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Using social entrepreneurship as a driver to transform the township economy: a case study of Soweto

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Using social entrepreneurship as a driver to transform the township economy: a case study of Soweto

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Abbreviations and Acronyms	
ASGISA	African Union
IGO	Inter-Governmental Organisations
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
NDP	New Development Path
NGP	New Growth Path
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
RDP	Reconstruction Development Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEWF	Social Enterprise World Forum
USA	United States of America
AU	African Union
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
NCC	National Coordinating Committee
TWG	Technical Working Group
SWG	Sectoral Working Groups
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
STC-TIM	Specialised Technical Committee on Trade, Industry and Minerals
SBA	Small Business Administration
GNP	Gross National Product
UNICEF	United Nations International Childrens Emergency Fund
CPF	Community Policing Forum
TEA	Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA)

1. Chapter 1

1.1 Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how social entrepreneurship has been used to transform the Soweto township economy. The research adopted a mixed-method approach, combining surveys and semi-structured interviews with social entrepreneurs operating in Soweto. The findings revealed that social entrepreneurship is largely necessity-driven, shaped by unemployment and limited opportunities, and sustained through innovation and community engagement. Key challenges identified include limited access to funding, inadequate policy support, and insufficient training and mentorship opportunities. The study demonstrated that social entrepreneurs play a vital role in job creation, skills development, and community upliftment, yet require stronger institutional support to thrive. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening government policies, improving access to finance, expanding mentorship programmes, and fostering partnerships between government, private sector, and civil society to accelerate township economic transformation through social entrepreneurship.

1.2 Introduction and Background

Social entrepreneurship has, over the decades, become a pivotal tool in the development and transformation of societies (Ferri, 2014:12). Researchers and think tanks dedicate significant resources to exploring the concept, while intergovernmental and regional organisations ratify policies that promote it (Ferri, 2014). Governments worldwide also develop domestic policies to encourage social entrepreneurship. In essence, it is seen as a driver of socio-economic transformation, particularly in developing countries where it offers pragmatic solutions by leveraging technologies, people's skills, natural talents, and the environment (Moses & Olokundun, 2014).

The concept of social entrepreneurship refers to the application of business principles adapted to specific contexts in order to ensure economic growth (Mair & Marti, 2006). It represents a toolkit of innovation directed at transformation. For example, a township gym may both promote healthy living and generate revenue through memberships.

Thus, a social entrepreneur is someone who implements innovative ideas and takes risks in addressing community-based problems (Dey & Teasdale, 2013).

South Africa faces persistent community-based challenges, with poverty being central. According to Tarboda (2016), South Africa is one of the most unequal societies globally. An estimated 55.5% (30.3 million) of the population live below the national upper poverty line (-992 Rands), while over 13 million live in abject poverty. Furthermore, more than 6 million South Africans aged 16 to 36 are unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Unemployment, poverty, and crime are entrenched in townships. Social entrepreneurship offers a pathway to addressing these issues by accelerating socio-economic transformation (Gonul & Senyuva, 2020).

The township economy broadly refers to enterprises based in South African townships (Gonul & Senyuva, 2020). This study therefore draws on policies of IGOs and regional institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU), while placing specific emphasis on domestic programmes like the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative—South Africa (ASGISA), the New Growth Path (NGP) and the National Development Plan (NDP). While these programmes did not directly focus on social entrepreneurship, they addressed its viability.

Comparative references will also be made to international cases, such as ghettos in the USA and favelas in Brazil, to highlight how governments, civic organisations, and individuals contribute to social entrepreneurship in marginalised communities.

1.3 Problem Statement

The township economy typically consists of spaza shops, food and beverage outlets, street vendors, urban farming, internet cafés, and gyms (Gonul & Senyuva, 2020). It is estimated that 17% of South African employment originates from township businesses (Gonul & Senyuva, 2020). This illustrates the opportunity for social entrepreneurship to play a greater role in reducing unemployment, poverty, and crime.

Although government policies and programmes have sought to accelerate township entrepreneurship (Rogerson, 2019), many challenges persist. These include:

- Lack of investment in skills, infrastructure, and sustainable development
- Poor financial management and weak implementation
- Limited infrastructure such as banks, arable land, and business services
- Deficient service delivery (water, electricity, sanitation)
- Weak entrepreneurial drive
- Overpopulation, low incomes, poverty, crime, and unemployment
- Inadequate access to resources and capital (low credit scores)
- Underdeveloped public infrastructure (schools, libraries, hospitals)

If investment in social enterprises were increased, social entrepreneurship could be central to transforming the township economy (Dey & Teasdale, 2013).

Literature also points to significant gaps between the private and public sectors, which could be bridged through collaboration, creating long-term mutual benefits. Where both government and civil society are seen to be failing communities, business could instead be positioned as part of the solution (Anderson & Dees, 2002).

Social entrepreneurship therefore has potential to deliver sustainable solutions to social problems. Drucker, as cited in Gendron (1996:36), argued that “the social entrepreneur changes the performance capacity of society.” Communities thus need to explore ways of enhancing social entrepreneurship in their contexts.

Based on literature, key gaps that this study addresses include:

- The lack of collaboration between public and private sectors in uplifting communities (Anderson & Dees, 2002).
- The potential of social entrepreneurship to deliver long-term sustainable solutions (Thomas, 2002).

The research focuses on Soweto, with case studies in Klipspruit and Orlando. Klipspruit, established in 1904 when colonial officials forced Black people to relocate from Johannesburg, represents one of the earliest township settlements (Bonner, 1998). Orlando gained international attention during the 1976 student uprisings and remains historically significant, housing the Mandela House and Tutu House on

Vilakazi Street, now a hub for social entrepreneurship. These areas provide a rich context for data collection.

While the study does not extensively address foreign-owned spaza shops, it acknowledges challenges faced by informal small businesses in townships, including xenophobia, government interference, socio-cultural tensions, high rentals, and inadequate infrastructure (Ezennia, 2023). These issues impact township enterprises significantly, despite their role in job creation and innovation.

The researcher notes positionality: as founder of the JM Mentorship Programme, he has engaged with township schools to address limited internet access, inadequate exposure to corporate opportunities, and lack of life skills (Manyaka, 2010). This background informs his perspective, while recognising possible bias.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to identify scientific methods and models of social entrepreneurship that can transform Soweto's economy. The specific objectives are:

1. To define social entrepreneurship in Soweto.
2. To identify the role of government in supporting social entrepreneurs.
3. To explore how a social entrepreneurship model can be implemented in Soweto to transform the township economy.

1.5 Research Questions

According to the literature review conducted by the researcher, the below are questions that have very little to not a lot of information and thus the reason why the researcher will undertake to answer the following questions:

1.5.1. What is Social Entrepreneurship and what does it look like in Soweto?

1.5.2. What role does the SA government play in supporting Social Entrepreneurs in Soweto?

1.5.3. How Social Entrepreneurship as a model can be implemented in Soweto and how it can transform the township economy?

1.6 Rationale of the Study

The researcher has decided to embark on this study because there is a need to accelerate transformation of the township economy for the betterment of the lives of its benefactors. There was a need ever since apartheid was declared a crime against humanity in 1966 by the General Assembly of UN (Manyaka, 2010).

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

Limiting the research scope to the most pertinent facets of social entrepreneurship in Soweto for the purpose of this study is very essential and therefore, the delimitations listed below help to maintain a focused, understandable, and actionable study.

