Impetus for Social Sustainability in South African Communities: Lessons from Social Enterprises in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to contribute to the pursuit of sustainable social development in South Africa through local empirical evidence using selected social enterprises. The article used a qualitative research approach, an interpretive paradigm and a case study research design to investigate the way in which social enterprises promote social sustainability in South Africa. Three social enterprises were purposively selected, from which eight participants were interviewed. The data were analysed using the content thematic analysis technique. The findings indicate that social enterprises invest and create value in people and for communities for a better future, facilitate and improve approaches to community interventions, provide platforms for nurturing tolerance and cohesiveness in communities, and create wealth for social change in the communities. The authors conclude that a strategic attempt by social enterprises to invest in programmes and ventures that bring long-term positive social change is a vital ingredient for social sustainability and social development.

Keywords: cohesiveness, community wealth, social change, social enterprise, social sustainability

Introduction

The concept "sustainable development" has attracted much attention and debate in the world. According to the Brundtland Commission of 1987, sustainable development meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland 1987; Licht and Folland 2019; Roca-Puig 2019). The ideology of sustainable development emerged as a result of developing world

intellectuals and governments reframing the international environmental debates into broader developmental needs (Fukuda-Parr and Mucchala 2019). The developing world desired developmental approaches that viewed sustainability beyond the context of the environmental resources. Therefore, the objectives of environmental sustainability had to be integrated into new development strategies that encompass concerns for economic and social equity (Fukuda-Parr and Mucchala 2019).

Essentially, this called for the development practitioners to examine the limits within environmental and economic growth and to find alternative trajectory to human development. Since then, sustainable development concerns focus on three pillars of development, which are social, economic and environmental (Fukuda-Parr 2019; Licht and Folland 2019). However, the environmental and economic pillars have received much attention as compared with the social pillar (Amrutha and Geetha 2019; Kumar and Anbanandam 2018; UN DESA 2013; Vallance, Perkins, and Dixon 2011). Realising the inextricable relationship between these three pillars of development, development and policy practitioners are currently championing for social sustainability because of its concomitant impact on the economic and environmental pillars (Amrutha and Geetha 2019; Kumar and Anbanandam 2018; Plagerson et al. 2019).

Therefore, sustainable development requires the elimination of fragmentation within social, economic and environmental components. It is integral to decisively and strategically incorporate the three pillars in the decision-making processes in order to move towards development that is truly sustainable. This article is premised on the opportunistic thinking that scaling up social investment could accelerate impactful social development, especially in the fragile communities in rural areas and townships in South Africa.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

Sustainable Social Development in South Africa and its Challenges

The South African National Framework for Sustainable Development aspires to create equitable access to resources and shared prosperity (DEA 2011). This vision provides a developmental trajectory for greater efficiency and innovation in resource use; and the integration of social, economic, ecological, and government systems. However, the contemporary social ills, such as crime and xenophobia (Beetar 2019; Breetzke and Edelstein 2019; Muchineripi, Chinyamurindi, and Chimucheka 2019; Steinberg 2018), poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, and inequality (Solomon 2019; Statistics South Africa 2019; Steinberg 2018), are serious threats to the "social fabric" and undermine the vision of the country towards sustainable development. Moreover, high crime rates and xenophobia have a negative impact on the social, economic and political relationships between South Africa and other countries (Muchineripi, Chinyamurindi, and Chimucheka 2019; Nnaemeka, Nkechi, and Michael 2019). Consequently, the country's local and foreign direct investment is affected, thus

lessening the opportunities for job creation and employment (Muchineripi, Chinyamurindi, and Chimucheka 2019).

To progressively have the future generations live in better and harmonious communities, a strategic and deliberate redress for these issues is called for. It is the researchers' contention that social sustainability should be taken seriously in the current South African social and economic dispensation. Researchers such as Steinberg (2018), Solomon (2019), and Heijden, Abrahams, and Harries (2019) argue that the various social ills such as socio-economic inequality, poverty and unemployment have a negative impact on the country's state of peace and tranquillity. Thus, the need for innovative development approaches to deal with these issues led to the emergence of social enterprises.

