

https://dspace.org/

Social entrepreneurship and women's economic and social empowerment in Kenya

Ondiek, Hanna Atieno

2025
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/49312
Ondiek, Hanna Atieno . (2025). Social entrepreneurship and women's economic and social empowerment in Kenya [PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/49312

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Social entrepreneurship and women's economic and social empowerment in Kenya

Hanna Atieno Ondiek
Hanna.Ondiek@students.wits.ac.za

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management at the University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Management)

Copyright © 2025 by Hanna Atieno Ondiek

Supervisor: Prof. Jacob Mwathi Mati
Jacob.Mati@wits.ac.za

November 2025

Acknowledgements

Completing this PhD thesis would have been impossible without the support and encouragement of many individuals and institutions. My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Prof. Jacob Mwathi Mati, whose expertise, feedback, and patience guided me throughout. Your dedication is sincerely appreciated.

I thank Prof. Bhekinkosi Moyo and Prof. Judith Mbula Bahemuka for valuable insights early in my studies. Your contributions created a strong foundation for this research. Thank you.

Special thanks to Ms. Mmabatho Leeuw for your tremendous support. I also acknowledge the Bradlow Foundation and Ford Foundation for providing financial assistance.

My heartfelt thanks go to Vincent Odhiambo, Executive Director of Ashoka East Africa; Ruth Soi, Visionary Program Coordinator at Ashoka East Africa; and Dr. Jonas Dzinekou of Tangaza University for helping me identify suitable participants for this research. To the incredible research participants, women working tirelessly to create change in their communities, thank you for sharing your time and insights. Your contributions were invaluable.

Throughout this PhD journey, I have greatly appreciated the encouragement and moral support from my colleagues and friends. Your steadfast prayers, especially from Margaret Mliwa and Prisca Kyalo, have been invaluable.

To my late father, Philip Ondiek, who could not witness this milestone, and to my wonderful mother, Roselyn Achieng, whose strength and upbringing inspired me to persevere.

I am especially thankful to my husband, Mike, for his unwavering support and to my children, Philip, Melissa, Michael, Winnie, and Emily, whose love gave me strength.

With sincere appreciation, I thank everyone who supported me during the completion of this thesis.

Declaration of originality

Statement by author

I, Hanna Atieno Ondiek, confirm this thesis is my own work and, to my knowledge, contains no previously published material or content submitted for another degree, except where acknowledged.

HannaOndiek
Signature Date: November 13, 2025

Name: **Hanna Atieno Ondiek**

Student ID No: **2623122**

Statement by supervisor

The research in this thesis was performed under my supervision and, to my knowledge, is the sole work of Ms. Hanna Atieno Ondiek.

Signature Date:

Name: **Professor Jacob Mwathi Mati**
Designation: Supervisor
Associate Professor
Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment
Wits Business School
Email: jacob.mati@wits.ac.za
Tel: +27 11 717 3116

Dedication

To my late father, Philip Akech Ondiek, and my mother, Roselyn Achieng, for their enduring love and sacrifice. To my husband, Mike, and my children, for their unwavering support. I thank the women social entrepreneurs who inspired this work.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how social entrepreneurship advances the economic and social empowerment of women in Kenya, focusing on Nairobi as a dynamic institutional and market setting. Using a qualitative, exploratory design, it draws on semi-structured interviews with thirty-nine women social entrepreneurs and document analysis, applying reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to link individual experiences with structural and cultural dynamics.

The results of this investigation offer new insights into the lived realities of women social entrepreneurs. Findings reveal that women enact social entrepreneurship before naming it, transforming moral purpose and communal obligation into viable hybrid ventures. Empowerment unfolds through a sequenced social-capital arc: bonding ties (trust networks and chamas) enable entry and resilience; bridging ties (peer alliances, suppliers, anchor buyers) stabilise and scale operations; and linking ties (procurement and policy access) confer legitimacy and institutional voice. These pathways are reinforced by conversion bundles, fit-for-purpose finance, digital tools, market access, and mentorship, which translate resources into durable outcomes.

Building on these pathways, the analysis shows that empowerment arises where enabling structures meet adaptive agency. Legal clarity, inclusive finance, and community trust expand women's feasible action sets, while knowledge, leadership, adaptability, and moral motivation mediate these opportunities, yielding control over income, assets, and decisions, and strengthening community and policy influence.

The study integrates Empowerment Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Capital Theory, and African feminist perspectives to reframe empowerment as cumulative, relational, and place-based. Building on this foundation, it recommends legal recognition for hybrid ventures, de-risked and sequenced finance, coalition-based learning infrastructures, and intersectionally inclusive capability building.

In summary, women's social entrepreneurship in Nairobi serves as both an economic force and a driver of structural change, advancing gender equity in Kenya's evolving social economy.

