

# African perspectives on researching social entrepreneurship

Researching  
social  
entrepreneurship

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421

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Context matters in social entrepreneurship, and it matters a lot. Social entrepreneurs are deeply entrenched in the context where they operate: they respond to its challenges, are shaped by it, and attempt to shape it in turn. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how social entrepreneurship in Africa is still understood within the scope of Western theories, without much consideration for local variations of the commonly shared archetype of social entrepreneurship or for how African norms, values and beliefs may shape our common understanding of this phenomenon.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors survey the often-neglected literature on social entrepreneurship in Africa and bring it together in this paper to discuss – also from the vantage point of their own experience and research in diverse African countries – how important assumptions in the social entrepreneurship literature are confirmed, enriched or challenged by key dimensions of African contexts.

**Findings** – Four important themes in the literature on social entrepreneurship in Africa emerged – institutions, embedding values, entrepreneurial behaviour and bricolage and scaling impact – each with its own considerations of how African contexts may challenge predominant assumptions in the extant social entrepreneurship literature, as well as implications for future research.

**Originality/value** – The authors uncover ways in which the peculiarities of the African context may challenge the underlying – and mostly implicit – assumptions that have shaped the definition and analysis of social entrepreneurship. They end by offering their understanding of social entrepreneurship and its concomitant dimensions in Africa as a stepping stone for advancing the field in the continent and beyond.

**Keywords** Social entrepreneurship, Social enterprise, Context, Africa, Bricolage, Scaling, Prosocial motivation, Entrepreneurial behaviour, Institutional voids, External enablers

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

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## Introduction

“In the world of social value creation, context is king” (Young 2006, 70).

Scholarship on entrepreneurship oriented towards the public good has flourished (Vedula *et al.*, 2022). Yet despite early recognition of the important role of context for social entrepreneurship (Mair and Marti, 2006) and authors’ calls for more attention to different kinds of contexts (Mair and Rathert, 2020; Bacq and Janssen, 2011), there is still a need for such contextual analysis, especially in Africa where there has been a dearth of social entrepreneurship research (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2022). African social entrepreneurship organisations are not homogenous and are also different from social entrepreneurship initiatives discussed in the literature (Rivera-Santos *et al.*, 2015). The complex dynamism of the context across Africa might offer not only a broader understanding of social entrepreneurship but also new theories for social entrepreneurship. Studying the complexity of the African context has also implications beyond social entrepreneurship, as “Africa has been recognized as an important and fertile ground for critically evaluating the relevance of Western theories in non-Western contexts” (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2022, 1). This understanding will, in turn, allow for accumulating knowledge that matters for addressing the challenges in Africa and beyond (Busch and Barkema, 2021; Ciambotti *et al.*, 2022; Barbour and Luiz, 2019). Our objective in this paper is to portray Africa as a rich research context for both social entrepreneurship and management scholars, from which to challenge existing theories as well as develop new ones (George *et al.*, 2016).

The African Network of Social Entrepreneurship Scholars [1] is a scholarly network that emerged from a funded project aimed at advancing the scholarly field of social entrepreneurship in South Africa and Africa at large. It currently features close to 250 members engaged in social entrepreneurship work – both teaching and research – in Africa. The network seeks to offer its members opportunities to develop their teaching and research skills, share teaching resources and practices, collaborate on joint research agendas and be exposed to relevant funding, conferences and careers in the field.

In June 2022, a Social Entrepreneurship Doctoral Seminar was held in Cape Town, which brought together eight doctoral researchers from South Africa, Namibia, Egypt and Uganda, two scholars (the seminar’s facilitators) affiliated with American universities, two scholars affiliated with South African universities and one Belgian scholar with multiple engagements in Africa. The doctoral seminar entailed reading in depth and discussing 40 papers which are deemed to have contributed significantly in shaping the scholarly discourse on social entrepreneurship since inception. The seminar facilitated the interaction between scholars from the Global North with doctoral researchers and scholars from the Global South. What emerged were lively discussions around the underlying assumptions of the scholarly enquiry on social entrepreneurship – which has been dominated mostly by North American and European scholars and contexts – and the peculiarities of the African context.

