

# The Role of Social Entrepreneurship in Enabling Economic Opportunities for the Poor: A Synthesis of the Literature and Empirical Works<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to shed light on how social entrepreneurship enables economic opportunities for the poor, thus eliminating social and economic problems in society. It also attempts to better understand the role of social entrepreneurship in enabling economic opportunities for the poor. To achieve the purpose, possible links through which social entrepreneurship enables economic opportunities are developed based on a survey of the literature. However, these links have yet to be empirically researched.*

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, social value, social problem.

**JEL Classifications:** L31, M1, O34.

## 1. Introduction

One of the main challenges of global economic development is the high rate of poverty. According to the United Nations (2013), there were about 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty, with funds of less than US\$1.25 per day. In Indonesia alone, in 2012 about 43.3% of the country's population of approximately 253 million people lived below the poverty line, earning less than US\$2 per day (BTI, 2014). The causes of poverty are very diverse. According to Mensah and Benedict (2010), poverty occurs because of a lack of access to adequate resources, resulting in difficulty for the poor to emerge from poverty. Sen (1985) explained that poverty occurs due to the inability of individuals to achieve the minimum capacity needed to gain fundamental freedoms of life. These freedoms include the freedom to engage in politics and the freedom to obtain economic and social networking facilities. If individuals retain the fundamental freedoms of life, they can have a quality of life which allows them to be free from the poverty line and escape from deprivations. This discussion indicates that the causes of poverty can be grouped into two categories: (1) poverty that occurs due to the limited ownership of the resources, thus hindering economic activity; and (2) poverty due to the failure to obtain the fundamental freedoms of life. By considering these causes, efforts to reduce poverty can address both categories.

Many empirical studies have demonstrated the important role of social entrepreneurship, and several scholars have examined its contributions in the economy. They include Santos (2012) and Mulgan and Landry (1995), who find that social entrepreneurship serves as a second invisible hand<sup>2</sup> in the economy that arises from the concern and moral commitment of individuals and their sense of shared (mutual responsibility).

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<sup>2</sup> The first invisible hand refers to the concept of the market mechanism that works based on principles of competitiveness in achieving economic goals. ... *and by directing that industry in such a manner, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part in his intention. Nor it is always worse for society that it was no part of. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it,* Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776.

According to Santos (2012), unlike the first invisible hand, under the 2nd invisible hand individual interests can be aligned so that individual goals do not conflict with social interests. Santos considers SE to allow the existence of another form of the invisible hand in the economy, one which does not merely emphasise individual interest (self-interest), but also heeds social interests in the economic system (p.350). Similar to Adam Smith's view, individuals cannot live only to satisfy personal interests, but also give attention to others' interests—this is the root of social entrepreneur behavior.

Martin and Osberg (2007) argue that social entrepreneurs emerge due to poverty, marginalization and exclusion in society, which in turn create social problems—the entrepreneurial context. To overcome social problems, there are individuals who take the initiative of tackling social problems by using business principles—entrepreneurial characteristics. Acting to utilize entrepreneurial characteristics in overcoming the entrepreneurial context will then create *entrepreneurial outcomes*, namely social change in poor communities (p. 35). Such social changes are the contribution of social entrepreneurs in improving the quality of life, efficiency, and sustainability of social and economic growth (Popoviciu and Popoviciu, 2011: 47). Literature indicates that by incorporating some social and business skills into entrepreneurship activities, social entrepreneurs play role in tackling social and economic problems in society, thereby enabling economic opportunities, especially for the poor. The purpose of this paper is to see the possible links through which social entrepreneurship enables economic opportunities for the poor, thereby combating poverty.

## **2. Social Entrepreneurship Defined**

Although social entrepreneurship has received a lot of attention at both theoretical and practical levels, it has no standard definition, but rather a multitude of definitions (Acs, Boardman & McNeely, 2013; Trexler, 2009). Most definitions of social entrepreneurship are practical (Mair & Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012). For instance, Mort, Weerawardena and Carnegie (2002) wrote that social entrepreneurship is multidimensional and covers business activities (entrepreneurship) in achieving social mission. Their emphasis lies on the achievement of a social mission, which is accompanied by a balance between objectives and immoral actions. Social entrepreneurship is described as individuals' action for change using principles and entrepreneurial models to meet social needs, to address social problems, and to maintain social values. This can be done through the use of innovation to create products, services and new economic markets (Dees & Anderson, 2006; Dees, 1998).