Keywords: *social entrepreneurship; women's empowerment; capability approach; social capital; African feminism; Kenya; Nairobi.*

Abbreviations

AGPO – Access to Government Procurement Opportunities

ANDE – Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs

BC – British Council

CBK – Central Bank of Kenya

CBO – Community-Based Organisation

CIC – County Investment Corporation / Climate Innovation Centre

CLG - Company Limited by Guarantee

CRM – Customer Relationship Management

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

E4I – Energy for Impact

EMES – Emergence of Social Enterprise in Europe (Research Network)

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation

FSD Kenya – Financial Sector Deepening Kenya

GBV – Gender-Based Violence

GEM – Global Entrepreneurship Monitor

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

KCIC – Kenya Climate Innovation Centre

KDHS – Kenya Demographic and Health Survey

KNBS – Kenya National Bureau of Statistics

KPI - Key Performance Indicator

KYC – Know Your Customer

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

MoU – Memorandum of Understanding

MSME – Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PLC - Private Limited Company (Ltd)

PSK – Population Services Kenya

SACCO – Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SE – Social Enterprise / Social Entrepreneurship

SROI – Social Return on Investment

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

UNON – United Nations Office at Nairobi

USSD – Unstructured Supplementary Service Data

WEI – Women's Empowerment Index

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Background and context 1
1.2 Conceptual orientation 2
1.3 Statement of the problem 3
1.3 Objective of the study 3
1.4 Research questions 4
1.5 Significance of the study 4
1.6 Delimitations of the study 6
1.7 Definition of key terms 7
1.8 Brief outline of the structure of the report 11

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 13

2.0 Introduction 13
2.1 Defining and tracing the evolution of social entrepreneurship 13
2.2 Theoretical traditions and contemporary debates 16
2.3 Social entrepreneurship in the Global South: contextual dynamics and practices 21
2.4 Social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment: conceptual and transformative linkages 23
2.5 Synthesis of literature and identified gaps 26
2.6 Theoretical framework 28
2.7 Conceptual framework for the study 34
2.8 Summary of the literature review and theoretical framework 39

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 41

3.0 Introduction 41
3.1 Research paradigm 41
3.2 Research approach 43
3.3 Research design 43
3.4 Population and sample 44
3.5 Unit of analysis 50
3.6 Data collection 64
3.7 Data analysis 67
3.8 Study limitations 72
3.9 Validity and reliability 73
3.10 Ethical appraisal 73
3.11 Chapter summary 74

CHAPTER FOUR: WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NAIROBI, KENYA 76

4.0 Introduction 76
4.1 Findings - Social entrepreneurship: Kenyan women social entrepreneurs' perspective 78
4.2 Findings - Factors influencing the conceptualisation of social entrepreneurship 92
4.3 Findings - Socio-economic and political environment 101
4.4 Findings - Strategies employed by women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi 113

4.5 Conclusion and theoretical synthesis 125

CHAPTER FIVE: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PATHWAYS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT IN NAIROBI 130

5.0 Introduction 130
5.1 Findings - Motivations for social entrepreneurship 131
5.2 Findings - Pathways to women's empowerment through social entrepreneurship 135
5.3 Findings - Structural and cultural barriers to empowerment 161
5.4 Findings - Key strategies for navigating barriers 166
5.5 Summary and integration of findings 171

CHAPTER SIX: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN KENYA 176

6.0 Introduction 176
6.1 Findings - External conditions impacting women social entrepreneurs in Kenya 178
6.2 Findings - Internal factors influencing women's empowerment 188
6.3 Findings - Outcomes of women's social entrepreneurship 195
6.5 Summary and integration of findings 202

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 206

7.0 Introduction 206
7.1 Conclusions in relation to the research questions 207
7.2 Recommendations for key stakeholders 210
7.3 Key contribution to the literature 214
7.4 Recommendations for future research 216
7.5 Conclusion to the study 218

REFERENCES 222

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE/ SCHEDULE 245

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS) 248

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM 250

APPENDIX D: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 252

APPENDIX E: RESEARCH LICENSE 253

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework 388
Figure 4.1: Perceptions of Social Entrepreneurship: A Kenyan Spectrum.....81
Figure 5.1: Pathways Map: From Resources – Agency - Achievements 150
Figure 5.2: Social pathway to empowerment 156
Figure 5.3: Interlocking Empowerment Trajectories.....175
Figure 6.1: Integrated Empowerment Mechanism.....177
Figure 6.2: Integrated Empowerment Mechanism.....204

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Overview of selection sources 47
Table 3.2. Participants demographics 53
Table 3.3: Organisation Vignettes 56
Table 3.4: Six-step thematic analysis framework 68
Table 3.5: Themes and codes emerging from thematic analysis 70
Table 5.1: Example of product and service-based models and thematic focus 141
Table 5.2: Service-Based Models and Thematic Focus 142
Table 5.3: Resource-Management Strategies 146
Table 5.4: Sustainability Strategies 148
Table 6.1: External Enablers and Constraints for Women Social Entrepreneurs 180

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background and context

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed worldwide as a practical approach to addressing deep-rooted social and economic inequalities, combining market innovation with purposeful, mission-driven action (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). In environments shaped by structural gender barriers, it provides a key route to improving women's access to resources, agency, and participation in economic, community, and civic life (Kabeer, 1999; Datta & Gailey, 2012). Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates notably high rates of women's involvement in social enterprises (Bosma et al., 2016), highlighting the sector's importance for gender-equitable development and for fostering ways women mobilise resources, overcome constraints, and build resilient livelihoods.

In Kenya, social entrepreneurship is seen as a strategic way to address women's socio-economic challenges (British Council, 2018, 2020). Many Kenyan women use trust-based, relational methods to access financial and social resources. They draw on collective traditions such as *chamas* (informal savings groups), community cooperatives, and mentorship networks. These practices reflect African feminist thought, especially nego-feminism, which focuses on negotiation and practical, context-driven strategies (Nnaemeka, 2004).