The parameters of this research are therefore as follows:

a) The study will focus the South African government policies and programmes on social entrepreneurship - This is to ensure there is a thorough assessment of current government programs meant to assist social entrepreneurs in townships. It also assists in evaluating how well policies are working to change the township economy, particularly in Soweto.
b) Only individuals, entrepreneurs, faith based organisations will be part of the study in Soweto - These groups directly influence and participate in social entrepreneurship, making them key stakeholders in the study. FBO's and local entrepreneurs often fill gaps in social development where government interventions may be lacking.
c) All participants will be required to speak in English – The use of the English language ensures consistency in responses and data analysis, avoiding potential errors from translation. The English language is commonly used in business, government policies, and academia, making the findings more accessible for broader discussion and application.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the statement of purpose, brought a fully fledged introduction with a background analysis, outlined problem statement, research objectives and aims and the delimitation of the study.

2. Chapter 2

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews scholarly articles and literature relevant to the study. It provides a cross-sectional analysis of trends, patterns, and debates on social entrepreneurship, including both international and South African contexts. The review also considers government policies related to social entrepreneurship and evaluates theoretical frameworks that underpin the study.

2.2 Literature Review

Social entrepreneurship has gained significant attention in South Africa as a driver of social and economic transformation. It is particularly important in addressing unemployment, inequality, and poverty, which remain persistent challenges in the post-apartheid context.

Martin and Osberg (2007) define social entrepreneurship as a business strategy that balances social impact with financial sustainability. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which prioritises profit, social entrepreneurship develops creative and sustainable business models to address social issues (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006).

The word “entrepreneur” refers to an individual who undertakes risks in implementing innovative business ideas with the goal of generating profit (Herbert & Link, 2009:17). The concept of social entrepreneurship therefore combines two dimensions: the “social” and the “entrepreneurial.” In this context, “social” reflects awareness and empathy, while “entrepreneurship” reflects the ability to identify opportunities and

innovate. Social entrepreneurs develop business ideas to transform both their environment and the people within it (Martin & Osberg, 2007).

In South Africa, the township economy refers to enterprises based in underdeveloped urban areas historically shaped by colonial and apartheid segregation (Gonul & Senyuva, 2020). These areas, characterised by poverty and underdevelopment, have attracted significant policy interest due to the lack of economic transformation since democracy (The Citizen, 2018; Ngcukana, 2018; Majoko, 2017; Gauteng Province, 2014).

In 2018, the President of South Africa announced that R50 billion would be redirected from non-performing projects to support township and rural communities, including the creation of industrial parks and a township and rural entrepreneurship fund (Daily Maverick, 2018; Nicolson). This illustrates the government's recognition of township economies as engines of inclusive growth.

Despite this recognition, South Africa's entrepreneurial activity remains low compared to other emerging economies (Herrington et al., 2017). Nevertheless, social entrepreneurs have shown success in:

- **Job creation**: hiring under-represented groups such as women and youth.
- **Service provision**: filling gaps in healthcare, education, and infrastructure.
- **Economic inclusion**: stimulating local development and business activity.

Barriers persist, however. Common challenges include:

- **Limited access to funding**: banks and investors view social enterprises as high-risk (Bowmaker-Falconer & Herrington, 2020).
- **Regulatory and policy barriers**: absence of a clear legal framework for social enterprises (Musara & Nieuwenhuizen, 2020; Adegboyo et al., 2021).
- **Skills gaps and lack of mentorship**: many entrepreneurs lack training in finance, marketing, and scaling (Sunny, 2023).

Littlewood and Holt (2018) emphasise that social entrepreneurs in South Africa are passionate about providing sustainable solutions, but they face systemic obstacles. While practitioner literature (Fury, 2010; Meldrum, 2011) highlights progress in impact

measurement and B-BBEE alignment, academic research remains limited, with growing calls for deeper theoretical engagement (Kerlin, 2008; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015).

Comparative global cases highlight the potential of social entrepreneurship:

- The **Asian Tigers** achieved transformation through social cohesion, education, healthcare, and stable macroeconomic policies (Chuang, 1998; IMF, 2006).
- **Hong Kong** provides strong social welfare programmes to protect vulnerable groups (IMF, 2006).
- The **Harlem Renaissance** in the USA illustrates how community-driven businesses transformed a marginalised neighbourhood into an economic hub (Huggins, 1971; Ferguson, 2008).

In South Africa, however, government initiatives such as the RDP, NGP, and NDP have been limited by weak implementation (Montmasson-Clair, 2017). Still, entrepreneurial examples like Richard Maponya demonstrate the potential of township businesses to stimulate development (McGaffin et al., 2015).

2.3 Theoretical Lenses

This study applies two frameworks:

a) Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Model

The ABCD model emphasises using community assets, both financial and non-financial, as the basis for development (Manyaka, 2010). By identifying assets and matching them with community needs, this model encourages collaboration, capacity building, and sustainable development.

b) Social Entrepreneurship Theoretical Framework

Developed from global literature, this framework evaluates social entrepreneurship at both individual and organisational levels across four dimensions:

- Social entrepreneurial intention
- Social entrepreneurial orientation
- Processes

- Outcomes

This framework demonstrates that in developing countries, social entrepreneurship seeks to address societal issues while creating social, economic, and environmental value (Vieira, 2022).

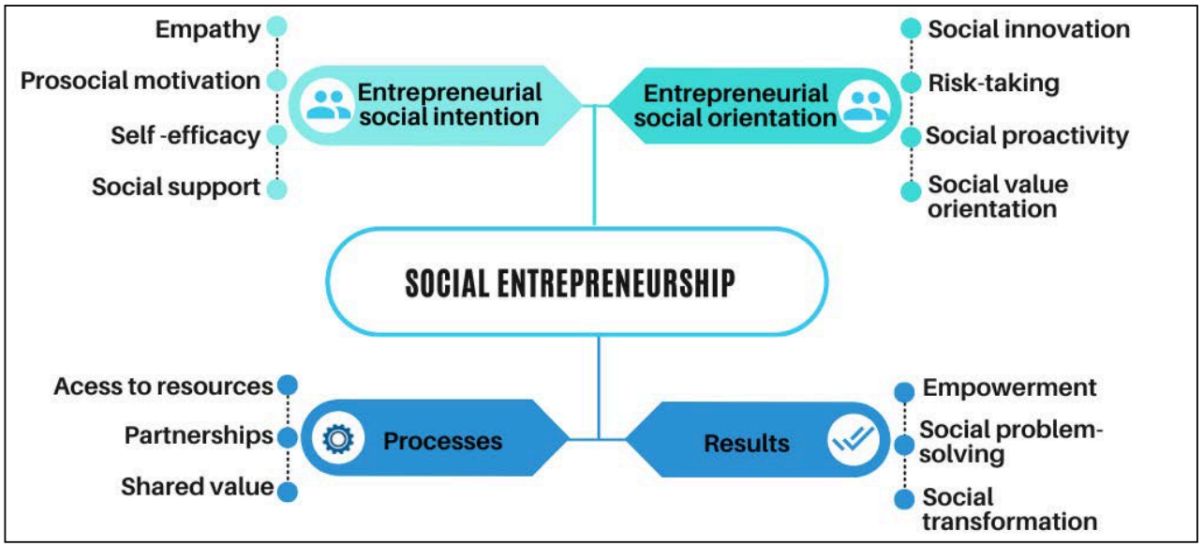


Figure 1. Framework for the measurement of social entrepreneurship in Soweto.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed global and South African literature on social entrepreneurship, outlining both achievements and barriers. It also introduced the ABCD and Social Entrepreneurship frameworks, which will guide the analysis in later chapters. The literature demonstrates that while township economies hold significant potential, their transformation depends on effective support systems, innovative models, and active community engagement.