A more prevalent definition is provided by Seelos and Mair (2005), who defined creating social values as the ultimate goal of social entrepreneurship. The economic values obtained through social entrepreneurship is only an additional goal (by-product) undertaken to ensure the sustainability and self-sufficiency of social entrepreneurship organizations. Products and services which are produced by social entrepreneur are directly related to basic needs that cannot be fulfilled by the social and economic institutions that exist in society (Seelos & Mair, 2005: 244).

Another definition of social entrepreneurship is as a philanthropic activity that aims to achieve social objectives (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Dees, 2001). In such a view, social entrepreneurs are social investors who utilize the resources and capital at their disposal to manage business activities which the aim of helping the poor through constructive methods. Such philanthropic activities are an important part of non-profit organizations which emphasize the importance of achieving social impact<sup>3</sup> by using business principles of venture capital, strategic thinking, and management principles; these people are defined as venture philanthropists (Robinson, 2006). Dees (1998: 4-6) proposed a more ideal definition of social entrepreneurship where he defined social entrepreneurs contribute to the living standard improvement not only achieving private values, but also adopting a mission to create and sustain social value, always finding new opportunities to achieve mission, striving to find innovation, adaptation, and learning as well as acting consistently without being hampered by limited resources.

From the above definitions, it can be seen those definitions of social entrepreneurship emphasize two key issues: entrepreneurial activity and social goals. In line with this, Seelos and Mair (2005) assert that the main characteristics of social entrepreneurship are a social mission and intended social impact. The same view was given by Dees (1998: 3), who emphasized that a social mission is the explicit and central goal of the social entrepreneurship. Due to goal, the challenges faced by a social entrepreneur are different than those faced by entrepreneurs in general.

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<sup>3</sup> Burdge and Vanclay (1996:59) argue that social impact is related to social and cultural consequences (cultural impacts) of both private and public actions. Such consequences affect individuals' ways of life and their behaviour in interacting with others to meet individual needs.

As explained by Mair and Marti (2006: 8), the main priority in social entrepreneurship is social wealth creation; it is different than business-objective entrepreneurship, which prioritizes economic wealth creation. Social wealth creation can be achieved because the primary motivation of social entrepreneurs is to create value for other people, not to capture value (Santos, 2012: 341-342). In creating such values, they conduct business activities, organizing and managing a business/venture in the context of social change (George, 2009). Thus, social entrepreneurs are seen as individuals who have new solutions to address social issues, and ultimately provide economic opportunities for the community.

For the purpose of this paper, social entrepreneurship is seen as the use of business activities and entrepreneur practices to address social and economic problems in society by exploiting relevant business activities (business venture) to create income and economic value.

### ***3. What role can social entrepreneurship play in helping the poor?***

Empirical studies and literature provide indicate that social entrepreneurship offers economic opportunities, including for the poor. Schumpeter, cited in Santos (2012), understood social entrepreneurship as entrepreneurs in general with regard to the production of new goods, the discovery of new production methods and new markets, as well as the creation of new organizations. Entrepreneurs, including social entrepreneurs, act as agents of important changes in the economy, and thus become agents of economic growth and job and wealth creation that can improve the welfare of the community (Wiklund, Davidsson, Audretsch, and Karlsson, 2011). Existing literature shows that the important roles of social entrepreneurs in enabling economic opportunities include: (1) the creation of access to financial resources; (2) the use of social innovation; (3) empowerment and social inclusion; and (4) job creation.

#### ***3.1. Financial access provision***

There is ample evidence that a lack of access to formal financial institutions is a great obstacle encountered by the poor because most of them engage with the informal sector. Efforts to encourage business activity in the informal sector should be emphasized in expanding access to financial resources. Their principles should be different than those of conventional banking schemes, in which collateral is generally requested when individuals apply for a loan. One movement for the creation and expansion of access to financing for the poor was conducted by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which was founded by Muhammad Yunus in 1976 is a social business organization. This bank plays an important role in poverty reduction in Bangladesh (Yunus, 2007; 2011) by channeling loans to the poor using schemes that are unlike those in formal banking. In contrast to general financial institutions, individuals who borrow funds from Grameen Bank need not provide a guarantee (collateral). Rather, loans are disbursed upon principles of mutual trust, accountability, participation and creativity. There are three main characteristics which distinguish Grameen Bank: (1) lending and borrowing systems are designed to ensure that the borrower is able to repay the loan in a timely manner; (2) only the poor people in villages and the landless are eligible to borrow; and (3) lending priority is given to women (Seelos & Mair, 2005: 243).