Despite these promising developments, progressive policy reforms have not fully overcome structural barriers. Kenyan women continue to face constraints, including limited access to credit, weak enforcement of gender-protective laws, and socio-cultural norms that restrict economic autonomy (KNBS, 2022). Indicators such as the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) show that only 29% of Kenyan women aged 15–49 meet multidimensional empowerment thresholds (KNBS, 2020). Nonetheless, targeted interventions in agriculture,

construction, technology, and entrepreneurship demonstrate promising impacts on expanding women's capabilities and financial inclusion. Microfinance institutions and social enterprises have contributed significantly to these outcomes (Chebii & Ogada, 2022). Digital platforms, clean energy ventures, sustainable agriculture, and other environmentally oriented innovations have created additional opportunities. However, the absence of a dedicated legal framework for social enterprises in Kenya continues to pose challenges (British Council, 2020).

Given these national trends and persistent gaps, Nairobi stands out as Kenya's innovation hub and provides a rich setting for examining women's social entrepreneurship. With high digital finance penetration (84.8% in 2024), a strong presence of investors and accelerators, and an active civil society ecosystem, Nairobi offers an enabling yet underexplored context (FinAccess Household Survey, 2024; UNDP, 2023). Against this backdrop, this study investigates how women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi understand, practise, and sustain social entrepreneurship, and how these activities contribute to their economic and social empowerment.

1.2 Conceptual orientation

Social entrepreneurship refers to entrepreneurial action organised around a primary social mission and sustained through earned revenue, using market mechanisms to generate verifiable social value (Dees, 1998a; Mair & Martí, 2006; Santos, 2012). Social enterprises balance financial viability with explicit social objectives and reinvest surpluses into mission-aligned activities (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Ebrahim et al., 2014). Women's empowerment in this study is guided by Kabeer's (1999, 2005) resources–agency–achievements model and Sen's (1999) capability approach. Economic empowerment includes income stability, asset control, and business resilience, while social empowerment includes decision-making voice, leadership, mobility, safety, and civic participation. These conceptual parameters frame the

study's focus on how women mobilise resources, navigate constraints, exercise agency, and translate social entrepreneurship practices into durable empowerment outcomes.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Global scholarship highlights social entrepreneurship's transformative potential, but most literature remains focused on Western contexts, overlooking African socio-economic realities (Austin et al., 2012; Bornstein, 2007). While South Asian evidence shows mission-driven models improve women's socio-economic status (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Haugh & Talwar, 2014; Yunus et al., 2010), African contexts are understudied. In Kenya, social entrepreneurship is diverse, with ambiguous definitions, hybrid structures, and fragmented coordination (British Council, 2018). Research often emphasises beneficiaries rather than women as social entrepreneurship leaders (Ciambotti et al., 2023; Maseno & Wanyoike, 2020). County-specific analyses exist, such as for Mandera (Hassan & Sakwa, 2021), but none address the strategy for women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi. Socio-economic and political factors; patriarchal norms, limited capital, regulatory hurdles are still underexplored (Tomashevska & Hryhoruk, 2022). African feminist perspectives stress relational and collective agency, as seen in chamas and other forms of collaboration (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004; Okech, 2020), yet these remain marginal in the dominant literature.

These gaps constrain policymaking and limit practitioners' ability to design contextually relevant interventions. To address this gap, the study integrates the emancipatory entrepreneuring lens (Rindova et al., 2009) with African feminist theory. It examines the lived experiences, motivations, strategies, and mechanisms through which women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi achieve economic and social empowerment.

1.3 Objective of the study

The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To explore how women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi conceptualise and practise social entrepreneurship.
2. To examine the pathways through which social entrepreneurship fosters women's economic and social empowerment.
3. To investigate the factors that influence the economic and social empowerment of women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi.

1.4 Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

Primary research question

How does social entrepreneurship advance the economic and social empowerment of women in Nairobi, Kenya??

Subsidiary questions:

1. How do women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi conceptualise and practise social entrepreneurship?
2. What are the pathways through which social entrepreneurship fosters the economic and social empowerment of women in Nairobi?
3. What factors influence the economic and social empowerment of women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study deepens understanding of how women in Nairobi engage with social entrepreneurship in their cultural, social, and economic environments. While existing scholarship offers valuable insights into women's empowerment, it often misses the complex interplay of community-based support systems, patriarchal structures, and ongoing resource constraints in African cities.

By examining how social entrepreneurship helps women address low-wage employment, limited labour protections, inadequate social safety nets, and restricted access to capital and decision-making spaces, this study provides practical insights specific to Nairobi. It demonstrates how women social entrepreneurs navigate the city's unique challenges. This empirical evidence highlights that social entrepreneurship can serve as a pathway to women's empowerment in Nairobi.

Theoretically, the study contributes to debates in social entrepreneurship and gender studies by showing how women combine internal capabilities, motivation, entrepreneurial skills, and resilience with collective arrangements. These include chamas, peer mentorship, and social capital. Women initiate and sustain ventures that generate both personal and communal value (Brush et al., 2019; Mair & Martí, 2006; Bandura & Evans, 2006; Putnam, 2000). The study integrates Empowerment Theory (resources–agency–achievements) with the Capability Approach (conversion factors) and lenses from social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) and African feminist pragmatics (for example, nego feminism). This provides a context sensitive theorisation of mechanism to outcome pathways.

In practice, these findings provide practical steps for policymakers, practitioners, and development actors. These steps include aligning finance with chama based reciprocity and cash flow cycles, recognising care burdens in programme design, strengthening procurement access and anchor buyer pathways, and supporting the adoption of digital tools to expand market reach and safety. Such actions are grounded in women’s lived strategies, which guide policy design in urban Kenya.

Methodologically, the qualitative, exploratory design enables in depth engagement with lived experience. Rich, context specific narratives surface dynamics that are often obscured in large scale quantitative studies. These narratives show how women deploy market-based

strategies and digital tools to adapt to and overcome systemic constraints (Mwobobia, 2016; Datta & Gailey, 2012).