Social Enterprises as Alternative Tools to Sustainable Development

Social enterprises have emerged as innovative business models to respond to the gaps and needs of sustainable development. The ideology behind social entrepreneurship is balancing social and economic objectives to contribute to the market integration, social inclusion and economic development (Bacq and Janssen 2011; Mirabella and Young 2012; Roundy 2017). Social entrepreneurship is about envisioning a future that is socially and economically integrated, which results in wealth creation, employment, low-cost housing, and investments in the health of the communities (Crawford-Spencer and Cantatore 2016). Notably, social entrepreneurship in growing economies has contributed to social welfare, social capital, economic value creation, and collective actions to deal with community needs (Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2017).

The World Bank Group defines social enterprises as privately owned organisations – for-profit, non-profit, or a hybrid of the two – that use business methods to advance their social objectives (World Bank Group 2017). Accordingly, Mandyoli, Iwu and Nxopo (2017) characterise social enterprises with the following: social mission, value creation, value capture, innovation, reinvesting profit, impact, and market-based.

Similarly, Noya (2009) and Saifan (2012) describe social enterprises as local initiatives that combat exclusion in communities and improve the well-being of individuals and communities at large. This reflects the role of social work practice, which primarily optimises the functionalities of individuals, groups and communities (IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW 2018; Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2013). Therefore, social service providers such as social workers can gain lessons from the operations of social enterprises to expedite social sustainability in the communities.

In Europe for example, social enterprises have contributed to the lessening of social inequality and improved the well-being of the people through job creation, participation and widening the horizons for social capital (Darko and Kweku 2015; World Bank Group 2017). In the South African context, research shows that social enterprises have a significant role in the social, economic, political and environmental development of

the country (ILO 2017; Kajiita and Kang'ethe 2020; Littlewood and Holt 2018; Shrivastava 2015). Social enterprises have been perceived as avenues to facilitate social development in South Africa by working with vulnerable groups (Hanley, Jansen, and Grotehans 2016; Urban 2008).

Notably, social enterprises in South Africa are involved in multiple sectors, such as health, education, agribusiness, clothing, and information communication and technology (Gordon 2016; Kajiita and Kang'ethe 2020). In these sectors, they focus on working and delivering services to the people in the weaker segments of society such as women, youth and children (Gordon 2016). These are groups that find it difficult to gain entry into the mainstream market economy (Kajiita and Kang'ethe 2020). For instance, the Clothing Bank in the Eastern Cape province has positively changed the lives of unemployed mothers through employment, skills development and health-related training (Kajiita and Kang'ethe 2020). Arguably, these benefits provide an important trajectory towards attaining sustainable social development.

Social Sustainability

Social sustainability as a sub-concept of sustainable development attracts different interpretations. According to the United Nations Global Impact (2020), social sustainability is about identification and management of positive and negative impacts of business on people. This implies that economic growth affects individuals and communities differently. Therefore, proactive measures are necessary to mitigate such effects to strike a balance between the needs for the current and the future generations. Social sustainability is a collective understanding of the need to build a community that thrives with equal access to opportunities with regard to amenities and infrastructure, social and cultural life, voice and influence, and space to grow (Bonnefin 2017). It hinges on principles of equity and equality, participation in decision-making, community ownership and responsibility, efficient and effective systems, and social cohesion (Murphy 2012; Schönborn et al. 2019; United Nations Global Impact 2020). This implies that social sustainability is both a process and an outcome.

Against these ideals, inequality is very high in the world such that in 2015, 62 individuals owned and controlled more assets than the poorer 3.6 billion people combined (World Economic Forum 2020). This stunning gap between the haves and have-nots clearly portrays a glaring magnitude of inequalities in societies and has been tantamount to violence, mental illness, lower life expectancies, and lower levels of trust in the communities (Bonnefin 2017; World Economic Forum 2020). The continuity of inequality is likely to disrupt the social, economic and political functioning of communities, thus undermining social sustainability. This necessitates the balancing of economic and social activities and outcomes to build on social sustainability (Roca-Puig 2019).

