

# Exploring the Barriers to Social Entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe: The Case of Graduate Professional Social Workers in Harare

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## Abstract

Social entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that has not been fully exploited to create employment and uplift underprivileged communities in Zimbabwe. Graduate social workers are expected to champion establishment of social enterprises. However they have opted to join the band wagon of people migrating into the diaspora in search of employment opportunities. This paper sought to establish why graduate social workers are not willing to venture into social enterprises despite the relevant training they possess and the vast opportunities presented by the ever shrinking Zimbabwe economy. Data was collected through interviews with social work graduates, students and a director of a social work school in Harare. The findings revealed that the curricular of social work does not have the entrepreneurial training component; there is lack of financial support and that there is a general non acceptance of such ventures by communities. The study recommends that the social work curricular be revised to incorporate entrepreneurial training and that successful social entrepreneurial ventures be given publicity to make them acceptable to both the communities and financial institutions.

**Keywords:** Social entrepreneurship, social work, barriers, opportunities, unemployment

## 1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is an area that has received little attention in developing countries yet its impact in society cannot be ignored. In developed countries social entrepreneurship has been embraced by Governments, financial institutions and ordinary citizens as evidenced by their willingness to fund social entrepreneurship ventures. Beneficiaries of such ventures include among others individuals and not –for –profit organisations which have assisted socially disadvantaged people in both their home countries and overseas. In sharp contrast social enterprises have not thrived in developing countries including Zimbabwe.

This paper seeks to establish some of the challenges that have inhibited the development of social enterprises in Zimbabwe particularly among the graduate social workers.

## 2. Background to the Study

In 2009 the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) adopted the multi currency system as away of stabilizing hyperinflation of 231 million percent (Besada and Moyo, 2008) which the country had experienced up to 2008. The multi-currency system managed to control hyperinflation but it created other problems for the economy. According to MEFMI (2009), after adoption of the multi-currency, the following challenges ensued; liquidity crisis, lack of lender of last resort and high unemployment. MEFMI (ibid) argues that the liquidity challenges created unemployment as firms could not meet salary and other obligations due to depressed demand. Under those circumstances firms had no option but to retrench as a cost management strategy. The National Social Security Authority (NSSA) reported that a total of 711 companies in Zimbabwe closed shop between 2011 and 2013 while as at end of July 2013 149 firms from Bulawayo had lodged liquidation applications with the Bulawayo High Court (NSSA, 2013).

The plight of workers was further exacerbated by the promulgation of the Indigenisation Act in 2008 which states that at least fifty-one per cent of the shares of every private company or any other business shall be owned by indigenous Zimbabweans (GoZ, 2008). The Act resulted in investor flight which saw the closure of some companies and subsequent loss of employment. This raised unemployment rate to 94 percent Intelligence Report (2013).

Faced with unemployment most people migrated to foreign countries like South Africa, the United Kingdom, Botswana, Australia and Namibia in search of employment. Among these migrants were social work graduates. According to [www.hcpc-uk.org](http://www.hcpc-uk.org) by September 2015 a total of 432 graduate social workers had migrated to the United Kingdom in search of employment. The Council of Social Workers (CSW) Assessment Report (2013) postulates that Zimbabwean universities produce an average of 200 social work graduates per year yet the audit carried out by Department of Social Services (DSS) (2015) asserts that there were less than 100 social workers manning all statutory child protection work which was impacting negatively on the justice delivery system mainly in cases involving child protection.

On the other hand social services delivery has been negatively affected by the weak economic

performance of the country. Broken families, street children, drug and alcohol abuse, unwanted pregnancies and other social vices have become rampant. Thus the environment provides an abundance of opportunities for social enterprises yet they are very few graduate social workers who have set up social enterprises as a way to counter unemployment ([www.cswzim.org](http://www.cswzim.org)). The website cites a few examples of social entrepreneurship ventures such as Makaita Social Care Consulting, Zimbabwe Opportunities Industrialisation Centre (ZOIC) and DP Foundation who are occasionally engaged by UN agencies and other government departments to provide their expertise, review policies and develop strategies.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

The worsening economic environment in Zimbabwe is characterised by high unemployment and poor social services delivery. This environment has brought about a plethora of social vices that provide graduate social workers with an opportunity to initiate social entrepreneurship ventures that can assuage the high rates of unemployment and social vices. However the graduate social workers have opted to migrate to foreign lands seeking employment opportunities instead of creating their own and others' employment through starting their own social entrepreneurship ventures locally.