While the study does not claim to provide a definitive account of social entrepreneurship in Kenya, it foregrounds the voices of women social entrepreneurs and demonstrates the diverse, context embedded routes they pursue to transform their communities. It encourages further research, especially longitudinal and cross-country comparative work, on social entrepreneurship's role in advancing gender equality and inclusive development in African urban settings.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

This dissertation is delimited to illuminate how social entrepreneurship enables women's economic and social empowerment in a dense, information rich urban ecosystem. The study focuses on women led social enterprises that combine a clear social mission with earned revenue (for example, sales or service fees). It does not examine purely grant funded NGOs, conventional CSR projects within for-profit firms, or political empowerment outcomes except where these directly intersect with the economic and social pathways under analysis. Framing empowerment in two domains, economic (income opportunities, asset control, market access, financial resilience) and social (voice/agency, mobility, associational leadership and networks, norm navigation), keeps the unit of analysis coherent with the research question and the mechanism tracing aim.

The inquiry is delimited to Nairobi County. It does not extend to peri urban counties (Kiambu, Kajiado, Machakos) or to other parts of Kenya. Nairobi is selected because it concentrates accelerators, investors, multilaterals, and civil society interlocutors while exhibiting pronounced within city variation in opportunities and constraints. The intention is analytic transferability to comparable African cities rather than statistical generalisation to the national level. The study examines experiences, organisational practices, and documentary

materials from 2020–2025, a period capturing the post COVID evolution of digital finance, shifting policy environments, and ecosystem maturation. Earlier histories are referenced only for brief context and are not systematically analysed. The research employs a qualitative design centred on semi structured interviews with women social entrepreneurs and senior leaders, complemented by document analysis (policy texts, accelerator or hub reports, organisational artefacts). Ethnographic or participant observation is not used, nor are surveys, financial audits, or experimental designs. This evidentiary strategy privileges depth over breadth, surfacing processes and mechanisms rather than estimating population parameters or causal effect sizes.

Claims are confined to a thematic explanation and to respondents' perspectives on the pathways through which social enterprises may enable women's empowerment in Nairobi. The study does not attempt counterfactual impact evaluation, macro level outcome measurement, or national representativeness. Interviews are conducted in English or Kiswahili (translated to English for analysis); materials available only in other languages and proprietary datasets not released by participants fall outside the scope. The research includes adults (18+) participating voluntarily, with anonymisation or agreed attribution and secure data handling; minors and covert or high-risk settings are excluded.

1.7 Definition of key terms

These definitions provide a foundational understanding of the terms critical to the current study on social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya.

Social enterprises: organisations that blend the pursuit of financial stability with explicit social or environmental objectives (Dees, 1998b; Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). Unlike conventional businesses, social enterprises reinvest profits into their mission-aligned activities, prioritising community well-being, societal improvements, and sustainability (Peredo & McLean, 2006). In Kenya, social enterprises typically adopt grassroots approaches to address

challenges such as poverty, financial exclusion, and environmental degradation (Mwobobia, 2016).

Social entrepreneurs: Social entrepreneurs are individuals who launch and lead social enterprises, combining conventional entrepreneurial skills, such as strategic planning, market analysis, and financial management, with a strong commitment to social change (Bornstein, 2007; Drayton, 2002). Their motivations often stem from direct experiences of social inequities or service provision gaps, which drive them to develop innovative, market-based solutions (Mair & Marti, 2006; Nicholls, 2010).

Social innovation: the development and implementation of novel, practical solutions to pressing social and environmental challenges (Mulgan, 2006). It entails rethinking established practices and leveraging creative business models, new technologies, or inclusive service-delivery methods to achieve superior outcomes compared to traditional approaches (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

Women's empowerment: Women's empowerment entails enhancing women's capacity to make strategic life choices across economic, social, and personal domains, and to act upon those choices without external constraints (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999). Empowerment involves challenging and overcoming cultural and structural barriers, enabling women to become entrepreneurs, community leaders, and advocates who contribute to broader societal development (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Nussbaum, 2000b).

Economic empowerment: Economic empowerment specifically refers to women's ability to secure financial resources and exercise autonomy over income-generating activities, investments, and asset management (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Mayoux, 2000). It often includes opportunities for women to engage in sustainable entrepreneurial ventures, which not only

enhance individual financial stability but also broaden their influence within households and communities (World Bank, 2019).

Social empowerment: Social empowerment emphasises women's increased agency and influence within community structures, allowing them to challenge entrenched gender norms and actively participate in decision-making processes (Putnam, 2000; Rowlands, 1995). Initiatives promoting social empowerment often involve collective mechanisms, such as women's groups, cooperatives, or community-based organisations, to enhance collective bargaining power and foster greater social visibility and voice (Haugh & Talwar, 2014).

Gender disparities: Systemic inequalities that result in unequal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power between women and men (Kabeer, 1999; World Bank, 2019). These inequalities manifest through wage gaps, limited educational opportunities, and underrepresentation in leadership roles, particularly in contexts influenced by cultural and institutional norms that disadvantage women (UN Women, 2019).

Financial inclusion: Ensures that historically underserved individuals and businesses, particularly women and low-income groups, have access to affordable, appropriate, and quality financial services, including credit, savings, insurance, and payment mechanisms. Mobile technologies such as M-Pesa have significantly enhanced financial inclusion among women entrepreneurs in Kenya (World Bank, 2022).