Social sustainability occurs when the formal and the informal processes, systems, structures and relationships facilitate the ability of the present and the future generations

to maintain secure and healthy communities (Allen and David 2007; Davids, Theron, and Maphunye 2009; Kemp, Parto, and Gibson 2005). To achieve this, there is a need to design and develop institutions and businesses that recognise the value of social sustainability. In the context of this study, social sustainability is viewed as a socially instituted process of adaptive change, in which equality, participation, accessibility of systems, innovation, and cultural integration are its core principles. It is on this premise that the activities of social enterprises are perceived as an impetus for social sustainability.

Unified Theory of Social Enterprise

The study is informed by the unified theory of social enterprise, which postulates that social enterprise emerges as the demand and supply of positive externalities that are ignored by the governments and other profit-making businesses (Santos 2009; Young 2007).

The institutions and individuals with surplus income and wealth represent the supply part of the social enterprises, whereas the impoverished segments of the community represent the demand side. The demand for social enterprises is a result of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and exclusion from and unsustainability of government programmes (Young 2007). Therefore, through social investment, the affluent groups supply services and products to areas in which they are mostly needed. Resultantly, positive externalities such as employment and community participation, new products and services are created (Santos 2009; Young 2007). These indicators help to tract the social mission of the social enterprises and could be useful to determine efforts towards social sustainability.

Aim of the Study

The article aims to contribute to the understanding of sustainable social development empirically using selected social enterprises in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa. The objective is to illustrate the way in which social enterprises are the impetus for social sustainability in South African communities.

Problem Statement

Social sustainability remains an area of deep concern in South Africa. This is because South Africa continues to struggle with challenges of inequality, a divided society, poverty and unemployment (Fransman and Yu 2019; Rogan and Reynolds 2019; Statistics South Africa 2019; UN DESA 2013). Glaringly, these factors threaten the "social fabric" of the communities and the country at large. Research evidences that the intervention gaps between the government, the private-for-profit sector, and non-governmental organisations (not-for-profit) perpetuate non-inclusive social development and growth in South Africa (Gordon 2016; Hanley, Jansen, and Grotehans

2016; Rogan and Reynolds 2019). To fill these gaps, alternative development approaches and models such as social entrepreneurship have emerged (ILO 2017; Shrivastava 2015).

Previous studies on social enterprise in South Africa have focused on mapping, roles, policy environment, and conceptualisations, to mention but a few (Gordon 2016; ILO 2017; Littlewood and Holt 2018; Shrivastava 2015). In these studies, the component of social sustainability has not been dealt with, hence the need to investigate it in this study. This is important because the growing inequalities in South Africa undermine the prospects for growth and sustainable socio-economic development. Therefore, strategies to facilitate and accelerate social sustainability are vital in South Africa.

Methodology

The contemporary social ills besetting communities in the world demand that researchers and social service practitioners use a wide range of methodologies to investigate, interpret and understand societal challenges to provide the best solutions possible. Qualitative research inquiry and case studies are considered appropriate to study social phenomena and interactions in systems and institutions (Creswell 2014; Patton 2015). The study therefore adopted this inquiry to explore and understand the way in which social enterprises can facilitate and accelerate social sustainability in South African communities.

As recorded in the background of this article, the communities are bequeathed with historical fragmentation, which potentially threaten socio-economic integration of future generations. Therefore, a qualitative inquiry is most appropriate when investigating social realities because it provides the researchers with an opportunity to interact with the people experiencing the phenomenon or those with rich knowledge of the subject matter (Creswell 2014; Paton 2015). Therefore, engaging social entrepreneurs in an in-depth discussion about social sustainability provided the researchers with a platform to gather data for critical analysis and insightful conclusions.