Chapter 3

This chapter sets to stipulate the research design of this study. It will commence by providing an overview of the research methodology that will be used, which is mixed research methods approach. This chapter will discuss the data collection methods

such as interviews, questionnaires and surveys, thus elaborating on quantitative methods. It will conclude by stating the population and sample of the study.

3.1 Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), mixed methods integrate both qualitative and quantitative research, allowing the researcher to collect, analyse, and interpret data in parallel. This design provides a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon by drawing on the strengths of both approaches. It enhances understanding of social entrepreneurship in Soweto by combining numerical trends with deeper contextual insights (Wasti, 2022).

3.2 Data Collection

Qualitative research offers several approaches to data collection, including exploration, description, ethnography, and interpretation (Bandari, 2022). For this study, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were applied.

3.3 Exploratory Research

Exploratory research was used to examine the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship and provide additional data to ongoing debates (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Its purpose was to generate deeper understanding and formulate recommendations that could accelerate social entrepreneurship in Soweto.

3.4 Descriptive Research

Descriptive research was applied to logically present the characteristics of the township economy and profile social entrepreneurs (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This approach enabled the study to describe the scale, features, and practices of social enterprises in Soweto.

3.5 Data Collecting Methods

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data included journal articles, textbooks, government reports, dissertations, and online

resources such as Google Scholar (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Primary data were obtained through interviews, surveys, and questionnaires.

3.5.1 Interviews: Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe participants' views and gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences (Kumar, 2011). While this method is time-consuming (Shaffer, 2013), it provided rich insights. Interviews were conducted in Soweto and lasted 15–30 minutes depending on participants' responses.

3.5.2 Questionnaires: Questionnaires combined open- and close-ended questions. This method allowed respondents to provide information independently and without the researcher's presence (Monette, Sullivan & De Jong, 2011).

3.5.3 Open-ended questions: These encouraged participants to articulate their views freely, yielding nuanced qualitative data (Burns & Grove, 2003). Although time-intensive, they allowed for detailed responses.

3.5.4 Close-ended questions: These were pre-set and associated with quantitative research, where responses could be coded and analysed numerically (Durkheim, 2004).

3.5.5 Population and Sampling

According to Statistics South Africa (2023), Soweto has a population of approximately 1.2 million across more than 32 townships (Manyaka, 2010). It was impractical to cover the entire population, so the study focused on Klipspruit (home to Maponya Mall) and Orlando.

The **snowball sampling** technique was used, where participants referred the researcher to other social entrepreneurs (Bandari, 2022). For example, a Virgin Active Gym owner at Maponya Mall could refer the researcher to the owner of the Engen Garage nearby.

Sample sizes were:

- **Quantitative survey**: 10–50 respondents (random sampling).
- **Qualitative interviews**: 20–25 participants. Saturation was expected after 15 interviews but provision was made for up to 25 to enrich the findings.

3.5.6 Limitations on the number of participants

The quantitative survey was limited to 25 participants in Klipspruit due to:

- **Logistical challenges**: Informal businesses often lack digital platforms, making face-to-face engagement necessary.
- **Study area specificity**: Focusing on Klipspruit provided a representative sample of township entrepreneurs near Maponya Mall.
- **Informality**: Many township businesses are not formally registered, and owners may be reluctant to participate in formal research.

3.5.7 – Methods of Data Analysis

Given the mixed-method design, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were applied:

3.5.7.1 **Quantitative**: Data cleaning ensured completeness and removed anomalies. Descriptive statistics summarised patterns and distributions, and visualisations such as bar charts and pie charts were produced.

3.5.7.2 **Qualitative**: Interviews were transcribed and coded. Thematic analysis identified recurring ideas, which were grouped into broader themes. Content analysis was also used to interpret textual data, followed by data interpretation to confirm and verify outcomes.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity was maintained. Respondents were assured that their information would be used solely for academic purposes. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines of the University of the Witwatersrand.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methodology, outlining the mixed-methods design and data collection techniques, including interviews, surveys, and questionnaires. It also discussed the population and sampling strategies, limitations on participant numbers, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations. Together, these approaches provided a structured framework for exploring social entrepreneurship in Soweto.

Chapter 4

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the study, focusing on social entrepreneurship in Soweto. It is divided into three sections: demographic information of participants, descriptive analysis of survey responses, and thematic analysis of qualitative interviews.

4.2 Response rate

The sample size was 25. Of these, 13 were purposively selected based on years of experience in social entrepreneurship. Questionnaires were distributed to all 25 participants, achieving a 100% response rate. This strong response enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.

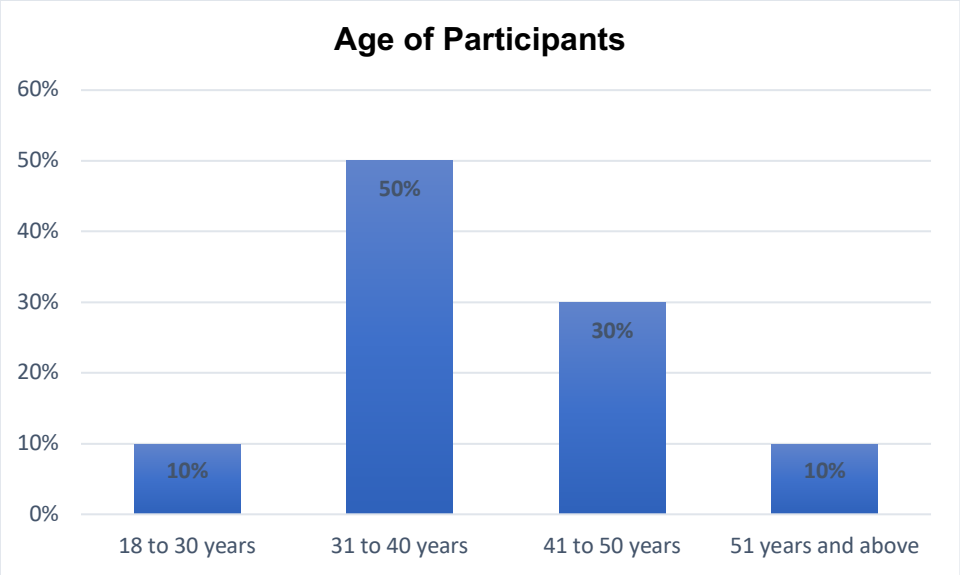
4.3 Demographic information

This section of the chapter focuses on the demographic details of the participants such as age, gender, level of educations and years of entrepreneurial experience.