At the end of the doctoral seminar, organising the emerged discussions that took place at the intersection between the field of social entrepreneurship and the African context resulted in four central themes. In this paper, we integrate these themes with social entrepreneurship studies focusing on Africa (or its regions or countries) and complement them with our own experience and research in diverse African countries so as to identify important changes and trends. In so doing, we make two contributions. First, we uncover ways in which the peculiarities of the African context may challenge the underlying – and mostly implicit – assumptions that have shaped the definition and analysis of social entrepreneurship in the scholarly literature (Hamann *et al.*, 2020a, Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Baker and Welter, 2018). Second, we highlight some implications for social entrepreneurship research

stemming from this intercontinental dialogue to advance scholarship and practice in this field in Africa and also broaden our understanding of social entrepreneurship *per se*. Figure 1 depicts the themes and implications for future research. We first discuss the themes highlighting possible research avenues. We then offer our understanding of social entrepreneurship in Africa, hoping that it will help advance scholarly practice in the continent.

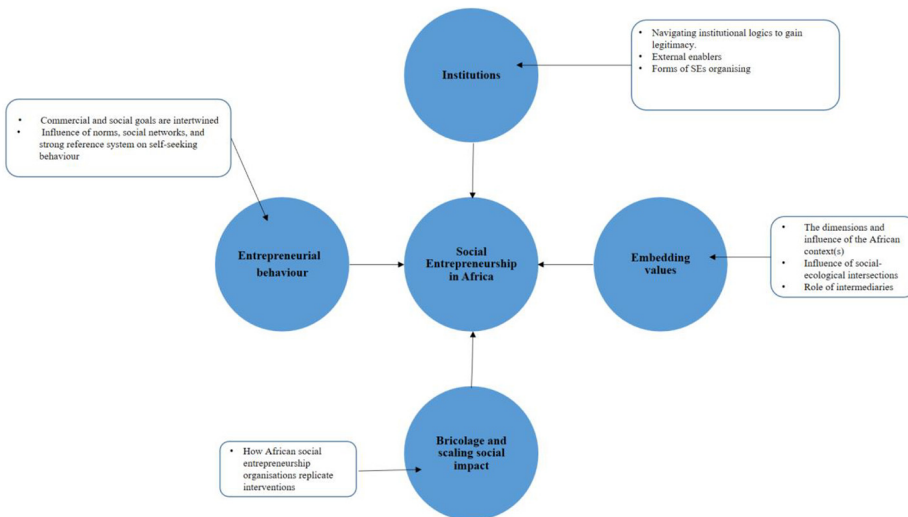
### Institutions

There are 55 countries in Africa which are divided into five geographic regions:

- (1) Central Africa (9 countries);
- (2) Eastern Africa (14 countries);
- (3) Northern Africa (7 countries);
- (4) Southern Africa (10 countries); and
- (5) Western Africa (15 countries).

The continent is endowed with rich resources, yet out of the total population (ca. 1.5 billion), 30% live in extreme poverty which is the highest number of people in the world living in extreme poverty, measured as \$1.90/day [2]. The continent lacks infrastructure in most of its regions and is plagued with corruption, conflicts and violence (African Union’s Agenda 2023, 2015) [3]. Not surprisingly, a salient subtheme that came up in our doctoral seminar was how the prevalent corruption, bribery and extortion reduce the confidence in the perceived entrepreneurial opportunity, self-efficacy and, hence, entrepreneurial activity (Adeleye *et al.*, 2020).

The study of African social entrepreneurship under an institutional lens has occupied a prominent stage in the literature. In this research stream, scholars have sought to understand not only how institutions shape social entrepreneurship – by enabling or



**Figure 1.**  
Themes and avenues for further research

Source: Authors’ own creation

hindering social entrepreneurship (Rivera-Santos *et al.*, 2015; Littlewood and Holt, 2018) – but also how social entrepreneurs “navigate” institutional logics to gain legitimacy and operate, as well as how social entrepreneurs influence these institutions (Zahra *et al.*, 2009). For example, recently, in Ghana, Bolzani *et al.* (2020) showed that organisational legitimacy in transnational social enterprises is constructed through building legitimacy in the dual institutional contexts in which they operate. They also show how the legitimacy of social enterprises might benefit from the legitimacy of social entrepreneurs. This means that social entrepreneurs, through using their social network and understanding of the highly personalised setting, are key in attaining legitimacy for their social enterprises in Africa.