Population and Sampling Techniques

Social entrepreneurship in South Africa is on a growth path, with the majority of the social enterprises being at their nascent stages of development (Shrivastava 2015; ILO, 2017). Owing to these early stages of development, an established database for social enterprises in the country and especially in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality is lacking. This presented a challenge for the researchers in sampling. To overcome this limitation, a web search on social enterprises in the Eastern Cape province was conducted. The web search yielded eight social enterprises which became the target population for the study. The following criteria was used to select three social enterprises: (1) the enterprise adopts a business model to provide services; (2) the enterprise has a clear social mission statement; (3) the enterprise works for or serves

marginalised groups; (4) the enterprise shows innovation; and (5) the enterprise reinvests profits to create social value. The sample consisted of agribusiness, clothing, and information and communication technology (ICT) enterprises. Based on the knowledge and availability of the participants, the three founders, three managers of each enterprise, one employee from the ICT enterprise, and another employee from the clothing enterprise were interviewed. Since this study was dealing with organisations and people, the researchers took into consideration all applicable research ethics and procedures such as respect for privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Patton 2015) during and after the research process.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

Qualitative studies use interviews to generate data through participants' narratives (Patton 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted with the eight staff members of the selected social enterprises. The data were collected in 2018 as part of a broad study that evaluated social enterprises and sustainable social development in South Africa. An interview guide with questions relating to the functions and contributions of social enterprises to social development was designed and used. The data collection process was cross-sectional in nature, meaning that the data were collected at once and in a short time (Patton 2015). Despite the limitations with the number and category of participants (social enterprise staff) qualitatively sufficient information was gathered for analysis.

Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis entails making meaning from words, text and images (Creswell 2014; Patton 2015). The data collected in this study were textual and therefore required thorough reading, transcription and development of codes. Through this process of meaning-making, patterns of ideas emerged about social sustainability and social enterprises. In applying a qualitative inductive analysis (Patton 2015), the researchers identified themes (the findings) presented in the next section. The participants' verbatim narratives, where applicable, were used to support the researchers' interpretations.

Findings

Socio-Economic Information of Participants

A total of 62.5 per cent of the participants were females and 37.5 per cent of the participants were males (see Table 1). The active participation of women in social enterprises is an important indicator of women entering the business community, which highlights a sense of gender inclusivity, an "ingredient" for sustainable social development (Frank and Muranda 2016; UN DESA 2013). This is because women have been reported to constitute the majority of people excluded from economic and business activities globally (IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW 2018; UN DESA 2013).

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

Gender	%	Age (years)	%	Qualification	%
Male	37.5	20–30	25	Diploma	37.5
Female	62.5	31–40	25	Bachelor	50
Total	**100**	41–50	37.5	Postgrad	12.5
		Above 51	12.5	**Total**	**100**
		Total	**100**		

In terms of age, the majority of the participants were in the age bracket of 20 to 40 years. This shows an active engagement of young people in social enterprise activities. This was useful in moulding them to become responsible citizens and refrain from criminal activities (Solomon 2019), hence contributing to positive societal transformation.

On qualification, 50 per cent had a bachelor's degree, 37.5 per cent had a diploma, and 12.5 per cent had a doctoral degree. Irrefutably, good education and training for social entrepreneurs and support staff are significantly important in problem identification, administration and interacting with relevant stakeholders to achieve the social mission (Darko and Kweku 2015; Hanley, Jansen, and Grotehans 2016). Therefore, the social entrepreneurs had requisite training to enable them to run a social business, and had the ability to understand the social challenges and the need for sustainable solutions.

Investing in People and Communities for Future Change

The study revealed that social enterprises focus on people to bring the best out of them, by utilising their special capabilities, talents, skills, values, and cultures. These values and attributes harbour a great potential for wealth creation for societal and individual development. The social entrepreneurs perceived the relationships between the social enterprises and the people served as a long-term investment with implications for a better future. For example, when comparing the social enterprise model with an African value system, one of the participants explained that:

> I would say that this was [referring to social entrepreneurship] an African way of communal living where people used to share their wealth and property with the rest of the community members. But we can now say it has been advanced to take the market approach. (Social entrepreneur agribusiness)

This participant likened social entrepreneurship approach to an ideal African way of life, that constituted sharing and caring for one another. Stating "this was a way of African communal living" indicates the absence of such a component in the current African communities, but at the same time acknowledges it in the social enterprise approach. In relation to social enterprises being close to people, to discover strengths and develop them, a participant contended that:

> The desire to be close to people and helping them address their problems is what demarcates social enterprises from other forms of businesses or organisations. It is a mutual relationship because the investor makes money while the community within him also benefits. (Social entrepreneur clothing enterprise)

Apparently, social enterprises embed immense social capital that positions them as avenues for developing sustainable communities. From the participants' views, there was sense of healthy relationships characterised by community friendliness, shared prosperity and wealth creation in the local settings. Social sustainability has been characterised by Murphy (2012) and Schönborn et al. (2019) as being inclusive and promoting distribution of resources. This is also explained by the supply principle of the unified theory of social enterprise (Young 2007), in that surplus wealth and resources are invested in and with people who need them most. This results in a rigorous social entrepreneurship and community social investment (Mirabella and Young 2012). According to the United Nations Global Impact (2020), to create wealth in communities and to achieve social sustainability, unlocking new markets, retaining and attracting business partners in social investing, and promoting innovation for new products or service lines are necessary.

Facilitated and Improved Community Approach to Local Needs

This study indicated that the social enterprises had an important developmental role in facilitating programmes and activities that meet the community needs in a transformative manner. For instance, the clothing enterprise mobilised resources (clothes) from the major clothing dealers such as Woolworths, Mr Price, and Truworths to initiate, develop and support selected women-owned enterprises in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality and other parts of the country. Moreover, the agribusiness enterprise supported macadamia farmers to access international markets and to use their collective bargaining voice to sell their products at competitive prices. The presence of these enterprises according to the participants facilitated and improved access to markets, funding and social support to individuals and the communities. Furthermore, the enterprises improved the affordability of services such as training (women trained on sewing), ICT services, and short courses for the youth. The participants were very positive about the position of social enterprises as they opined:

> Our approach stands high . . . we are changing the lives of many people. We are result-oriented and not about recommendations. (Social entrepreneur ICT enterprise)

> . . . we have been able to prove that out of dead community assets there are viable economic activities. That is critical in solving the problem of unemployment in rural communities. By so doing, we are able to bring dignity to the rural people. (Manager agribusiness enterprise)

The sentiments above elucidate the way in which social enterprises are instrumental in facilitating communities to develop and adopt improved strategies to deal with challenges related to access to services. This provides a platform for communities to

invest as the unified theory of social enterprise (Young 2007) expatiate on the fact that the social entrepreneurs are both a source of demand (seeking personal and organisational satisfaction) and supply (motivations and incentives) for social enterprise services and products.

The access to ICT services at low costs played a facilitative role in dealing with challenges related to accessing information on government services such as social grants, and also personal needs such as printing, photocopying and faxing. This is in line with the World Economic Forum view that through technology, the development of products and services can increase efficiency and lead to an enjoyable lifestyle at reduced costs (World Economic Forum 2020). In the same vein, two participants contended that:

> We focus on accessibility and flexibility of services we offer. For example, we facilitate the creation of user accounts for our services and get into a contract with our clients for convenience. This gives them ownership as they can use the services anytime they wish, even when they have not paid for them. (Manager ICT enterprise)

> Other business operators and entrepreneurs use our services to register their businesses with ease compared to other platforms. (Employee ICT enterprise)

The above extracts showcase social enterprises' facilitative role in ensuring that communities access the services that are necessary for their present and future developmental needs. Social enterprises make strategic social investments and support social sustainability by partnering with other businesses and communities to pull strengths and resources for a greater positive impact (Frank and Muranda 2016; ILO 2017). This enables the community to develop skills, experience and knowledge to tackle future challenges (Murphy 2012).