4.3.1 Age of the Participants

The findings of the age of participants are presented in Figure 4.1 as follows:

Figure 4.1: Age of Participants



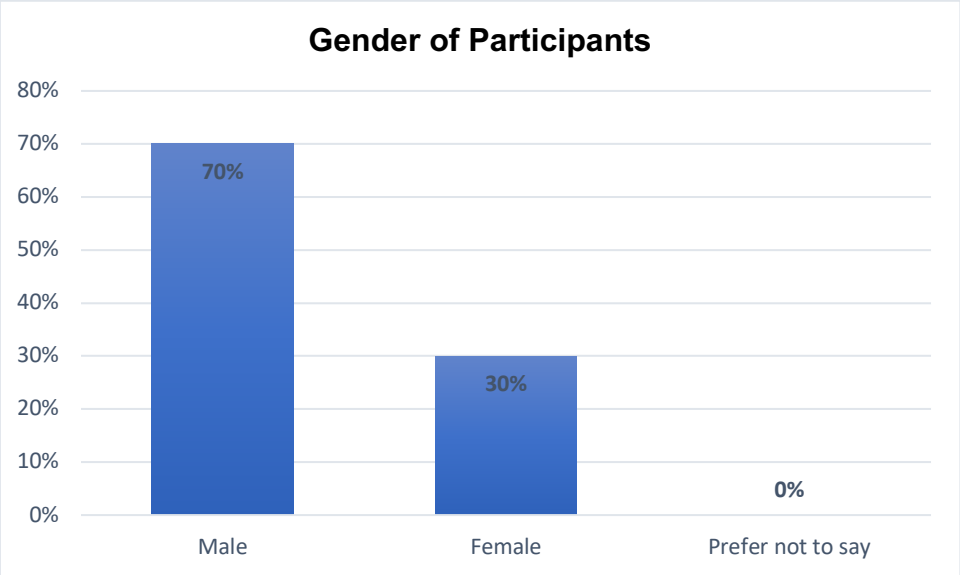
The findings as indicated in Figure 4.1 illustrates the following:

Age: 10% of participants were aged 18–30, 50% were 31–40, 30% were 41–50, and 10% were above 51. The majority fell in the 31–40 age group, suggesting social entrepreneurship in Soweto is primarily driven by individuals with some financial stability and work experience. Fewer younger participants highlight challenges such as inadequate funding and inexperience.

4.3.2 Gender of Participants

The findings on the gender of participants are illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Gender of Participants



The findings as highlighted in Figure 4.2 illustrates the following:

Gender: 70% of participants were male, 30% female. This imbalance suggests barriers to entry linked to gender, pointing to the need for targeted support to increase women's participation.

4.3.3 Level of Education

The findings on the level of education are demonstrated in Figure 4.3 below:

Figure 4.3 Level of Education

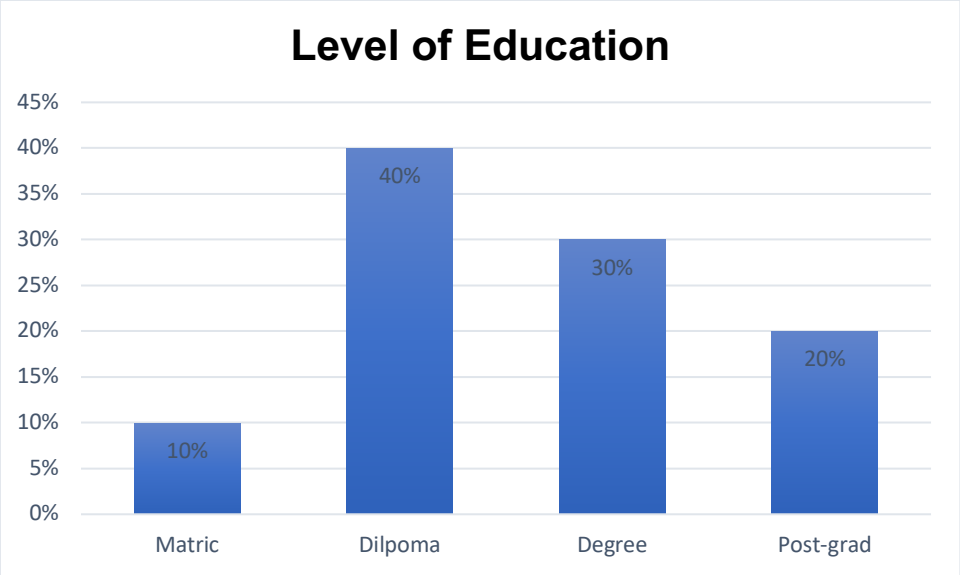


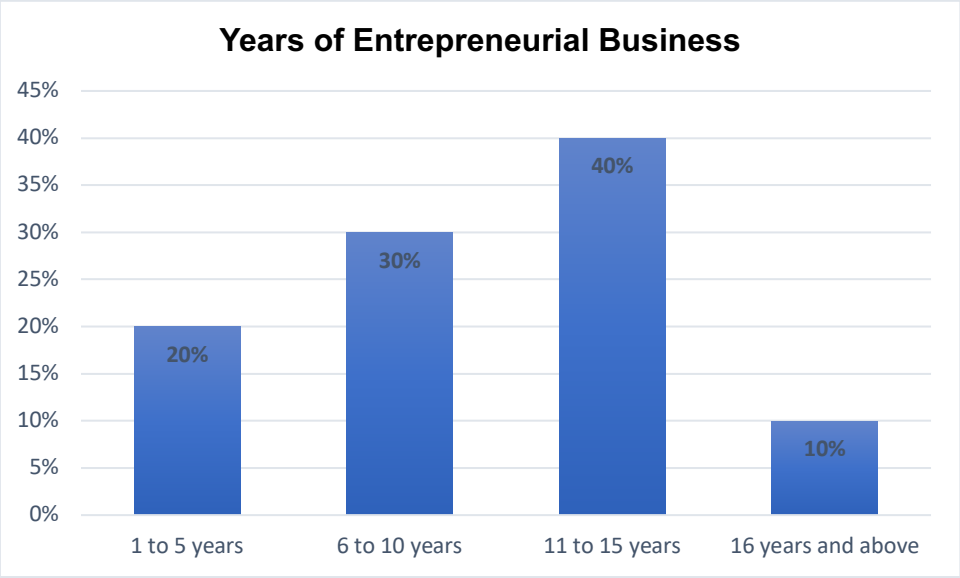
Figure 4.3 above illustrates the following:

Education: 10% of respondents had completed matric, 40% held diplomas, 30% had degrees, and 20% postgraduate qualifications. The relatively high education levels may help sustain enterprises, but support for those with lower education levels could broaden participation.

4.3.4 Years in Entrepreneurial Business

The findings of the years in entrepreneurial business are described in Figure 4.4 below:

Figure 4.4: Years of Entrepreneurial Business



The findings as depicted in Figure 4.4 illustate the following:

Years in Business: 20% had 1–5 years' experience, 30% had 6–10, 40% had 11–15, and 10% had 16+ years. These results suggest many Soweto entrepreneurs have substantial experience, but new entrants require targeted assistance to ensure long-term sustainability.

4.4 Presentation and analysis of findings (Descriptive Analysis)

This section focuses on presentation and analysis of quantitative data through descriptive analysis. This presentation addresses the research objective number 2 which to identify the role that is played by the South African government in supporting Social Entrepreneurs in Soweto.

Research objective 2: To identify the role that is played by the South African government in supporting Social Entrepreneurs in Soweto.

