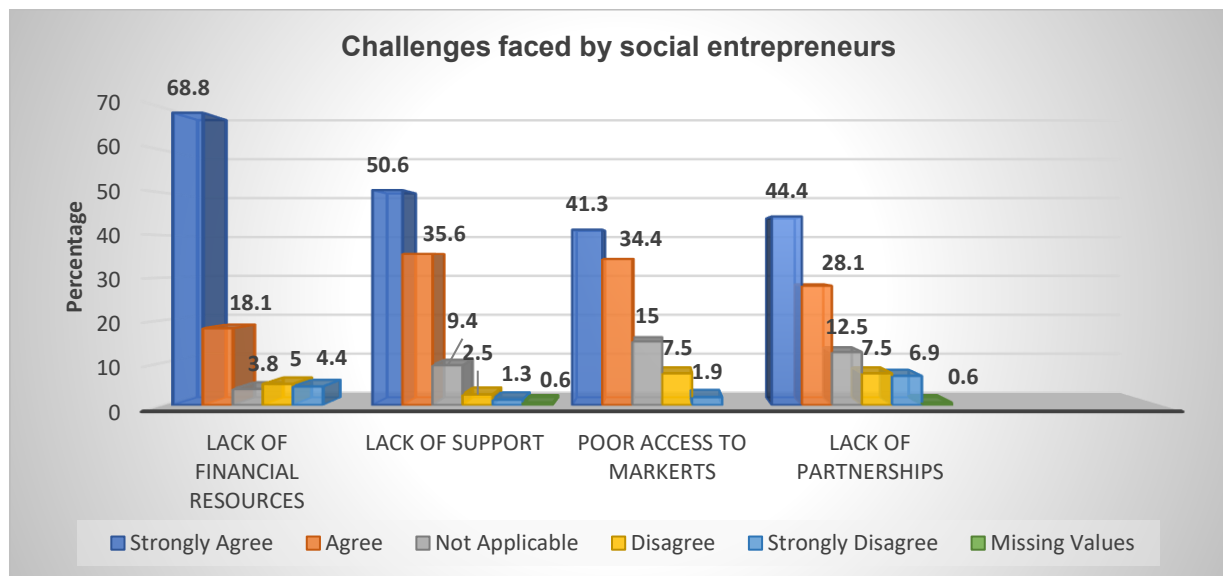


Figure 3: Challenges Faced by Social Entrepreneurs

Similar to traditional entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs encounter various notable obstacles. The obstacles might hinder the attempts of social entrepreneurs to tackle social and economic issues (Dzomonda, 2021). Social entrepreneurs, as the leaders and key paragons of community sustainability, aim to tackle social issues by employing their business models, which focus not only on profit but also on benefiting the communities positively. Nonetheless, this journey is frequently fraught with various obstacles that may obstruct certain social and economic goals of social entrepreneurs.

According to figure 1 above, most respondents (68.8%) experience financial difficulties. This encompasses both registered and unregistered businesses. For unregistered businesses, the dilemma might stem from an absence of organized structure and financial record-keeping (Hasseno, Tefera & Taylor, 2024). Nevertheless, the shortage of financial resources could be mitigated by expanding revenue sources as shown in figure 8 below. Regardless of the challenges they encounter, although social entrepreneurs deal with financial issues, this does not deter them from contributing to the well-being of their communities and individuals, as they are motivated by a passion and eagerness to improve the lives and livelihoods of others.

A key finding of the paper is that social entrepreneurs have insufficient support. Therefore, 50.6% of those surveyed do not have assistance. For clarity and vividness, insufficient support may encompass inadequate assistance from both the government and private sector, absence of encouragement, and insufficient resources to achieve economic and social goals. Insufficient resources, like lacking office space or professional connections, can impede business development. In addition, limited market access was identified as one of the key findings, with 41.3% strongly agreeing that poor market access

contributes to their challenges. Limited access is a major obstacle to building sustainable communities, which also results in diminished economic growth prospects.

Discussion

It is evident that social entrepreneurs are crucial in facilitating the achievement of LED in various communities. The goodwill and passion to help communities and underprivileged individuals motivate social entrepreneurs to keep making a difference in society. Upon examining literature, it becomes clear that social entrepreneurs might be described as “*Angel Investors*” aiming to gain nothing from their contributions to the communities. Due to their efforts, investing in communities is essential. In contrast to conventional businesses focused on profit, social entrepreneurs are dedicated to creating an influence and transforming lives by fostering empowerment and generating employment opportunities. Thus, this method not only enhances sustainable communities, but also promotes a culture of social unity and self-reliance. Therefore, in a South African context where economic and social inequalities are ongoing, social entrepreneurship is essential for fostering inclusive economies that are sustainable in tackling long-term social challenges. The results of the paper revealed that social entrepreneurs are the protagonist of building sustainable communities through various interventions. The interventions include amongst others that social entrepreneurs undertake different endeavors such as job creation, crime reduction, poverty reduction, and building the well-being of the communities. Though social entrepreneurs face challenges such as finance, lack of access to markets and poor partnerships, they still continue to enhance the living standards of the people through their social and economic activities.

Conclusion

Social entrepreneurs emerge as a transformative force of building sustainable communities in South Africa, which is known to create sustainable, comprehensive and inclusive economy that can potentially reduce poverty and empower the communities. Therefore, embracing social entrepreneurship as a strategic approach may unlock economic opportunities and build long-term or sustainable communities with less poverty and unemployment. Therefore, one of the effective ways to reduce poverty and ensure community empowerment is by encouraging and recognizing the roles and contributions of social entrepreneurs in the communities. Hence, countries such as Kenya and Nigeria also recognize and support the work done by social entrepreneurs. Same applies in the context of South Africa in the provinces such as Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng wherein social entrepreneurs are seen to be playing a central role toward improving the communities. What needs to happen is that social entrepreneurs in South Africa, Limpopo Province in particular, must be at the forefront of building sustainable communities, LED and IDP strategies so that when budgets are drawn, social entrepreneurs may get some fair share from it. The paper calls for the inclusion of the social entrepreneurship in the LED

strategy of the municipality. This call is necessary so that social entrepreneurs could also receive the support from the LED office in Polokwane Local Municipality. The municipality should also have a political will to create a conducive environment for social entrepreneurs to exchange knowledge and experiences on the success and failures of their business. Most importantly, the municipality should also invest in capacity training and resources such as finance to sustain the businesses. Perhaps, the money that is not spent in the municipality due to political and lack of experienced personnel or due to a fear of accountability, should be channeled to supporting social entrepreneurs. Accountability and responsibilities will come later, as long as the money is spent in the right and legit manner to build sustainable communities which are safe, less poverty, less unemployment, proper infrastructure and basically delivering the basic services. Most importantly, there should be a dedicated social enterprise desk within the municipality or a specific registration database to provide a feasible starting point for local authorities.

Future Research

Future research could explore the following aspects:

- One could conduct a study on the sustainability and longevity of social entrepreneurs by exploring possible strategies and planning for social entrepreneurs.
- A research study may be needed in exploring the role of government and policy support for social entrepreneurs in examining and evaluating the current municipal support systems such as policy gaps in LED strategy in Polokwane Local Municipality.
- One may also pursue a study that embarks on the analysis of funding and financial sustainability of social entrepreneurs through assessing their social and economic investments, funding models and financial literacy amongst others.

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