Developing and Nurturing Cohesive and Responsible Communities

The study revealed that social entrepreneurs were driven by a desire for wealth creation, sustainability, innovation, participation, human dignity and ownership in their operations. The participants claimed that they undertook investments that nurtured and developed their local communities to co-exist, participate in decision-making processes, and have a sense of ownership in the community wealth. This was perceived to progressively promote the integration of different clusters of people in the communities for future development. An entrepreneur had the following to share:

> One [an entrepreneur] needs just an idea to address the needs in the community. In our case, we only needed one computer, and through innovation, we could have more. Further, our services are rooted in the principles of ubuntu that echoes Ulutho our mantra, while the other sectors are driven by profit-making; and do not necessarily consider humanistic values. (Social entrepreneur ICT enterprise)

Arguably, by applying the principle of wealth creation as opposed to wealth accumulation, social enterprises are more likely to undertake humanistic approaches that the beneficiaries can learn to reciprocate in the community. The ability to reciprocate builds social sustainability by increasing trust and cooperation in a community (Roca-Puig 2019). For example, the clothing enterprise recruited unemployed mothers for a training and mentorship programme to help them overcome their past life challenges. In turn, these women have become ambassadors of change in their families.

Alluding to the importance of innovation in developing a community, a manager postulated that:

> . . . for you to be different, you must be innovative in what you want to do because you might find that, the product you want to produce or the service you want to offer is already in the market and many people are doing it. So it is either you modify the existing products and services, or you create new ones altogether for you to succeed in bringing change to the community. (Manager clothing enterprise)

This sentiment shows the need to be innovative and to challenge the traditions to change the community for the future good. It is through innovations that new products and services are developed, maintained and improved for future use (World Economic Forum 2020). Therefore, it is also central that social enterprises continue to train and empower individuals through innovation, and instil humanistic values as they are integral ingredients for social sustainability (Roca-Puig 2019; Schönborn et al. 2019; United Nations Global Impact 2020).

Wealth Creation for Local People and for Social Change

The study revealed that social enterprises created and contributed to wealth creation through employment, skills development, training and empowerment programmes, and access to the markets. This was achieved through the recruitment of unemployed women into sewing and business development enterprises by a clothing social enterprise, recruitment and training of youth who were unable to join the mainstream (colleges and universities) by providing short ICT courses, and supporting farmers' cooperative to improve collective bargaining for their products. By providing these services, social enterprises were capacitating and empowering the community to be self-sufficient, and to emancipate themselves economically. Therefore, with requisite skills, resources can be converted into wealth to transform individuals and the community at large. This resonates well with the participants' views as illustrated below:

> We have enabled young people to get business franchise at an affordable rate which has enabled more job creation. Few of our graduates have also started their own businesses, which continue to promote access to information and jobs in the rural communities. (Social entrepreneur ICT enterprise)

> I moved from being a cashier to a branch manager and later on I was able to own my store through a franchise. (Manager ICT enterprise)

In an agreement that social enterprises create wealth for and with the local people, another participant reported that:

> We are able to harness the rural people to stay in their rural areas without migrating to urban areas to seek jobs. So this helps to curb the challenge of rural-urban migration, which is constraining many cities. (Manager agribusiness enterprise)

The access to community assets and resources is necessary for building a socially sustainable community (Bonnefin 2017; Murphy 2012). This situates social enterprises as platforms and conduits for promoting socially sustainable communities through creation and distribution of wealth (Kajiita and Kang'ethe 2020). Research indicates that social enterprises are driven by the desire for assisting the indigent with adapting to, and managing the shocks of life through new development approaches that bring about economic and social relief (Gordon 2016; Guputa, Beninger, and Ganesh 2015: ILO 2011; Littlewood and Holt 2018). These are potential indicators towards attaining social sustainability.

Discussion

The findings revealed that social enterprises were people-centric and were characterised by investing their resources such as money, time, skills and values in the community. By social enterprises focusing on people's needs and abilities, they are likely to facilitate self-emancipation, leading to community realisation of the need for collective efforts (Roca-Puig 2019; Schönborn et al. 2019). The people-centric approach adopted by social enterprises counters the conventional self-centredness capitalistic and imperialistic investments modalities (Arowolo 2010), which have continued to tear down the societal social and human values (IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW 2018). Being aware of these dynamics, social entrepreneurs attempt to reconstruct the market system through innovation to create economic and social value (Crawford-Spencer and Cantatore 2016; Sengupta, Sahay, and Croce 2017). They create balance in economic systems by providing fairer prices for goods and services (Crawford-Spencer and Cantatore 201; Young 2007) as well as producing with the people who need those products (Kajiita and Kang'ethe 2020). Through these efforts, social enterprises provide grounds for thinking and attaining social sustainability in communities (Solomon 2019; Steinberg 2018). Hence, policymakers and other social-oriented pragmatists should facilitate development that promotes social sustainability through poverty alleviation, inclusivity and equality in all spheres of life.