Regulatory challenges: When laws, policies, and bureaucratic processes fail to adequately support the establishment, operation, and growth of social enterprises (British Council, 2020; Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). In Kenya, the absence of specific legal frameworks and incentives for social entrepreneurship complicates access to funding, organisational legitimacy, and the scalability of social enterprises (Ndemo et al., 2020).

Context-specific strategies: tailored approaches that acknowledge and integrate unique cultural, economic, and environmental factors of a specific locale (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Mair, 2010). In Nairobi, these may involve culturally relevant community engagement, leveraging digital platforms for market access, and adopting participatory models that reflect the realities of informal urban economies (Mwobobia, 2016).

Patriarchal mindset: A patriarchal mindset refers to beliefs, norms, and practices that perpetuate male dominance and traditional gender roles, systematically constraining women's access to resources, decision-making opportunities, and social and economic empowerment (Mama, 2001; Walby, 1989). Recognising and addressing patriarchal structures is critical for initiatives aimed at women's empowerment in socio-economic contexts.

Resilience: The capacity to adapt and persist in the face of adversity and challenges, maintaining progress toward entrepreneurial and empowerment objectives despite obstacles (Bandura & Evans, 2006; Masten, 2018). For women social entrepreneurs, resilience involves strategic resource mobilisation, adaptive management, and persistent efforts to navigate structural and societal constraints (Datta & Gailey, 2012).

Community engagement: Community engagement is the active collaboration and partnership-building process among individuals, social enterprises, and local stakeholders, aimed at identifying and collectively addressing shared community needs (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Putnam, 2000). Effective engagement fosters local empowerment, inclusive participation, and sustainable solutions tailored to community contexts (Haugh & Talwar, 2014).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a conceptual framework that examines how overlapping social identities, such as gender, ethnicity, class, age, and disability, intersect and compound experiences of discrimination and privilege (Mancini & Bello, 2016; Collins, 2000;

Okech, 2020). Understanding intersectionality is essential for analysing the nuanced ways in which diverse identities shape women's experiences of empowerment within social entrepreneurship initiatives.

Community-driven: A community-driven approach emphasises grassroots leadership, where communities identify their own priorities and mobilise resources and actions accordingly. This model promotes self-determination, sustainability, and local innovation, often in contrast to top-down development strategies.

A chama (plural: chamas) is an informal, community-based savings and investment group common in Kenya. Chamas typically operate through pooled financial contributions, rotating savings schemes, or joint investment activities. Beyond financial functions, they serve as social support networks that foster trust, reciprocity, and collective problem-solving. In this study, chamas are understood as key sources of bonding social capital, offering women initial liquidity, emotional support, legitimacy, and entry pathways into entrepreneurial activity.

1.8 Brief outline of the structure of the report

This thesis is organised into seven interrelated chapters that collectively examine how social entrepreneurship advances women’s economic and social empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya. Chapter two critically reviews the existing body of knowledge on social entrepreneurship and women’s empowerment. It discusses the theoretical foundations, conceptual frameworks, and empirical studies that underpin the research, and identifies key debates, knowledge gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature. This review establishes the intellectual context and informs the formulation of the study’s research questions.

Chapter three outlines the research design and methodological approach adopted in the study. It explains the rationale for using a qualitative, exploratory design and describes the data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The chapter

also details the sampling procedures, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations employed to ensure the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapter four presents and analyses findings related to the first research question: How do women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi conceptualise and engage with social entrepreneurship? It explores participants' interpretations, motivations, and practices, connecting empirical insights to theoretical debates on entrepreneurship, gender, and social innovation.

Chapter five addresses the second research question: What are the pathways through which social entrepreneurship fosters women's economic and social empowerment in Nairobi? The chapter examines the mechanisms and processes through which social ventures generate empowerment outcomes, identifying patterns of agency, capability enhancement, and collective action that sustain women's advancement.

Chapter six examines the third research question: What factors influence the economic and social empowerment of women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi? It analyses both external (institutional, policy, and market) and internal (personal, relational, and organisational) factors shaping empowerment trajectories. The discussion highlights emergent themes and their implications for theory, policy, and practice in gender-responsive social entrepreneurship.

Chapter seven synthesises the overall findings and situates them within the broader academic and practical discourse. It integrates insights from the preceding empirical chapters to answer the study's central and subsidiary research questions. The chapter concludes by discussing the study's contributions, practical implications for policymakers and practitioners, and proposing directions for future research on social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment in African contexts.

Chapter two: Literature review and theoretical framework

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines how social entrepreneurship shapes women's empowerment in the Global South, with a focus on Nairobi, Kenya. It first traces the evolution of social entrepreneurship and presents different schools of thought. Next, it explains why this matters as a development strategy, particularly when institutions are weak, informal, or affected by gender barriers. The chapter then covers women's empowerment, reviewing the main dimensions, measurement methods, and how social enterprises support economic and social empowerment. To ground the analysis, the chapter uses an integrated theoretical framework. Empowerment Theory serves as the causal basis, modelling empowerment as a process that moves from resources to agency to achievements. Then, the Capability Approach is introduced to explain how time, mobility, safety, and social norms affect the conversion of resources into outcomes. Subsequently, Social Capital and African Feminist perspectives are included to clarify mechanisms and factors shaping empowerment, such as the shift from bonding to bridging and linking ties, and the work of negotiated, relational agency in Nairobi's gendered setting. Finally, this synthesis places the study within current scholarship, highlights gaps it fills and supports later chapters. By focusing on Nairobi's context, the chapter underscores the multidimensional and intersectional nature of empowerment and calls for system-aware, context-driven research and practice.