### **4. Objectives of the study**

The study aims to understand why graduate social workers are failing to establish social entrepreneurship ventures that may be used to alleviate the high levels of unemployment and social vices. Specifically the study seeks to:

- assess the extent to which social work graduates are exposed to entrepreneurial skills training;
- assess the barriers faced by social work graduates in their efforts to set up social entrepreneurship ventures; and
- provide strategies that may be adopted to stimulate establishment of social entrepreneurship ventures.

### **5. Proposition**

The study was premised on the proposition that graduate social workers lack social entrepreneurship skills; hence struggle to venture in social entrepreneurship.

### **6. Study Justification**

The study's findings will guide curriculum review and influence its realignment to incorporate entrepreneurial skills and competencies. The study will also assist in identifying employment creation options for graduate social workers. The GoZ will benefit through graduate social work skills retention.

### **7. Research Methodology**

The study adopted the qualitative approach and was a case study of social work graduates based in Harare. The study's sample was selected using purposive sampling technique since the population under investigation was graduate social workers. Saunders et al (2008) argue that purposive or judgemental sampling enables a researcher to use personal judgement in selecting participants that will best help in answering research question(s) to meet a study's objectives. Thus for the study a sample of 15 respondents was used broken down as follows- 9 social work graduates, 5 social work students with fieldwork experience and a director of one of the social work departments. Data was collected using in-depth personal interviews as the study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' skills, experiences, perceptions, motivations and opportunities, recruitment was carried out with the aim of achieving diversity. Levy (2006) support this data collection method when he asserts that in cases of sensitive subject matter and complex decision-making processes, individual in-depth interviews provide a far more effective tool and create an environment where participants would be likely to speak more openly and frankly. Levy (ibid), adds that one-on-one in-depth interviewing encourages personal thought, respondent attentiveness to questions and they allow the interviewer to sense non-verbal feedback and to probe for clarity. Data collected was then processed using N-Vivo. Content analysis was used to analyse the processed data.

### **8. Literature Review**

#### **8.1 Definition of Social Work**

Scholars define social work from different perspectives. Hearly (2008) defines social work as a profession which seeks to help and empower vulnerable groups in societies such as women, persons with disabilities, children and the elderly as well as people living with HIV/AIDS. Morals et al. (2010) define social work as a professional activity of helping individuals, groups and communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social function and creating societal conditions favourable to that goal. Mupedziswa (2005) gives a more direct view by defining social work as a professional approach of ameliorating social ills. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (2014) gives a more elaborate definition of social work by defining it as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social development, social change, social cohesion, and the

empowerment and liberation of people. Thus different scholars agree on the definition of social work as a helping profession for desired social change.

## 8.2 DEFINITION OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Literature strongly agrees on the definition of social entrepreneurship. Nyssens (2006) defines social entrepreneurship as an innovative, social value creating activity that can occur within or across the non-profit, business and public sectors. Martin et al. (2007) concurs with Nyssens' definition but expresses it in business sense when he asserts that social entrepreneurship as phenomenon of applying business expertise and market-based skills in the non-profit sector. The Public Innovator's (2008) perspective social entrepreneurship is that it is a practice of responding to market failures with transformative and financially sustainable innovations aimed at solving social problems. Therefore, existing literature strongly suggests that social entrepreneurship is the fusion of business skills and social skills for social value creation. Therefore one can conclude that in social entrepreneurship the main driver is social benefit not profit.

Smith and Stevens (2010) postulate that there are three types of social entrepreneurs namely social bricoleurs, social constructionist and social engineers. Zahra et al. (2009) observe that social bricoleurs usually focus on discovering and addressing small-scale local social needs. Wulleman and Hudon (2015) add that this type of social entrepreneur is fairly autonomous from external suppliers and has practically no need of external or specialized resources. Wullenman and Hudon (ibid) further assert that what differentiates social bricoleurs from other social service providers is the unique manner in which they identify local opportunities, marshal necessary resources, and deliver services to the disadvantaged. Lehnar (2012) concludes that social bricoleurs act upon local needs.