Another subtheme is the concept of institutional voids (Sydow *et al.*, 2022; Nason and Bothello, 2022). This term is commonly understood as “situations where institutional arrangements that support markets are absent, weak, or fail to accomplish the role expected of them” (Mair and Marti, 2009, 422). Important to note here that, as African scholars, and reinforcing Hamann *et al.* (2020a), we find ourselves uneasy with this term, as it denotes a subservient position where Africa is devoid of institutions and always attempting to “catch up”. In fact, using Western terminologies that do not align with our context to be able to join a well-established narrative threatens our identity. Put differently, submitting to using this particular term implies that to develop, African institutions need to replicate Western institutions and deny all other existing forms of organising (Bothello *et al.*, 2019). While we acknowledge the weak business support infrastructure (ecosystems) – or the absence thereof – that is required to enable fair market access (George *et al.*, 2016), we also recognise that the reference system, or the “rules of the game”, of such a market is Western-born. These ecosystems will always complement already present, plural institutional arrangements (Mair *et al.*, 2012, 822), many of which can be characterised as informal (another “void” term) or cultural, which is a fundamental dimension of African contexts. The alternative ways of organising and existent institutions challenge the way we commonly understand, for example, growth, as African social enterprises operating in complex environments may grow in less visible ways (Nason and Bothello, 2022). For example, Mirvis and Googins (2018) highlight the role that some ecosystem players such as universities, non-governmental organisations and corporations have played in building a supportive social enterprise ecosystem in Africa. But they also observe how the involvement of institutions from the Global North may underscore the colonial legacy in Africa, with its concomitant exploitative economic systems (Hamann and Bertels, 2018) further entrenched in patrimonialism (Pitcher *et al.*, 2009). It would be interesting to study how other external enablers (Kimjeon and Davidsson, 2021), such as ecosystems, build on local knowledge and work in tandem with existing institutions to allow for more inclusive market activity.

A third subtheme highlighted the way social enterprises “organise” (Mair *et al.*, 2012), their level of formalisation and the regulations they are subject to (Iddy *et al.* (2022), which vary greatly across African contexts (Rwamigabo, 2017; Claeys, 2017; Littlewood and Holt, 2018). In South Africa, for instance, where the social and solidarity economy policy is yet to be implemented and there is no legal framework for social enterprises, Bignotti and Myres (2022) discovered that formal social enterprises operating mostly in urban areas are classified as either “beneficiary-centric entrepreneurial nonprofits” or “customer-centric social businesses”. This points to the unique ways African social enterprises respond to their institutional context as opposed to other more formalised contexts (Defourny *et al.*, 2021; Mair *et al.*, 2012). To recall, African institutions vary greatly, which makes it difficult to speak of Africa as “one big pot” under many respects, including institutions. For instance, South Africa has a unique dual economy composed of strong formal institutions and widespread informal institutions, each playing a role in the formation of social enterprises.

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As [Urban and Kujinga \(2017\)](#) South African study reveals, the regulatory environment plays a catalytic role in the development of social entrepreneurial intentions, while the institutional normative and cognitive pillars appear to be noninfluential, meaning that social entrepreneurship is still *not* commonly accepted practice in the country.

To summarise, the institutional environment as a fundamental contextual dimension in Africa shapes and is shaped by social entrepreneurship activities and outcomes. However, without some formal institutional and political framework in place to enable market formation, the developmental role of social entrepreneurship organisations may be challenging. Under these institutional conditions, how do African social entrepreneurship organisations operate and survive? In fact, as demonstrated below in the social impact scaling section, how do they thrive, grow and scale throughout the continent and beyond? Answers to these questions would hugely benefit social entrepreneurship theory, practice and policy.