4.4.1 Financial support for social entrepreneurs in Soweto

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that the South African government provides adequate financial support for example, grants, subsidies, and funding opportunities to social entrepreneurs in Soweto. The findings are presented in Figure 4.5 below

Table 4.5 Financial support

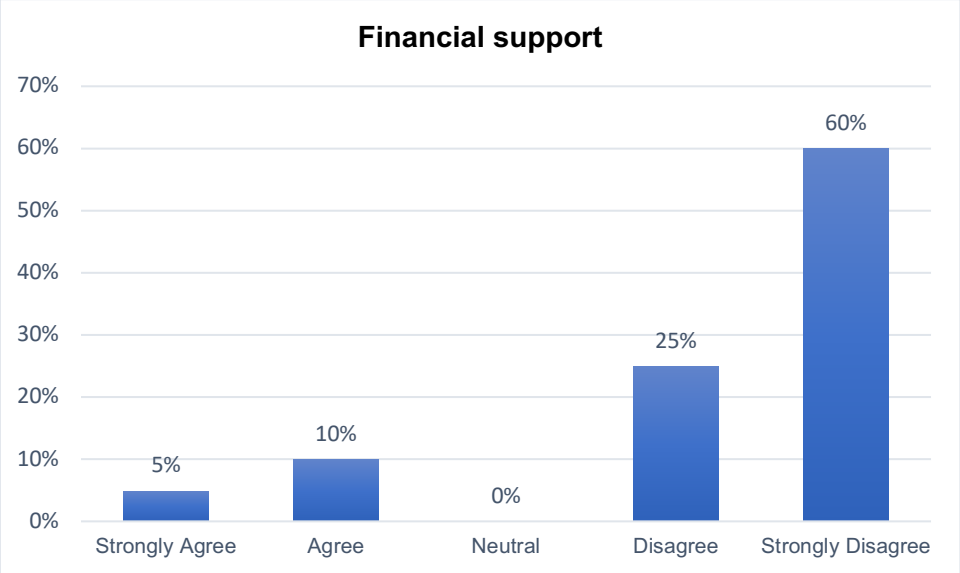


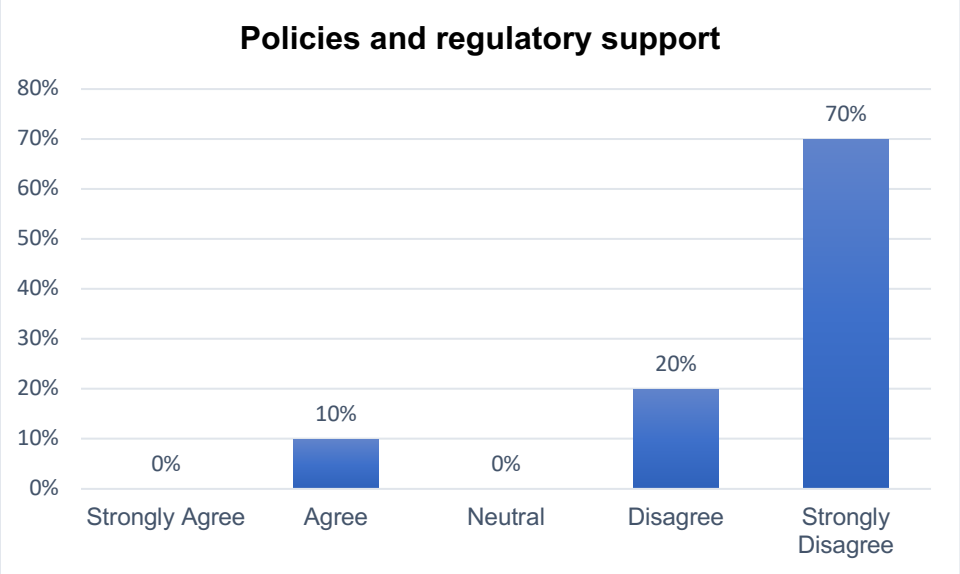
Table 4.5 above illustrates the following: Only 15% of participants agreed that government provides adequate financial support (grants, subsidies, or funding opportunities). The majority (85%) disagreed, citing a lack of accessible funding. This

aligns with ILO (2022), which notes that banks view social enterprises as high-risk. Reuters (2024) similarly reported that government BEE efforts have struggled to reduce inequality, limiting effective support for Black-owned businesses.

4.4.2 Policies and regulatory support for social enterprises in Soweto

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that government policies and regulations create a favourable environment for the growth and sustainability of social enterprises in Soweto. The findings are presented in Figure 4.6 below

Figure 4.6: Policies and regulatory support



Most respondents (90%) disagreed that government policies foster a supportive environment. They described bureaucracy, red tape, and absence of tailored policies as major barriers. Adebowale and Agumba (2023) highlight similar regulatory challenges for South African social entrepreneurs.

4.4.3 Initiatives for training, Mentorship, and Networking Support in Soweto

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that the government offers sufficient training programs, mentorship initiatives, and networking opportunities to support social entrepreneurs in Soweto. The findings are presented in Figure 4.7 below

Figure 4.7: **Initiatives for training, mentorship, and networking support in Soweto**

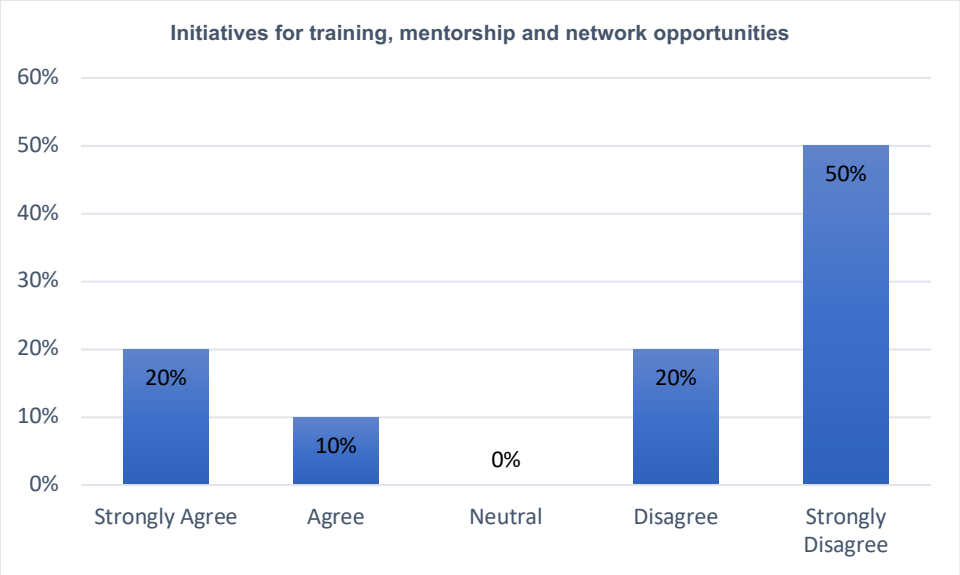


Figure 4.7 above illustrates the following: Only 30% of respondents agreed that government provides adequate training and mentorship opportunities. Half strongly disagreed, suggesting programmes are insufficient or poorly funded. Baker and Welter (2020) and Kifordu (2022) also point to the lack of targeted support and mentorship opportunities for social entrepreneurs.