The second type is the social constructionists who according to Zahra et al. (2009) typically exploit opportunities and market failures by filling gaps to underserved clients in order to introduce reforms and innovation to the broader social system. Wulleman and Hudon (2015), add that social constructionists are alert to market failures that are inadequately addressed by existing businesses, governments or organizations. They seize those opportunities to create alternative structures. Like social bricoleurs, social constructionists often focus on specific local issues but suggest solutions that can be applied to many different situations, (Smith & Stevens, 2010).

Lastly there are social engineers who according to Zahra et al. (2009), recognize systematic problems within existing social structures and address them by introducing revolutionary change, as a result, these entrepreneurs often destroy dated systems and replace them with newer and more suitable ones. Wulleman and Hudon (2015), argue that unlike social bricoleurs and social constructionists, social engineers tackle existing social structures by addressing large-scale issues. Smith and Stevens (2010), add that prior knowledge in the field is not crucial in order for them to identify a problem. Their most important resource is the legitimacy of the masses and the associated political capital, which provides access to existing or required resources.

## 8.3 Elements/Qualities of Social Entrepreneurs

There is little consensus on the qualities of social entrepreneurs as scholars argue from different perspectives. However the different scholars tend to agree on the following as the critical attributes to social entrepreneurship. Austin et al. (2008) argue that innovation is the most fundamental quality of a social entrepreneur. Okpara (2007) defines innovation as the process of bringing creativity and the best ideas into reality and thus, innovation and creativity are intricately intertwined qualities of a social entrepreneur. Dobelet et al (2011), strongly concur that creativity is the spark that drives the development of new products, services and ways to do business. Therefore, the authors concur that a social entrepreneur should have the ability to bring into existence ideas through imaginary skills for social value creation.

Praskier and Nowak (2012) identify risk taking behaviour as another key attribute to social entrepreneurship. Webster (2015) defines risk taking as an act of doing something that involves danger or risk in order to achieve a goal. Dobelet et al (2011) add that a social entrepreneurship is not risk aversion but taking bold decisions in the quest to create social value. UNICEF (2007) agrees with the other authors on this attribute but adds another one which is referred to as visionary thinking. Webster (2015) defines visionary as having or showing clear ideas about what should happen or be done in the future. Bohwasi and Mukove (2008) postulate visionary thinking as the ability see an opportunity even in situations where others see chaos, confusion or problems. Thus the authors agree that risk taking, innovation and visionary thinking are fundamental elements of social entrepreneurship.

Some scholars add determination and patience to the list of key qualities of good social entrepreneurs. Abdumac (2006), defines determination as a positive emotion that involves persevering towards a difficult goal in spite of obstacles, not giving up no matter how hard things get or how badly you want to just give up. Martin and Oberg, (2007) view a social entrepreneur as not only determined and patient, but one who also exhibits sense of good leadership.

Flexibility is another attribute that scholars agree on as critical in social entrepreneurs. Dees (2004) argues

that flexibility, which is the ability to accommodate others of different opinions, is critical in enhancing interpersonal and networking abilities. Praskier and Nowak (2012) concur with Dees (ibid), further arguing that interpersonal skills are a vital competency for social entrepreneurs as they will need to be flexible in their quest for funding. They will need to be able to adjust from one funding conversation to the other.

Agbenyiga and Hamadan (2008) add a deep understanding of culture as another key quality of social entrepreneurship. The authors give the example of Ghana where Ghanaian women are usually the financial pillar of the family and also act as the social network facilitator for the family.

Therefore creativity, innovation, risk taking, patience, determination, networking and deep understanding of culture are qualities that make up good social entrepreneurs according to the various scholars.

#### **8.4 The Importance of Social Entrepreneurship**

Dobele et al (2011) argue that social entrepreneurship is important as it provides employment opportunities to socially vulnerable people, compensates bottlenecks that are experienced by governments in the provision of local services and allows for creating social innovation in areas such as education, health, the environment and business development. The Annual Survey of Small Businesses in UK estimates that 800,000 people are employed by social entrepreneurs (State of social enterprise survey, 2009).