2.1 Defining and tracing the evolution of social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship emerged from two sources: non-profits seeking financial sustainability and for-profits adopting social aims (Dees, 1998b; Kerlin, 2006; Muli & Arasa, 2019). The term rose to prominence in the late twentieth century, but its roots trace back to

nineteenth-century cooperative enterprise and socially driven innovation (Daru & Gaur, 2013; Dees & Anderson, 2006). The term's origins are contested. In 1972, Joseph Banks used “social entrepreneurship” to describe management for social problems (El Ebrashi, 2013). In the 1980s, Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, gave it a modern definition, defining social entrepreneurs as innovators who use business skills to drive social reform and achieve transformative outcomes (Drayton, 2002; Daru & Gaur, 2013). This view casts social entrepreneurs as “gap-fillers” who act where markets and state institutions fail, a notion supported by current scholarship (Mair & Martí, 2006; Nicholls, 2006; Saebi et al., 2019).

The rapid spread of social entrepreneurship has attracted criticism. Spicer et al. (2019) argue that its popularity reflects neoliberal ideals. These favour market-based solutions and shift public responsibilities to private or hybrid actors. Drayton’s model, they warn, may favour elite interests and promote privatisation of essential services. This can reduce public accountability (Hacker, 2004; Spicer et al., 2019). These critiques stress the need to balance entrepreneurial efficiency with equity, inclusion, and long-term public commitments. In contrast, proponents like Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) and Nyssens (2007) argue for the potential of social enterprises. With supportive legislation and cross-sector collaboration, they can support public welfare systems. Social enterprises can enhance service delivery and foster inclusive innovation. This is especially important where there are fiscal constraints or weak governance (Smith et al., 2012).

Historical cases highlight both promise and tension in social entrepreneurship. The Rochdale Pioneers showed that cooperative models build collective ownership and resilience. Florence Nightingale’s nursing reforms illustrate how social innovation drives systemic change by raising standards (Daru & Gaur, 2013; Nicholls, 2006). In Kenya, Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement exemplifies modern grassroots innovation: mobilising women for empowerment across economic, social, and political spheres. It also showed how such

innovation creates livelihoods and civic transformation (Maathai, 2004; Panum, 2018a). These cases reveal social entrepreneurship as a contested yet catalytic field, shaped by market logics but able to enable community-driven change. Recognising these tensions builds a nuanced base for analysing its potential to support women's empowerment in Nairobi's complex setting.

Dees and Anderson (2006) identify two main schools of thought: Social Enterprise and Social Innovation. The Social Enterprise School gained traction as non-profits adopted market strategies to advance their missions (Boschee, 1998). It focuses on revenue generation and financial independence for non-profits or hybrids, aiming to sustain social purpose without sacrificing financial sustainability (Alter, 2006; Boschee & McClurg, 2003). Harvard's Social Enterprise Initiative, launched in 1993, reinforced this management focus (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010). The Social Innovation School differs, drawing on Schumpeter's (1934, 1939) theory of entrepreneurship as "creative destruction." This school sees social entrepreneurs as change agents who disrupt traditions and reshape institutions (Pomeda, 2002; Mair & Martí, 2006; Khalid et al., 2022). Ashoka exemplifies this tradition, valuing creativity, scale, and societal change over financial autonomy.

The Social Enterprise perspective emphasises sustainability via market discipline, whereas the Social Innovation approach underscores creativity and systemic transformation. Jointly, these frameworks demonstrate how social entrepreneurship mediates economic viability and transformative aspirations. This equilibrium is particularly pronounced in Nairobi's hybrid ventures. Entrepreneurs in Nairobi operate within volatile markets and informal regulatory contexts, while confronting complex social issues. On the one hand, these enterprises are compelled to generate revenue amid inconsistent donor funding, conservative financial institutions, and the absence of a dedicated legal classification conditions consistent with the Social Enterprise School. On the other hand, many of these ventures demonstrate adherence to the Social Innovation tradition by constructing disruptive solutions to issues such

as youth unemployment, gender-based violence, unreliable public services, and urban inequalities, frequently introducing novel distribution mechanisms, value chain configurations, and community participation systems.

Kenyan social enterprises operate at the intersection of two theoretical paradigms. Financial viability is essential for organisational survival, while innovation and community transformation underpin legitimacy and societal impact. This duality is pronounced among women entrepreneurs in Nairobi, who must navigate commercial pressures, gender-related barriers, and prevailing social expectations as they advance social objectives. Analysing this intersection of market discipline and innovation enhances understanding of how women-led social enterprises in Nairobi function and contribute to women's empowerment.

2.2 Theoretical traditions and contemporary debates

This section links global, African, and Kenyan scholarship to highlight debates that shape social entrepreneurship concepts and practices. The discussion groups these insights into five debates: legal and institutional arrangements, organising and financing hybrids, empowerment mechanisms, digital inclusion, and contextual constraints. Each debate is highly relevant for Kenya and Nairobi.

2.2.1 Institutional and legal arrangements for social enterprise

Global debates stress how legal and institutional arrangements shape the legitimacy, sustainability, and accountability of social enterprises. In Europe, special forms like the UK’s Community Interest Company and Italy’s social cooperatives were created by policy to formalise hybrid ventures. These forms also protect their social missions (Borzaga & Defourny,

2001; Spear et al., 2009). The EMES[1] "ideal type" framework provided criteria for defining social enterprise. Applying European models elsewhere has been challenging (Davister et al., 2004; Nicholls, 2010). African scholars criticise copying these models without adjustment. They note that African social enterprises often work in informal economies, where legitimacy comes from community trust, donor expectations, and flexible rules (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). In Kenya, there is no dedicated legal form. Social enterprises must navigate company law, cooperative law, and NGO frameworks. They often follow donor or procurement rules (Kerlin, 2009; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). These ambiguities can be constraints or opportunities. They limit access to specific incentives but allow flexibility, especially for women entrepreneurs building ventures and community support. For this study, institutional arrangements form part of the capability environment. They shape women's access to resources, procurement, and public contracting.