4.4.4 Access to Government Resources for Social Entrepreneurs in Soweto

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that social entrepreneurs in Soweto receive adequate access to government resources, such as funding information, business development services, and tax incentives. The findings are presented in Figure 4.8 below

Figure 4.8 Access to government resources for social entrepreneurs in Soweto

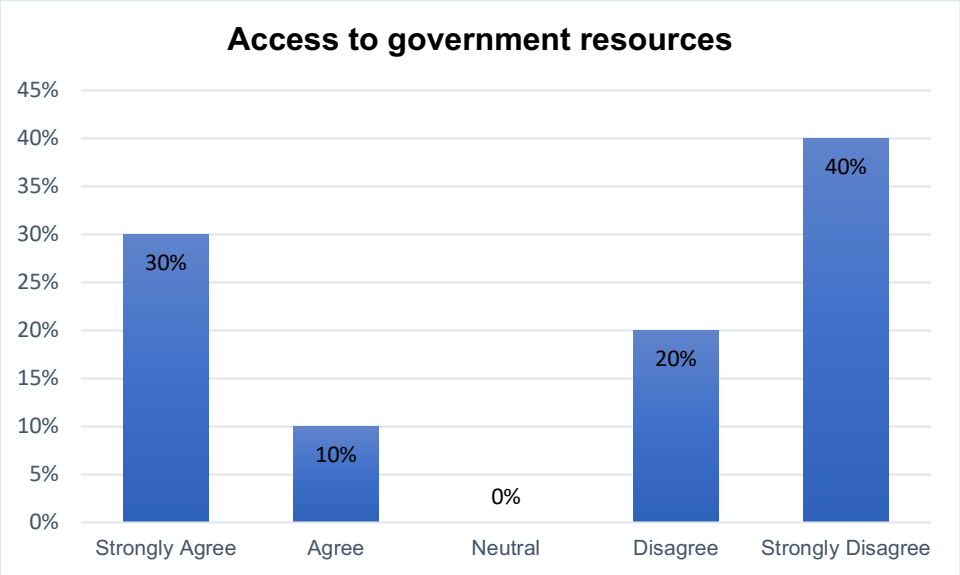
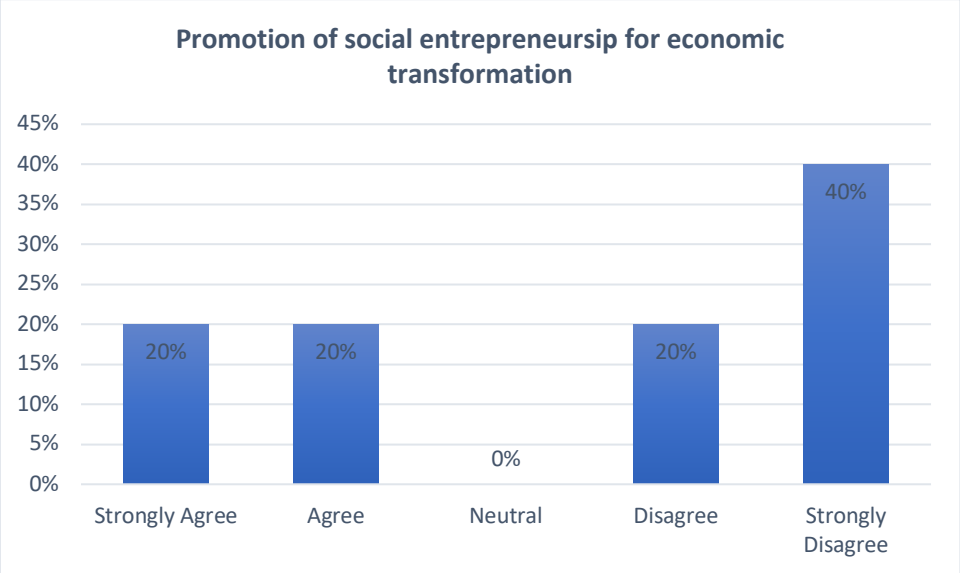


Figure 4.8 above reveals that 40% of respondents agreed that entrepreneurs can access government resources such as funding information or tax incentives, while 60% disagreed. This suggests uneven access, often hindered by poor communication and complex application processes (Adegboyo et al., 2021).

4.4.5 Promotion of Social Entrepreneurship for Economic Transformation in Soweto

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that the South African government actively promotes social entrepreneurship as a key driver of economic transformation in Soweto. The findings are presented in Figure 4.9 below.

Figure 4.9: Promotion of Social Entrepreneurship for Economic Transformation in Soweto



The results as indicated in Figure 4.9 above reveal that 40% agreed that government actively promotes social entrepreneurship, but 60% disagreed. Respondents felt policies are insufficiently communicated and poorly integrated into local systems, echoing Sunny (2023) and Estrin & Mickiewicz, who argue that policy objectives often fail to translate into local economic transformation.

4.5 Presentation and discussion of findings (Thematic Analysis)

This section of the study focusses on the presentation and analysis of data using the thematic data analysis technique. Key themes and subthemes were identified by analysing the interview transcripts and a few selected verbatim quotes were used to support the analysis.

Research Objective 1: To define Social Entrepreneurship in Soweto, Johannesburg

4.5.1 Theme 1: Understanding social entrepreneurship in Soweto

Participants described social entrepreneurship as a response to unemployment and lack of opportunities, functioning both as a survival strategy and as a means of empowerment.

- One participant stated: *"With this high rate of unemployment in our community, social entrepreneurship fills the gap where there are no formal jobs."*
- Another explained: *"The majority of businesses here are established out of necessity, not opportunity."*

These findings suggest that social entrepreneurship in Soweto is necessity-driven, echoing Adebowale and Agumba (2023) and Kifordu (2022), who highlight that disadvantaged communities often pursue entrepreneurship for survival rather than profit.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Key characteristics of social entrepreneurship in Soweto

Subtheme - 4.5.2.1. *Focus on social impact*: Participants emphasised that their goal is to uplift the community rather than maximise profit. Success was measured in terms of improved livelihoods rather than financial returns. This aligns with Adel and Mahrous (2020), who argue that community impact defines social entrepreneurship.

***Subtheme - 4.5.2.2 Resource constraints and innovation*:** Entrepreneurs reported limited resources, forcing them to adopt innovative, low-cost solutions. For example: *"Since we do not receive support in terms of funding, we are forced to find cheaper and more sustainable ways to run our businesses."* This resonates with Adegboyo et al. (2021) and Baker & Welter (2020), who note that resource scarcity fosters innovation.

Subtheme - 4.5.2.3 *Community-centric approach*: Social enterprises were described as deeply embedded in their communities. One participant said: *"Our*

solutions are created based on community challenges, and we ensure that local people are part of our problem-solving process." This supports Wynn and Jones (2019) and Estrin & Mickiewicz (2019), who stress community involvement as critical to sustainability.

4.5.3 Theme 3: The impact of social entrepreneurship in Soweto

Social entrepreneurship in Soweto has arisen as an important determinant of economic and social transformation. This theme was broken down into subthemes namely job creation, skills development, and broader community development.

4.5.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Job Creation and Economic Empowerment

Job creation is one of the successful examples of the contribution of social entrepreneurship in Soweto.

Verbatim quotes

> ***Participant 7:*** *"These enterprises have really assisted many who have been struggling with the issue of work. Not only did social entrepreneurship provided employment but it has equipped the community especially the youth with skills".*
>
> ***Participant 10:*** *"This venture has given many young people a second chance by providing them with training and stable employment"*.
>
> ***Participant 3:*** *"The community has been uplifted because the money has been circulating due to the support of the local business".*
>
> ***Participant 4:*** *"When we started our business, we ere very small but look have over 30 people in our employment, proving that entrepreneurship can bring about economic change".*

These primary research findings indicate the integral part that social entrepreneurship plays in addressing pressing issues of unemployment. The creation of employment opportunities enhances the standard of living for the community and establish routes for economic independence. Beyond direct employment, local enterprises play a part

in community resilience by making sure that financial resources remain with the local economy in Soweto. This underlines the potential of transformation by social. The primary research findings resonate with the Sunny (2023), who described the significance of social entrepreneurship in addressing societal challenges such as unemployment. Cant (2019) highlighted that social entrepreneurs create employment opportunities to assist the community to be self-reliant as well as to improve economuc conditions.