Hervieux et al. (2010), add that social entrepreneurship do not only create social value through the creation of employment, but empower the marginalised population. To support the fact that social entrepreneurship empowers the marginalised, Germak and Singh (2009) provides the example of an entrepreneurial social program, the Grameen Bank. This is a bank that was developed to address a market demand and boost economy. The bank has managed to successfully address the demand for economic independence in Bangladesh by establishing a vast system of micro-credit. Through micro loans of as little as \$30 the Grameen has economically disadvantaged Bangladeshis and, consequently, helped 5.3 million people build credit, support their families, construct homes, and move toward economic independence.

Dobele et al (2011) also argue that social entrepreneurship promotes development of entrepreneurial skills critical for effective operations of social ventures. UNICEF (2007), argues that social entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for young people to take initiative, create a project, conceptualize and launch one's own venture through trainings on basic finance, accounting, marketing, and management, as well as problem solving, planning, and leadership.

The existing literature strongly suggests that social entrepreneurship alleviates poverty and promotes self-worth. Dobele et al. (2011) agree with this assertion and posit that social entrepreneurs directly and indirectly addresses biggest societal problems such as HIV/AIDS, mental ill-health, illiteracy, crime and drug abuse. Thus it significantly raises the social status of persons with disabilities and improves their quality of life.

Various authors assert that social entrepreneurship is key in the development of social capital. Dobele et al. (2011) posit that social entrepreneurship creates social capital because of its focus on long-term relationships, ethics of cooperation, innovation and industrial development.

#### **8.5 Conditions/Drivers for Social Entrepreneurship**

Agbenyiga and Ahmedani (2008) argue that social entrepreneurship is mainly driven by low standards of living and the associated social problems.

However some scholars believe that limited government participation in welfare matters triggers social entrepreneurship. Nandan and Scott (2013), posit that increased privatisation of government-run programs like child protection services has resulted in government playing less and less of a role in providing primary services. Nandan et al. (2015), further elaborate that there is a growing emphasis on reducing the governmental role in social welfare; concurrent with shrinking public funding for these causes has created major drivers for social entrepreneurship.

#### **8.6 Social Work Barriers to Social Entrepreneurship**

There is evidence to suggest that the social work curriculum is not empowering social work graduates to venture in social entrepreneurship. Bent-Dooley (2002), argue that social workers have already missed entrepreneurship opportunities due to their inward looking curriculum. This assertion is supported by Germak and Singh (2009), who argue that to address the changing environment of the non-profit sector, schools of social work should take a beacon role in educating social work students regarding the practice of advanced management techniques. SASW (2012) also weighs in on the argument by noting that the education policy of schools of social work must promote excellence, creativity and innovation in social work education and practice.

Germak and Singh (2012) identify perceptions by some social workers as a hindrance to social entrepreneurship. Germak and Singh (2009), add that embracing the practice of social entrepreneurship involves changing the way social workers do business. Social workers need to be business savvy which they should receive during their training in-order for them to overcome barriers to social entrepreneurship (Dale, 2012). Thus, studies

have shown that the social work curriculum is lacking business skills necessary to start and run a social entrepreneur venture.

Somescholars consider lack of a legal framework as a barrier to social entrepreneurship. For instance, Watters et al. (2012) found out that South Africa has no legislative framework to deal with social enterprises. Dees (2007) adds that due to the lack of legislative frameworks, social entrepreneurs do not find the kind of support they need to blend socially and attain their financial objectives.

Poor business models according to Mehta and Ashok (2012), is another impediment to social entrepreneurship. The authors argue that while microfinance spurs the initial growth of social entrepreneurs, there is still a challenge in finding the right business model for impact in sectors such as healthcare and education.

## 9. Findings

The following were identified by respondents as the major deterrents to social entrepreneurship:

### a. Resistance within Communities

53% of the respondents indicated that there was a general negative attitude towards social entrepreneurship by communities in general. Respondents said that communities viewed efforts towards social entrepreneurship with suspicion as in most cases they associated social entrepreneurship ventures with politics or viewed them as bent on swindling them of their resources.