In the South African context, social enterprises have strategically and objectively cultivated both formal and informal partnerships with private, public and non-profit stakeholders (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon 2014; Gordon 2016; Guputa, Beninger, and

Ganesh 2015; Littlewood and Holt 2018) to engineer sustainable ventures. This is supported by the unified theory of social enterprises that explains the importance of different sources of strengths and experiences of governments and the private sector in developing social investments (Young 2007). Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO 2011) reported that successful social enterprises create and leverage partnerships across sectors to alleviate poverty in developing communities. In the current study, formal and informal partnerships included, for example, the clothing social enterprise working with the major supply chain clothing entities, support from the government through enterprise fund grants, and the local beneficiaries. This was important in securing financial, and human resource expertise, and community trust needed to expedite the enterprise operations towards achieving the social mission.

From the three social enterprises, marketing, philanthropic, leadership, and general management skills were acquired by the beneficiaries. According to Mirabella and Young (2012), these are some of the most important skills developed by and within the social enterprises, and are significant in creating social impact in communities.

Arguably, this is why social enterprises attempt to develop and nurture a state of cohesiveness in the communities as reported in this study. Community social cohesion and tranquillity have been emphasised in South Africa as an important tenet to realise sustainable social development (DSD 2013). However, the pertinent questions we need to ask ourselves are: "in which way do we achieve sustainable community social cohesion and tranquillity?" and "what facilitative tools and mechanism do we need?" Perhaps evaluating development approaches and philosophies that are in place could generate insights on the need to reconstruct existing development models to facilitate social sustainability.

Guided by the strong belief system, social enterprises pursue multiple sustainability issues such as financial, community relationships and social capital accrued from stakeholder interactions (Gravells 2012). This positions them as vital vehicles for transformative development in South Africa (DSD 2013; Noya 2009; Shrivastava 2015). According to Gravells (2012), the transformation and social sustainability of communities require passionate, enthusiastic and morally strong social entrepreneurs. This is because a strong moral and belief system keeps the entrepreneurs accountable or "checked" in terms of ethical frameworks that the social enterprises strive to restore in communities. According to Roundy (2017), social enterprises provide incentives for community revitalisation, and attract community stakeholders to invest in wealth creation because of the trust they trade. Consequently, the status quo between the impoverished and the affluent is challenged. This creates an opportunity for new development approaches that are friendly to the local community interests. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of macro and micro environments of economic trends, political landscapes, and sociocultural settings in the local context is important for social sustainability.

Conclusion and Implications for Social Work

The study has elucidated that the innovativeness within the social enterprises provides a platform to invigorate, restructure and usher in development frontiers for sustainable social development in South Africa. This is because successful social enterprises are able to introduce and leverage social, economic, political and cultural challenges in an inclusive approach. Social enterprises benefits to the communities are both complementary and supplementary to the social work practice mandate for promoting positive transformation in the society and the well-being of the individuals and families (IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW 2018).

It is critical that social institutions strive to develop and transfer human capital, values and aspirations for better livelihoods between generations. This is significant in providing a preventive remedy to the social maladies manifested in the communities currently. Therefore, integrating social enterprises ethos into social work interventions could strengthen the efforts of the Department of Social Development in combating poverty, inequality, unemployment, and crime, to mention but a few. This is where the skills and expertise of social workers as lobbyists, advocates, and brokers are of paramount importance to bring the much-desired change in the communities. The article calls for a paradigm shift on restructuring economic, social and political systems to align with the principles of social sustainability.

The findings are limited to only three social enterprises and their staff members. This limits the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the views from the founders, managers and employees show potential bias. Nonetheless, the study provides useful insights on social enterprises as impetus for social sustainability in South Africa. The study is an opportunity for further research focusing on beneficiaries of these social enterprises for validation.

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