4.5.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Skills Development and Education

Several efforts prioritised empowering local people with entrepreneurial and vocational skills, improving their employability and allowing them to establish their own enterprises

Verbatim quotes

> ***Participant 9:*** *"I am now an entrepreneur because of the training I received. This is something that I never imagined in my life*
>
> ***Participant 4****: "As entrepreneurs, we do not only offer employment opportunities but we also impart knowledge and skills to our people which even empowers them to start their own thing".*
>
> ***Participant 10****: "The youth in Soweto are now able to access vocational training programmes that equip them to work in different sectors of the economy".*
>
> ***Participant 13:*** *"Our goal is not just to offer short-term employment opportunities but to empower the local community with lifelong skills".*

These primary research findings shows that social entrepreneurship goes beyond providing instant employment opportunities, but they empower people with skills that have long-term benefits. By promoting self-reliance, these efforts assist in breaking poverty cycles and establish a workforce that easily acclimatise to economic shifts. This human capital investment ensures that the people in Soweto are not employable but also can drive economic growth through their own businesses.

These findings resonate with the views of Musara and Nieuwenhuizen (2020), who contend that social entrepreneurship prioritise the establishment of robust human

capital in addition to assisting with short-term financial assistance. According to Adebowale and Agumba (2023), the social entrepreneurship long-term influence extends beyond the creation of employment and lead to better economic empowerment. Furthermore, Vieira et al. (2022), highlights that social entrepreneurship fosters long-term economic growth by providing people with the resources and instruction they require to begin their own entreprises.

Research Objective 3: To define how social a entrepreneurship model can be implemented in Soweto and assist in transform the township economy.

4.5.4 Theme 4: Challenges and opportunities in implementing a social entrepreneurship model in Soweto

The social entrepreneurs in Soweto are confronted with both challenges and opportunities. Subthemes emerged from this theme, and these are discussed as follows:

4.5.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Financial constraints and limited access to funding

Receiving fundings is one of the major challenges that is experienced by the social entrepreneurs in Soweto.

Verbatim quotes

> ***Participant 3:*** *"We do have good business ideas but unfortunately, its not enough if you do not have the capital to commercialise that idea.*
>
> ***Participant 9:*** *"Since we do not only focus on profits, banks and investors lack the understanding of our business model and they deem us a risky people"*
>
> ***Participant 10:*** *"Most of the social enterprises in Soweto rely on individual funds or assistance from family which is not adequate to sustain long-term growth".*
>
> ***Participant 13:*** *"It is indeed a challenge to acquire resources such as infrastructure, training and machinery without the necessary financial support".*

These primary research findings shows that the capacity of social entrepreneurs to grow their business is severely hindered by poor finding. The lack of funding results in the inability to make meaningful infrastructure investments, marketing and employee training. The primary research findings resonate with the study by Musara and Nieuwenhuizen (2020), which indicates that lack of financial support hinders the growth of most entrepreneurs. Furthermore, Estrin and Mickiewicz (2019) highlighted that inadequate funding restrict the social business ability to grow by hindering the development of important operational and infrastructure capacities.

4.5.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Regulatory and bureaucratic challenges

Participants noted that the social entrepreneurs in Soweto find it to difficult to navigate the regulatory environment,

Verbatim quotes

> ***Participant 11:*** *"The documentation process is just too much and it is not within our expertise and resources"*
>
> ***Participant 2:*** *"Since, we cannot fit in the traditional categories of cooperates, government initiatives do not recognise or sufficiently help us."*
>
> ***Participant 10:*** *"Since several programmes of the government do not categorise social firms, applying for funding is quite a daunting task."*
>
> ***Participant 12:*** *"The regulations are too strict, and it discourages those that want to start their business".*

These primary study findings show that social entrepreneurs experience many challenges because of complex bureaucratic processes and vague legislation. Since social enterprise do not have concise legal classification, most of the entrepreneurs struggle to obtain official registration, tax breaks and government assistance programmes which deters their ability to operate efficiently. These results corroborate with views of Uju and Ugochukwu (2021), that complex stringent bureaucratic processes and vague legislation provide significant challenges to the growth of social enterprises. According to Wynn and Jones (2019), the feasibility of social enterprises

is hindered by poor legislative frameworks, which makes it difficult to get the government assistance. Cant (2019) also indicated the need for tailored regulatory support for social entrepreneurs, contending that an appropriate legal and regulatory framework is necessary to foster the growth the growth of social firms and their potential to enhance economic change.

4.5.5 Theme 5: Strategies and support structures necessary to promote social entrepreneurship in Soweto

Most of the participants highlighted that many critical support systems such as funding, mentorship programmes and legislative initiative are necessary for the growth of the social entrepreneurship in Soweto.

4.5.5.1 Subtheme 5.1: Access to funding and financial support

The challenge of obtaining funding is one of the biggest obstacles to social entrepreneurship in Soweto.

Verbatim quotes

> ***Participant 1:*** *"We have not choice but to depend on our savings and community donations since banks drags their feet to finance social enterprise because they think they are very risky".*
>
> ***Participant 8:*** *"There are funding programs and grants available, but the application procedures are difficult and not designed with social companies in mind".*
>
> ***Participant 12:*** *"We could successfully address more social concerns and generate more employment if we had more access to startup money".*

The incapacity to acquire funding limits social entrepreneurs' ability to grow and make a difference. Most of the entrepreneurs are required to rely on inconsistent funding sources, which restricts their ability to proactively plan and remain sustainable in the long-term. The implications highlight that finance models customised to social enterprise should be established by financial institutions, investors and legislators.

Uju and Ugochukwu (2021) complement these findings by arguing that financial resources are essential for social companies to develop and become sustainable over the long run. It is frequently difficult for social entrepreneurs to plan for expansion and increase their influence in the absence of steady and sufficient funding. Impact investing and microfinance are examples of specialised financial mechanisms that are necessary to promote the expansion of socially conscious firms (Kifordu , 2022). Sunny (2023) further believes that government-backed financial initiatives can assist close the funding gap and guarantee that capital limitations do not impede social companies.

4.5.5.2 Subtheme 5.2: Mentorship and business development support

In addition to funding, social entrepreneurs need business development assistance and coaching to handle the challenges of managing a long-term company. **Verbatim Quotes:**

> ***Participant 3****: "I had the motivation and the desire, but I didn't have the commercial acumen to make it a viable venture".*
>
> ***Participant 10:*** *"For us, mentoring has been essential since it helps us avoid expensive mistakes and gives us advice on how to develop ethically".*
>
> ***Participant 13:*** *"Since most of us are new business owners, it really helps to have an experienced person walk us through the process".*
>
> ***Participant 1:*** *"Better individuals would be inspired to launch social companies if mentorship programs were better organised".*

These primary research findings illustrate how vital mentoring is to the development of successful social enterprise. Several entrepreneurs do not have the technical business abilities required for long-term success, regardless of having robust social objectives. Without proper strategic direction, social entrepreneurs in Soweto risk making grave mistakes that can result in the failure of the company. These primary research findings are in line with the views of Estrin and Mickiewicz (2019) that mentoring programs provide critical help to entrepreneurs, particularly in the areas of

technical skills and strategic planning. This indicates the important of mentorship and business advice for social entrepreneurs.