2.2.2 Hybrid organising and financing logics

Contemporary debates on hybrid organising highlight the plural logics that social enterprises must balance: commercial discipline, social mission, and institutional legitimacy. Internationally, the Social Enterprise School emphasises earned income as a means of enforcing mission discipline and reducing donor dependency (Alter, 2006; Dees, 1998b). Parallel research on hybridity and bricolage illuminates how ventures reconcile competing logics in resource-constrained contexts through improvisation, effectuation, and network mobilisation (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Boschee, 1998). African scholarship extends these

[1] EMES is a research network of established university research centres and individual researchers whose goal has been to gradually build up an international corpus of theoretical and empirical knowledge, pluralistic in disciplines and methodologies, around our "SE" concepts: social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, social economy, solidarity economy and social innovation.

debates by foregrounding necessity-driven models that build on community assets and relational structures to compensate for thin markets and volatile institutions (Hammond et al., 2007; Ciambotti et al., 2023). In Kenya, women-led social enterprises face persistent capital frictions such as conservative underwriting, small ticket sizes, and risk-averse intermediaries despite growth in gender-lens investment and blended finance. Intermediaries such as Kenya Climate Innovation Centre (KCIC), Villgro Africa, and the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) network provide investor-readiness support, yet their concentration in Nairobi creates "intermediation deserts" for peri-urban and informal-settlement women social entrepreneurs. For this study, hybrid organising and financing logics constitute structural determinants of capability formation, illustrating how women social entrepreneurs assemble capital, skills, and legitimacy under intersectional constraints.

2.2.3 Mechanisms linking social entrepreneurship to women's economic and social empowerment

A substantial body of global literature theorises empowerment as a movement from resources to agency to achievements (Kabeer, 2001; Sen, 1999; Mayoux, 2000), while emancipatory entrepreneurship research describes the micro-processes through which entrepreneurs disrupt constraints and renegotiate power relations (Rindova et al., 2009; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). African evidence underscores that these processes are deeply embedded in communal relations, informal economies, and grassroots innovation, where access to skills, networks, and local legitimacy enhances women's agency despite institutional limitations (Littlewood & Holt, 2018; Rivera-Santos et al., 2015). Kenyan studies deepen these insights by highlighting blurred boundaries between non-profit and for-profit models, reinvestment cultures, and dense social networks that support women's participation in markets, chamas, and associational life (Panum et al., 2018b; Hassan & Sakwa, 2021; Maseno & Wanyoike, 2020). However, these benefits are uneven, shaped by caregiving burdens, safety constraints,

and time poverty. The analytic implication for this study is to trace mechanisms such as network transitions, capability conversion, and negotiated agency that explain how and under what conditions economic gains translate into social recognition and voice.

2.2.4 Digital and fintech inclusion and gendered access

Digitalisation is widely viewed as a platform for scale, efficiency, and inclusion, yet persistent gender gaps remain in device ownership, affordability, digital skills, and usage (World Bank, 2024). African and Kenyan evidence confirms that while high levels of financial inclusion provide an enabling infrastructure for pay-as-you-go models and platform-based entrepreneurship, women's adoption remains constrained by literacy barriers, affordability challenges, and restrictive social norms. Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) and Short Message Service (SMS) technologies, alongside extensive mobile-money agent networks, reduce entry barriers for women but introduce new compliance burdens. For instance, Know-Your-Customer (KYC) requirements and data protection obligations can disproportionately affect micro enterprises that lack administrative capacity (FSD Kenya, 2024). In Nairobi, resilient digital enterprise models integrate mobile payments with place-based coordination such as community agents, clinics, and climate hubs, illustrating that digital inclusion depends on physical distribution networks and normative acceptance. Accordingly, this study conceptualises digitalisation not as a stand-alone enabler but as a conversion factor: one that enhances empowerment outcomes only when aligned with offline capabilities, mobility conditions, and social legitimacy.

2.2.5 Contextual constraints and intersectionality in African cities

Contemporary debates highlight persistent methodological and conceptual tensions. Global critiques warn that narrow economic metrics, short evaluation cycles, and donor-driven frameworks such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) risk conflating outputs with substantive empowerment outcomes (Alvord et al., 2004; Calás et al., 2009; Ebrahim &

Rangan, 2014). Calls for system-oriented evaluation, such as process tracing, contribution analysis, and intersectional approaches, reflect recognition that social entrepreneurship functions as a "second invisible hand" within complex socio-economic ecosystems (Santos, 2012; Beach & Pedersen, 2013). African feminist scholars and Kenyan researchers caution against elite-driven impact narratives, emphasising the need for participatory metrics, contextual fidelity, and attention to negotiated agency in gendered urban environments (Panum et al., 2018b; Ozkazanc-Pan & Muntean, 2016). Nairobi epitomises these intersectional frictions: women social entrepreneurs navigate spatial inequalities, caregiving burdens, mobility and safety constraints, and reputational risks that shape both opportunity structures and empowerment pathways. For this study, these constraints serve as boundary conditions, specifying where empowerment may stall despite resource gains, and where social capital or supportive intermediaries may amplify effects.