Grameen Bank has a very significant role in combating poverty and also in encouraging various economic activities and social development in Bangladesh (Pervez, Maritz & Waal, and 2013: 59). Through Grameen Bank, Yunus has proved that microcredit that is channeled to the poor, particularly the women who are generally active in the informal economy, has managed to bring the poor out of poverty. The success of Grameen Bank in providing financial access to the poor is considered an important strategy for reducing poverty. Another social entrepreneurship organization that successfully helps poor people get funding is SKS Microfinance, an organization founded by Vikram Akula in India in 1997 ([www.sksindia.com](http://www.sksindia.com)). Its mission is to eradicate poverty by providing microfinance services to the poor people of India and other countries. The organization's microfinance activities are run by applying modern financial management practices and the technology applied in conventional banking systems. SKS Microfinance channels their loans to the poor, particularly women, with a guarantee mechanism in which the members of the five groups of women who initiated SKS Microfinance serve to provide loan guarantees to every member of each group. Currently, SKS Microfinance is the largest microfinance institution in India in terms of the number of customers, branches and also loans disbursed (Pervez, Maritz & Waal, 2013). Along the way, SKS Microfinance has changed from non-profit into a for-profit organization in an attempt to expand access to financial resources, made possible by, among others, going public on the Bombay Stock Exchange and New York Stock Exchange (Peterson, 2015: 15).

#### ***3.2 Social Innovation***

As in other fields, innovation is pivotal in social entrepreneurship. Social innovation refers to innovative activities and services which are carried out by social-mission organizations to fulfill unmet social needs in the society (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, & Sanders, 2007: 8). Social innovation, as a growing field in social science, is embedded in social entrepreneurship activities in many countries (see, Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006; OECD, 2010; Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, & Sanders, 2007). The OECD (2010) defines social innovation as efforts to address social problems, and to identify and provide new services that can improve the quality of life of individuals and communities.

According to Santos (2012), social entrepreneurship is a process of economic innovation that occurs with a variety of characteristics of institutions based on the creation of values in which the approach used is generally suitable and appropriate to address problems in modern society. Hence, social innovation is closely related to social entrepreneurship, where the social entrepreneur is the actor of social innovation. Social innovation is also interpreted as social changes, referring to the process and results of those changes. Social entrepreneurs bring and use ideas and innovative solutions to overcome social problems (Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik, 2011). They utilize personal leadership skills and capacity to solve problems that arise in particular communities or regions (Mulgan and Landry, 1995: 41). Social entrepreneurs create social values by exploiting innovation such as establish new activities or organizations (Schumpeter, 1994; Pervez, Maritz & Waal, 2013; Ashoka, nd).

A study by Groot and Dankbaar (2014) on twenty social enterprises in the Netherlands indicates the importance of social innovation as a solution to social problems. In their study, social innovation referred to the discovery of new ideas related to products, services and models that could be used to encourage the fulfillment of social needs such as social inclusion, environmental protection, and sustainable development, as well as relationship establishment and new social collaboration. Successful efforts in using social innovation to help the poor are also shown by Kiva Foundation, which was established in the United States in 2005. As a non-profit organization, Kiva strives to build connections between individuals by providing micro loans in order to reduce poverty. This organization emphasizes the importance of the role of technology and the internet to drive micro-financing networks by connecting people in different locations and countries. Kiva builds connections between people through four stages: (1) choose a borrower; (2) make a loan; (3) get repaid, and (4) repeat. In summary, the connection mechanism begins with capital owners who use the information available on Kiva's website to obtain information about individuals who need capital to run businesses. If a potential borrower candidate is found, then capital owners can be channeled through loan institutions, that loan be referred to as Kiva's field partners. Kiva has field partners in many areas, which are generally in the form of micro-finance institutions, schools, NGOs, and various other organizations. Furthermore, after funds are distributed, the capital owners continue to oversee customers and ask the customers to repay their loan when they have successfully established their business. Once the funds have been returned to the owners of capital, capital owners can re-use them and lend the funds to others, or donate them to Kiva, or withdraw them entirely from Kiva ([www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org))

### 3.3. People Empowerment and Job Creation

Empowerment is an essential aspect of social entrepreneurship. According to the World Bank, as cited in Santo (2012), empowerment refers to the asset and capability development of individuals or groups necessary to conduct certain actions in their lives. Empowerment is a significant aspect of social entrepreneurship because social entrepreneurs have limited access to resources when addressing social problems. Job creation is another contribution of social entrepreneurs. In literature, the labor market is believed to work as a competitive mechanism, meaning that individuals who get jobs in the market are those with the required skills. Thus, individuals lacking the skills will not get the job; this is known as skill mismatch. Skill mismatch is the poor's greatest obstacle in finding jobs. Though they actually have skills, they are unable to use them. Policy and institutional failures also contribute (Yunus, 2007; 2011). Poverty also occurs when individuals who do not have jobs are unable to earn regular income. Therefore, the best possible way to help the poor is to create jobs and integrate the poor into available jobs outside the competitive labor market.