### **Embedding values and social relationships**

There is no question that social entrepreneurship, its activities and outcomes are deeply embedded in the context of operation ([Mair and Marti, 2006](#); [Seelos \*et al.\*, 2011](#)). On the organisational level, the complexity of the African context may adversely affect social enterprises' interdependence with the environment and their continuous survival and effectiveness, which necessitates a theoretical attention to this complex interdependence. On the micro level, in their study on the role of social entrepreneurship in providing long-term recovery humanitarian services in Africa and the Middle East, [Ibrahim and El Ebrashi \(2017\)](#) outline the "unique attributes" that make social entrepreneurs major players in accessing local data efficiently and effectively. They argue that local leaders in Africa and similar contexts have a vital – but less well-researched – role to play in the overall development efforts of social entrepreneurship.

The diversity and complexity of the African contexts is a major theme in the literature ([Madichie, 2016](#); [Barbour and Luiz, 2019](#); [De Avillez \*et al.\*, 2020](#)). This includes the variety of tribes that differ not only in ethnicities but also in languages and cultures, which inevitably affects the operation of social enterprises. This contextual plurality matters, as social enterprises' primary function, by definition, is to alter the environment they are embedded in for the interest of their customers-beneficiaries. Therefore, knowing and conforming to one location does not guarantee an automatic fit in another location, as the same contextual understanding might not apply. There are many examples of social entrepreneurship initiatives and organisations which had difficulty operating because of failure to attribute enough potency to local (community-level) norms and cultures as well as the role of community leaders and kings. For example, [Ibrahim and El Ebrashi \(2017\)](#) showed the power of traditional leaders and how their acceptance or rejection can empower or threaten the social venture operations. Community leaders (e.g. local kings and religious leaders) in Africa highly influence the legitimacy of the enterprise and are major players in creating support for its operations ([Bolzani \*et al.\*, 2020](#)).

Africa's local marketplaces are often resource-poor and highly influenced by the norms and subcultures of local ethnic groups ([Rivera-Santos \*et al.\*, 2015](#); [Muthuri and Farhoud, 2020](#)). Thus, to ensure sustainability and scalability, social entrepreneurship organisations must follow a community-centric approach ([Bacq \*et al.\*, 2022](#)) to gain legitimacy in the local community where they operate ([George \*et al.\*, 2016](#); [Kimmitt \*et al.\*, 2016](#)). This contextual plurality underpins the importance of co-creation in designing social innovations and calls for collaboration between different actors to access formal resources (e.g. human capital and finance) and informal resources (e.g. local knowledge and trust). An illustrative example is

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Mothers2Mothers, an organisation dedicated to preventing the mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Mothers2Mothers has relied on staff from local communities since 2001. The organisation identifies African HIV-positive mothers as a valuable resource. The mothers who successfully (with positive results) went through the treatment programs are recognised as experts in the disease and, more importantly, experts in the cultural dimensions of how to live with such a disease in their local communities. As such, these mothers, who reside in these communities, guide newly diagnosed mothers through both the treatment journey and living in local communities (Besser, 2006). This is relevant, as it points out the need for new organisational forms and strategies for the social entrepreneurship initiatives and organisations to navigate unchartered contexts (Busch and Barkema, 2021).

In Africa, the local community is an important element of the social entrepreneurial process, as it either enables or hinders entrepreneurial activity (Madichie, 2016). In Africa's more communal cultures, a deep sense of community (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2023c) and relational capital – the value and knowledge embedded in formal and informal relationships and based on common values and behaviours, trust, loyalty and willingness (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2023b) – positively influence social enterprises' bricolage efforts, with relational capital also facilitating the opportunity recognition and exploitation process (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2023b). Within the informal and resource-constrained contexts in which they operate, African social entrepreneurs need to rely more heavily on relational networks (Halberstadt and Spiegler, 2018) and trust (Gupta *et al.*, 2015). At a more macro level, however, despite almost every paper on social entrepreneurship in Africa discussing the context directly or indirectly, to date, except for Rivera-Santos *et al.* (2015), there seems to be no research endeavour systematically defining the dimensions and influence of the African context(s) on the practice and scholarly field of social entrepreneurship.