According to Kifordu (2022), networking opportunities and mentorship are important for the sustainability of social enterprises because they them to be aware of mistakes and map a way forward for growth. Uju and Ugochukwu (2021) note that mentoring programs and business incubators play an integral role in providing entrepreneurs with the networks and real-world experience the need to address the challenges.

4.5.6 Theme 6: The role of social entrepreneurship in job creation and economic growth in the township economy

The role of social entrepreneurship in transforming township economies is becoming more widely acknowledged. Social entrepreneurs boost local economic activity and provide job possibilities by solving social issues and making money. However, several variables, such as market accessibility, talent development, and company scalability, affect their influence. To highlight their significance in promoting sustainable growth in townships, this section examines two major subthemes: boosting local economies through inclusive business models and creating jobs through skill development.

4.5.6.1 Subtheme 6.1: Job creation through skills development

The capacity of social entrepreneurship to provide people with useful skills is among its most important contributions to the township economy.

Verbatim quotes

> ***Participant 1:*** *"Since the majority of our staff members have little to no formal training, we make sure they are prepared for long-term employment by giving them practice".*
>
> ***Participant 3:*** *"We have taught more than fifty young people digital marketing skills through our social venture, and several of them have gone on to launch their own companies".*

Participant 13: *"By equipping individuals with the skills necessary to be self-sufficient, we educate them how to live a long life. We do more than just provide jobs".*

Participant 6*: "Although there is a wealth of potential in townships, finding steady work is difficult for those without mentoring and skill development".*

These primary research findings illustrate how vital skill development is to the creation of employment opportunities. Besides employment opportunities, social entrepreneurs provide people especially the youth with skills. The findings show that enhancing vocational training efforts inside social businesses significantly drop unemployment rates in Soweto. According to Uju and Ugochukwu 2021) skills development is important for fostering economic empowerment and creation of employment in disadvantaged regions. In addition, firms that focus on social outcomes are likely to provide skill development and alleviate poverty and enhancing the employability of people (Sunny, 2023).

4.5.6.2 Subtheme 6.2: Stimulating local economies through inclusive business models

The participants emphasised that social enterprises significantly contribute to the uplifting of the local economy by buying goods and services from local businesses.

Verbatim quotes

Participant 4*: "For the money to circulate among the community, we need to buy from the local suppliers".*

Participant 10: *"Not just for ourselves, but also for other small businesses, our business approach is made to open doors".*

Participant 3: *"There is a robust informal economy in townships; social entrepreneurs should collaborate with these companies rather than compete with them".*

> ***Participant 5:*** *"We make sure that the advantages of our business are distributed by employing people in the area and reinvesting earnings in neighbourhood initiatives".*

These primary research findings show how integrating the local firms into supply chains through social entrepreneurship enhances economic growth. Inclusive business models ensures that wealth is distributed among the community. The findings suggest that to enhance the financial impact, more social firms must execute business strategies that are inclusive. Cant (2019) explains how inclusive business models and local sourcing enhance economic growth in marginalised areas. According to Baker and Welter (2020), inclusive business models equip local firms and minimise economic loopholes, fostering growth. Additionally, Musara and Nieuwenhuizen (2020) emphasise that social enterprises that focus on local employment and sourcing significantly improve wealth retention in local areas, enhancing long-term economic stability.

4.6 Conclusion

The findings reveal that while Soweto's social entrepreneurs are resilient and innovative, they remain constrained by systemic challenges. Social entrepreneurship is necessity-driven, community-focused, and impactful, but requires stronger financial, policy, and institutional support to reach its full potential.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction

This chapter consolidates the study's findings and discusses them in relation to the literature reviewed. It also presents recommendations for strengthening social entrepreneurship in Soweto and reflects on the study's contribution.

5.2 Findings from Literature Review

The literature showed that social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as a strategy for addressing unemployment, poverty, and inequality in South Africa. However, social entrepreneurs face persistent barriers, including limited access to finance, inadequate mentorship, and weak policy support (Bowmaker-Falconer & Herrington, 2020; Musara & Nieuwenhuizen, 2020; Sunny, 2023). International comparisons, such as the Asian Tigers and Harlem, highlighted the role of education, social cohesion, and community-driven enterprise in driving transformation.

5.3 Findings from Primary Research

5.3.1 **Objective 1: Defining Social Entrepreneurship in Soweto**

Social entrepreneurship in Soweto is necessity-driven, with enterprises established primarily to address unemployment and poverty. Entrepreneurs emphasised social impact, community involvement, and innovation despite resource constraints.

5.3.2 **Objective 2: Government's Role in Supporting Social Entrepreneurs**

Government support was perceived as limited, particularly in relation to financial assistance, mentorship, and regulatory frameworks. Policies were viewed as poorly communicated and inadequately implemented.

5.3.3 **Objective 3: Implementing a Social Entrepreneurship Model in Soweto**

The findings demonstrated the importance of embedding social entrepreneurship within community structures, leveraging local assets, and strengthening collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society.

5.4 Overall Conclusion: Answering the Problem Statement

The study concludes that social entrepreneurship holds significant potential to transform township economies, but this potential is undermined by systemic challenges. Social entrepreneurs in Soweto contribute to job creation, skills development, and community upliftment, yet they remain constrained by financial, infrastructural, and policy barriers. Effective transformation requires more robust institutional support, targeted financing mechanisms, and an enabling policy environment.

5.5 Recommendations Per Objective

5.5.1 **Objective 1: Defining Social Entrepreneurship**

- Support initiatives that highlight and showcase the social and economic value of township entrepreneurs.
- Promote awareness campaigns to encourage broader participation in social entrepreneurship.

5.5.2 **Objective 2: Government's Role**

- Develop clearer, tailored policies for social enterprises, supported by simplified regulatory processes.
- Expand financial instruments (e.g., grants, low-interest loans) to support township-based entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen mentorship and training initiatives, ensuring accessibility for both new and established entrepreneurs.

5.5.3 **Objective 3: Implementing a Social Entrepreneurship Model**

- Encourage asset-based approaches such as the ABCD model to leverage community resources.
- Build partnerships between government, private sector, NGOs, and community organisations to support scalable social enterprises.
- Provide infrastructure (e.g., business hubs, shared services) to reduce operational costs for township enterprises.

5.6 Additional Recommendations of the Study

5.6.1 Establish township innovation hubs to foster collaboration and creativity.

5.6.2 Promote inclusive financing models that recognise the dual social and economic goals of enterprises.

5.6.3 Encourage gender-focused initiatives to increase women's participation in social entrepreneurship.

5.6.4 Enhance monitoring and evaluation of government programmes to ensure effective implementation.

5.6.5 Support academic–community partnerships to generate evidence-based strategies for township development.

5.7 Conclusion

This study demonstrated that social entrepreneurship in Soweto is a vital yet under-supported driver of economic transformation. By addressing systemic challenges and strengthening policy, financial, and institutional frameworks, social entrepreneurship can unlock sustainable development in township economies.

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