Bina Swadaya, established by the Pancasila Farmers Association (Ikatan Petani Pancasila) on 24 May 1967 as the Yayasan Sosial Tani Membangun, is widely known as a leading social enterprise in Indonesia. It empowers individuals and groups in the utilization of their resources and creates jobs through various social businesses. The aim of this organization is to empower or to raise the dignity of the poor and marginalized (Bina Swadaya, 2009).

Its strategies for the eradication of poverty in Indonesia are the empowerment of the community through education and training. Such empowerment strategies aim to develop and to encourage individual capacity in establishing organizations, known as *Kelompok Swadaya Masyarakat* (Community Self-Help Units).

Bina Swadaya undertakes community empowerment through various training programs, including, (1) training for facilitators of community self-help units (*Tenaga Pengembangan Kelompok Masyarakat Swadaya*); (2) training for community self-help development Management (*Pelatihan Manajemen Pengembangan Swadaya*); (3) training for participatory rural appraisal; (4) training for collective savings-loans businesses (*Pelatihan Usaha Bersama Simpan Pinjam*); (5) Training for small-scale entrepreneurs (*Pelatihan Wirausaha Kecil*); (6) training for household economic management (*Pelatihan Pengelolaan Ekonomi Rumah Tangga*). Bina Swadaya also conducts microfinance training, small industry technical training and other training related to disaster risk mitigation and disaster handling, as well as farming technical skills (Ismawan, 2012: 8-9).

Bina Swadaya also disseminates knowledge through its printing and publishing business, which has published thousands of books on agriculture. This includes the leading agriculture magazine in Indonesia, *Trubus*<sup>4</sup> (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2012: 59). In its early years, Bina Swadaya empowered people by forming groups known as Community Self-Help Units. Bina Swadaya also established the Center for Education and Training to integrate its empowerment programs with national development. Bina Swadaya has emphasized social entrepreneurship values within its organization and focused on sustainability since 1999. To achieve sustainability, its profits are not distributed to shareholders. Since then, Bina Swadaya has emphasized seven strategic pillars: (1) community empowerment; (2) microfinance development; (3) agribusiness development; (4) communication development; (5) alternative tourism development; (6) printing services development; and (7) the provision of facilities for meetings, training, workshops, and seminars.

As mentioned above, since 1999 Bina Swadaya has run its business based on social entrepreneurship values. This movement was inspired by Muhammad Yunus, who has concerns over the existence of various social injustices in the society. According to Bambang Ismawan, the founder of Bina Swadaya, prolonged poverty in Indonesia cannot be addressed due to a lack of government attention to the economic activities in the informal sector, which is the poor's main economic activity. As a form of determination to eradicate poverty, Bambang Ismawan, along with the other founders of Bina Swadaya, declared 2007 to be the Year of Empowerment and Poverty Eradication.

Empowerment missions are focused on several areas: (1) increasing capacity building so individuals can solve their own problems; (2) connecting informal economy (*ekonomi rakyat*) with banking institutions in order to obtain financial services; (3) establishing a network of cooperation with central and local government to facilitate and to protect efforts towards community empowerment; (4) developing mutually beneficial cooperation with the business sector as well as financial sector; (5) encouraging the development of a network of mutual cooperation with various groups in society as well as with philanthropy organizations, both domestic and international (Bina Swadaya, 2007: 8). The founder of Bina Swadaya, Bambang Ismawan, was awarded a social entrepreneurship award in 2006 for his focus on addressing social problems and people empowerment and for strengthening the agricultural sector in Indonesia. The empowerment programs initiated by Bina Swadaya were driven by the inability of the governments in helping the poor (Bina Swadaya, 2007: 5)

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper attempts to promote discussion of the role of social entrepreneurship in enabling economic opportunities for the poor. Based on ongoing discussions of the role of social entrepreneurship in literature and society, it is found that social entrepreneurship has broadened access to financial sources, promoted the use of social innovations in reducing social problems, granted people empowerment and social inclusion, and created jobs. The first three factors create income for the poor, thereby enabling economic opportunities, whereas the latter eliminates the deprivation of capabilities that allow the poor to involved and act in economic activities. All these factors enable economic opportunities for the poor. The links between social entrepreneurship and economic opportunities in this paper are produced based on a review of current literature. Therefore, the author suggests more empirical work be undertaken to validate the comprehensive contributions of social entrepreneurship in enabling economic opportunities for the poor.

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<sup>4</sup> When first established, *Majalah Trubus* encountered various challenges due to limited number of references for agriculture in Indonesia (Ismawan, 2012).

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