This finding reflects that social entrepreneurship, as practised by Zimbabweans, is not a common phenomenon in the Zimbabwean communities. Zimbabwean communities may only be used to see foreigners through aid agencies engaging in social entrepreneurship ventures. Therefore find it difficult that their own can engage in similar activities with no ulterior motives.

### b. Relevance of curriculum to social entrepreneurial skills development

60% of the respondents indicated that the major impediment to social entrepreneurship among social work graduates was the curriculum used by the schools of social work. Only 33% of the respondents were of the opinion that the curriculum equipped graduates with social entrepreneurial skill.

The findings reflect that the social work curriculum does not prepare graduates for entrepreneurship; instead it prepares them for a life of employment. This could explain the high rate of social work graduates who have opted to search for employment in the diaspora after failing to secure employment locally.

### c. Political Interference and Rigid Regulatory Framework

Respondents ranked political interference and a rigid regulatory environment as deterring them from engaging in entrepreneurial ventures. The GoZ has policy initiatives that seek to address social issues linked to community development for example the Land Reform, Indigenisation, Youth Empowerment, ZIMASSET, etc. Existence of such programmes creates that impression that social entrepreneurship ventures are a political domain.

Secondly, respondents said that there are no clear regulations that should be followed by individuals who wish to set up social entrepreneurship ventures. They gave the example of payment of taxes and registration procedures to be followed. According to the respondents there was no policy by the tax authority with regard to tax clearance certificates for social entrepreneurship ventures. They also cited the absences of clarity regarding registration of such ventures- are they to be registered as Trusts or as welfare organisations under the Ministry of Labour and Social Services?

These findings support research by Watters et al. (2012) and Dees (2007) who confirm that lack of a clear regulatory framework inhibit social entrepreneurship since they will not the necessary support needed to blend socially and attain their financial objectives.

### d. Financial Challenges

Respondents cited lack of financial resources and absence of willing financiers as the other barrier to social entrepreneurship. The Zimbabwean economic environment since the year 2000 has not been conducive to investments. Up to 2008 the environment was characterised by hyperinflation, (Besada and Moyo, 2008), while the post 2008 period is characterised by a liquidity crisis, lack of lender of last resort, depressed demand for goods and services and high unemployment and interest rates (CZI, 2015).

This environment makes it difficult if not impossible for individuals to save to invest in ventures. On the other hand it also makes it difficult for individuals to borrow for start-ups

### e. Competition

Respondents brought up competition as another impediment to social entrepreneurship. Respondents said the social work was a highly specialised area hence required specialised skills. The required skills expect competitive remuneration which was being offered by many organisations in the diaspora. Thus new start-up social entrepreneurship ventures found it difficult to compete for the resources as they could not afford the remuneration demanded.

## 10. Conclusions

The study's findings bring the following conclusions:

The curricular for social work programmes does not address the entrepreneurial side of its graduates. The curricular still views social work graduates as being trained for seeking employment yet the reality on the ground is that there is little employment opportunities for the graduates.

The socio-political and economic environments currently prevailing in Zimbabwe does not support social entrepreneurship.

## 11. Recommendations

It is recommended that the social work degree programmes incorporate entrepreneurship training in order to prepare graduates for life after University. Given the prevailing challenges faced by Zimbabwe, which include high unemployment rates it would be wise to adopt entrepreneurship training as a life skill for social work graduates.

The study also recommends that the government clarifies regulations regarding the registration and operations of social entrepreneurship ventures. Social entrepreneurship is an area that has many benefits that will help Zimbabwe particularly in the face of the challenges that the country is faced with. Social entrepreneurship as a new phenomenon in developing economies including Zimbabwe has high potential for growth, thereby becoming a vehicle for employment creation and improving local communities' welfare.

Lastly there is need to conscientise society including financial institutions and the community at large of the existence of social entrepreneurship, its role in communities and that given the necessary support it can meet its financial and social obligations. This can be achieved by publicising successful social entrepreneurship ventures like the Grameen Bank, Water Play Pumps in South Africa, Water-Health International in Ghana and PolypillFor Cardio-Vascular treatment in India.

## 12. Area of further study

The majority of interviewed people were newly graduates without hands-on experience in social entrepreneurship. It is therefore recommended that further studies should focus on the experienced social work graduates who are in or were involved social entrepreneurship ventures.

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