We also call for more research on the influence of social-ecological intersections on social entrepreneurship in Africa (Hamann *et al.*, 2020b), where poverty is widespread (Muthuri and Farhoud, 2020). The literature on entrepreneurship for the public good distinguishes between "social" and "environmental" entrepreneurship, relying on an assumption that these categories have ontological distinctiveness (Vedula *et al.*, 2021). Many African contexts are characterised by acute poverty, and even though there is a very high urbanization rate, there are still many Africans living in rural areas. Especially in such poor, rural contexts, the distinction between social and environmental issues is problematic. People rely for their livelihood on water, soil fertility, etc., so any environmental degradation has direct and relatively immediate social consequences. This has been long recognised in the development and environmental studies literatures and is becoming more apparent in the management literature, as it integrates perspectives from, for example, social-ecological resilience (Hamann *et al.*, 2020a). Given the intersection between social and environmental issues in many African contexts, future research may seek to avoid the social-environment dichotomy and rather explore how social-ecological systems motivate, contextualise and are affected by social entrepreneurship, especially in the context of poor and rural communities.

Finally, given the high levels of inequality and the large divides between informal and formal economic actors, development scholars have identified an important role for intermediaries that connect excluded, more informal actors into more formal value chains or other forms of economic opportunity. Arguably, this is an especially important ambition for social entrepreneurs (see our understanding of social entrepreneurship in the conclusion). This opportunity may have been overlooked to date because such intermediaries are not necessarily using commercial mechanisms themselves. There is a scope for social entrepreneurship scholars to give this a more systematic attention (Bhatt *et al.*, 2022).



## Entrepreneurial behaviour

In an Africa context, there has been no lack of research focusing on the motivational factors underlying social entrepreneurial behaviour, in line with global research on the same topic. In an effort to answer the core question of what drives individuals to engage in social entrepreneurial activities, Omorede's (2014) study in Nigeria proposes that local conditions and an intentional mindset, coupled with social network support, engender the passion for a cause underlying social entrepreneurial behaviour. What stands out is the presence of illiteracy and unscientific beliefs among the local conditions responsible for local social issues, as well as strong religious convictions underpinning the intentional mindset. In Egypt, Ghalwash *et al.* (2017) observe that a desire to change the status quo, inspiration (derived from exposure to different contexts and inherited religious beliefs) and previous personal experience are the main motivators behind social entrepreneurship, while social networks are critical for social entrepreneurs' resilience. In South Africa, Griffin-EL (2021) finds that compassion and its other-oriented dimension are responsible for social entrepreneurs' boundary-spanning behaviour – in other words, social entrepreneurs go beyond the boundaries of their organisations to include actors in the environment, hence getting more involved or going the extra mile to bring about change.

Interestingly, in their study in West Africa, McMullen and Bergman (2017) showed that social entrepreneurs' sense of entitlement and reciprocity might hinder the societal developmental path. In other words, the emotional attachment of social entrepreneurs to their organisations might create tensions between what is good to their communities and what is good to their organisations. Feelings of entitlement, social worth and reciprocity challenge the conviction that prosocial motivation is the major motivation behind social entrepreneurship – at least in Africa. As such, social entrepreneurs might start their organisations not only following prosocial motivation, but also for the benefits, status or power that they gain (Bolzani *et al.*, 2020) or because of a social worth motivation (Bacq and Alt, 2018).

Notwithstanding the above, we notice a deeper issue affecting social entrepreneurial behaviour and its motivational antecedents *vis-à-vis* “normal” or commercial entrepreneurship, with the former focused on creating social value for others or the public good, and the latter focused on creating financial value for the self. The commonly held assumption is that self-seeking behaviours are normatively appropriate and socially possible. However, in many African contexts, self-seeking behaviours are normatively inappropriate. Norms such as Ubuntu (the “oneness” of humanity) – conceptualised as “individuals see themselves as part of a wider whole, and in honour of this tradition they give and share with others” (Morvaridi, 2016, 151) – define the self as an integral part of the community (Mangaliso, 2001), which has showed implications on entrepreneurship (Abubakre *et al.*, 2021). Such norms also include constraints to behaviour, where self-seeking behaviours are stigmatised and others' jealousy is legitimated; that is, Ubuntu has its counterpart in “Umona, which is best translated as envy or jealousy” (Koens and Thomas, 2016, 1643).

In many African cultural contexts, individuals are embedded in extensive social networks that can both enable and constrain entrepreneurship (Khayesi and George, 2011). Imams, priests, community kings, chiefs and their representatives are all forms of a social structure that is considered part of the extended family (George *et al.*, 2016). For instance, the extended family may support the entrepreneur with access to contacts and financial resources (acting as a fishing net), but may also constrain the entrepreneur by requesting financial aid and jobs for relatives (acting as a spider net) (Hoang and Yi, 2015). In addition, in their study on the influence of informal institutions on entrepreneurship in a less developed context, Shantz *et al.* (2018) argue that in resource-poor environments, informal

institutions (namely, fatalism and collectivism) have a negative effect on entrepreneurial growth and innovation. As such, we call for more research on the influence of norms, social networks and strong reference systems on social entrepreneurship practice in Africa, both as enablers and disablers (Kimjeon and Davidsson, 2021), as well as on self-seeking behaviour (Shantz *et al.*, 2018).

Against the above backdrop, we argue that defining social entrepreneurship with an emphasis on entrepreneurs' intention to benefit others, in contrast to benefiting the self, is problematic if self-seeking behaviours are broadly stigmatised. In a context that is largely underdeveloped and most of the basic needs are yet to be met and where other-oriented behaviours are normatively expected, African (social) entrepreneurs do not, necessarily, rely as much only on prosocial motivation. Instead, most forms of entrepreneurship, inherently, have some "social" dimension in the African context. For example, in their study on commercial entrepreneurs in Kenya, Sydow *et al.* (2022) showed that commercial and social goals are intertwined and commercial entrepreneurs eventually include social value creation in their practices.

### **Bricolage and scaling social impact**

In their analysis of a community organisation operating in South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania and Uganda with their headquarters in South Africa, Busch and Barkema (2021) highlight that social enterprises face a great variety of local contexts, and local fit is, thus, difficult as "African tribes and ethnicities differ, with a wide variety of subcultures, rites, and norms" (George *et al.*, 2016, 389). In addition to local fit, accessing funds from local banks is difficult for small enterprises (Kimmitt *et al.*, 2016), and entrepreneurs often rely on family and/or community networks, which creates social obligations that hamper entrepreneurial activity (Khayesi *et al.*, 2014). African social entrepreneurs and their organisations are also constrained by human capital (e.g. education and vocational training). Despite these difficulties, African social enterprises manage to find ways to not only survive but also scale. Studying social enterprises in Africa will let us better understand how social enterprises scale up and how, in doing so, they overcome their resource scarcity while being adaptable to a variety of settings and local contexts.

While African social enterprises are often local and micro in nature, a number of them have managed to scale up and cross borders. R-Labs, a South African social enterprise, operates in 20 countries (Busch and Barkema, 2021); Mother2Mother, another South African social enterprise, reached more than 14.5 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa; SWA-sponsored water centres operate across communities and borders in West Africa (McMullen and Bergman, 2017); and Better Life Association, Basaysa Village, Together Foundation, mPedigree, kamvaYouth and The Small Holders Foundation (Ibrahim and El Ebrashi, 2017) are a few examples among many of social enterprises that operate and flourish throughout Africa. These organisations demonstrate an inspiring ability to access and understand local contexts, design adequate business models, gain trust and build partnerships, create financial sustainability and assess their impact. They also exhibit unique ways to scale their social impact – penetration, bundling, spreading and diversification (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2023a) – in their resource-constrained environments, paving the way for a more granular understanding of how social enterprises manage their inner tensions between their dual logics during the growth process.

Bricolage is indeed a frequent resource-acquisition strategy adopted by social enterprises in Africa, given their often resource-constrained contexts, to come up with frugal innovations (Nilsson *et al.*, 2022). The work of Ciambotti and colleagues (Ciambotti and Pedrini, 2021; Ciambotti *et al.*, 2021; Ciambotti *et al.*, 2023b) highlights bricolage as a



commonplace resource-acquisition strategy and reveals the unique approaches adopted by African social enterprises to garner resources, with even the emergence of unique hybrid harvesting strategies (Ciambotti and Pedrini, 2021). Busch and Barkema (2021) also outlined how African social enterprises use a low-cost bricolage approach, which is replicated – with simple rules being contextualised and adapted – to a variety of local environments.

In sum, the scalability and replication of social enterprise models are possible; we just need to study them in Africa, and we call upon scholars to take up this challenge. Of particular interest is the question of how African social enterprises scale their impact while maintaining sustainable operations. Shepherd and Patzelt (2022) define possible specific research questions, which can be applied to the African context:

- RQ1. What exactly is being scaled?
- RQ2. Is there a trade-off between scaling the social entrepreneurship organisation and scaling its social impact?
- RQ3. Under what conditions are scaling the social entrepreneurship organisation and scaling social impact complementary?

### Social entrepreneurship in Africa

In developing countries, especially in Africa, social entrepreneurship remains a poorly understood concept. This is because of social expectations (e.g. Ubuntu), the social fabric (e.g. community and relational values), social-ecological intersections, underdeveloped infrastructure, inefficient institutions and the blurring boundaries between the responsibilities of governments, civic society and the third sector. Still, social entrepreneurship's purpose is unique and distinctive. At the end of this paper, we build on the literature and our experience in the African context to offer the below understanding to participants and scholars who study social entrepreneurship in Africa:

We view that social entrepreneurs intervene to introduce solutions that enable development beyond financial incentives (Marti *et al.*, 2013). Social entrepreneurs are the first to remove the barriers and uncover opportunities in “the forgotten, the unorganized but indispensable units of economic power” (Mason *et al.*, 2013, 402). As such, social entrepreneurs engage in the social entrepreneurship process which we understand as “the process of identifying, evaluating and exploiting opportunities aiming at social value creation by means of commercial, market-based activities and of the use of a wide range of resources” (Bacq and Janssen, 2011, 388). Operating in a resource-poor and highly personalized environment necessitates an “innovative use and combination of resources to pursue [these] opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs” (Mair and Marti, 2006, 37). While pursuing these opportunities they might sacrifice some of the expected economic return in exchange for sustainable business solutions to developmental problems (Santos, 2012; McMullen, 2011). Through social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurs create social enterprises, which we understand as “organisations social entrepreneurs have established to put their innovations into practice. In its broadest sense social enterprise can refer to small community enterprises, co-operatives, NGOs using income generating strategies to become more sustainable, social businesses or companies that are driven by their desire to bring social or environmental change”. (Littlewood and Holt, 2018, 535). Consequently, we suggest to include entities in the not-for-profit sector, for-profit sector with social missions, and hybrid organisations (Lumpkin *et al.*, 2013; White *et al.*, 2021; Mair and Rathert, 2020). In Africa, people's needs are deeply connected with the natural ecosystem; hence, aligned with Bansal and Song (2017), we conceptualise environmental issues as a subset of social issues. Like Schumpeter (1947), Baumol (1990), and Christensen *et al.* (2019), we take a broad view of innovation which might include a new product, service, market, business model, or process.

We also agree with [Shantz et al. \(2018\)](#) on the nature of these innovations. These innovations can be as simple as an entrepreneur who is “introducing a product that is new to her community (new product); an entrepreneur introducing a new element to an existing service, such as cell phone charging while you get your hair cut (new service); an entrepreneur employing a new business model, such as the rental of farm tools to customers (new business model); an entrepreneur finding a more efficient way of pounding fufu, a cassava dish (new process); and an entrepreneur scaling up her operations to service new customers (new market) would all be considered innovations for our purposes” ([Shantz et al., 2018](#), 416). Finally, these actors and activities exist in what is referred to as social economy which we understand as “a people-centred sector of the economy, which uses principles of sustainable economic activity to stimulate socially and environmentally responsible growth by leveraging, and simultaneously building, solidarity, social inclusion and cohesion” ([ILO, 2019](#), 7).

### Conclusion

Despite the challenges, there is a great deal to learn from Africa. We invite social entrepreneurship and management scholars to provide empirical evidence and guidance to organisations and policy makers alike on the road ahead towards development here in our African home and the world.

### Notes

1. [www.anses.org.za/](http://www.anses.org.za/)
2. Data downloaded on July 25, 2022 at 16.00 hrs from the <https://worlddata.io/>
3. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

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