Across these debates, social entrepreneurship converges on the deliberate creation of social value under conditions of financial viability, yet its pathways, mechanisms, and beneficiaries remain deeply context specific. Within Kenya's hybrid regulatory environment, fragmented financing architecture, digital physical distribution dynamics, and gendered social structures, women social entrepreneurs continually negotiate the balance between commercial survival and structural transformation. Integrating Empowerment Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Capital Theory, and African feminist perspectives enables this study to examine not only whether social entrepreneurship empowers women in Nairobi, but also how, when, and under what conditions empowerment occurs and is sustained.

2.3 Social entrepreneurship in the Global South: contextual dynamics and practices

Social entrepreneurship has become an increasingly vital strategy for addressing development challenges in the Global South, where top-down economic growth models often fail to produce equitable and sustainable outcomes (Mair & Marti, 2006; Seelos et al., 2006). By applying market-oriented innovations to pressing societal issues ranging from healthcare and education to environmental sustainability, social entrepreneurs bridge service delivery gaps that weak state institutions and limited resources often leave unfilled (Chell, 2016; Nicholls, 2008). In doing so, they engage directly with historically marginalised groups, especially women, offering pathways to economic and social empowerment (Datta & Gailey, 2012).

In regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where poverty, unemployment, and inequality remain entrenched, social entrepreneurship has been championed as a locally grounded alternative to traditional development interventions. Rather than relying on external agencies, social entrepreneurs collaborate with communities to co-create solutions tailored to local needs, strengthening ownership and long-term sustainability (Nicholls, 2008). Critics, however, caution that such bottom-up models may unintentionally shift state responsibilities onto private actors, potentially obscuring the need for structural reforms (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Spicer et al., 2019). Illustrative evidence from South Asia highlights social entrepreneurship's transformative role in empowering women. Microfinance innovations in Bangladesh and India, such as the Grameen model and the Self-Employed Women's Association, have expanded women's financial autonomy, skills, and social status (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Yunus et al., 2010). These initiatives demonstrate how collective organising and financial access can shift gender norms. Yet scholars note that while such models generate immediate benefits, they cannot substitute for deep institutional change, particularly in contexts

marked by structural inequality (Roy, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, social entrepreneurship often emerges in response to infrastructural deficits and institutional volatility. Solar Sister's women-led clean-energy distribution model in Uganda, Tanzania, and Nigeria demonstrates how gender-sensitive enterprise models can simultaneously alleviate energy poverty and strengthen women's economic agency (Samantarai & Dutta, 2024; Heuër et al., 2015). Katre et al. (2018) further show that integrating women into clean-energy value chains can catalyse broader community development by challenging patriarchal norms.

Within Kenya, similar place-based innovations are increasingly visible. Initiatives linked to the Green Belt Movement, county-level social enterprises supporting agricultural cooperatives, and women-led clean-energy and waste-management ventures in Nairobi and Mombasa illustrate how social entrepreneurship translates environmental and livelihood goals into gendered empowerment. Kenyan studies highlight that women's ventures thrive where community networks, microfinance institutions, and county procurement initiatives intersect (Hassan & Sakwa, 2021; Maseno & Wanyoike, 2020). Nonetheless, structural constraints such as the absence of a legal category for social enterprise, limited early-stage finance, and gendered labour burdens continue to restrict scalability and sustainability (Littlewood & Holt, 2018; Kimmitt & Muñoz, 2018).

The literature reveals that while social entrepreneurship can generate economic and social empowerment, its effects depend on context-specific mechanisms: the strength of social networks, the quality of institutional support, and women entrepreneurs' ability to navigate gendered constraints. These dynamics reinforce the relevance of this study's integrated framework, in which empowerment arises from the interaction among resources, agency, social capital, and conversion conditions within Nairobi's socio-economic landscape.

2.4 Social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment: conceptual and transformative linkages

Women's empowerment entails confronting and transforming the structural and relational power imbalances that constrain women's autonomy and participation in economic, social, and political spheres (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Conceptually, empowerment is multidimensional: economic empowerment refers to access to income, assets, and productive resources; social empowerment denotes enhanced recognition, voice, and agency within households and communities; and political empowerment encompasses influence in governance and decision-making spaces (Mayoux, 2000). This study focuses primarily on economic and social dimensions, following Kabeer's (2001) conceptualisation of empowerment as the expansion of women's capacity to make strategic life choices in contexts where such choices were previously restricted.

In African contexts, empowerment is inseparable from cultural, historical, and communal dynamics. African feminist scholars such as Nnaemeka (2004) and Mama (2001) emphasise relationality, spirituality, and collective agency as central to empowerment, distinguishing African feminist practice from individualised liberal frameworks. Historically, African women have advanced empowerment through communal forms of resistance, shared labour, and mutual care as transformative collective action that operates outside formal political spaces yet remains deeply influential. Accordingly, empowerment must be understood as both an individual and a collective process, embedded in social networks and governed by indigenous principles of solidarity, reciprocity, and negotiated agency.

Empowerment is not a static end-state but a dynamic process of expanding choice, control, and influence (Sen, 1999). Sen describes empowerment as the enhancement of capabilities, the substantive freedoms to live lives one values, while Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) foreground the acquisition of resources, critical awareness, and competence across

individual, organisational, and community levels. Keller and Mbewe (1991) similarly underscore the transformative role of collective organising as women mobilise to contest gendered subordination. In Kenya, this collective capacity is often expressed through chamas, rotating savings groups, and community-based cooperatives that enable women to pool resources, access markets, and build social legitimacy (Njenga et al., 2021; Wachira, 2012).

Social entrepreneurship provides an institutional space where these collective energies can be formalised, scaled, and translated into durable empowerment gains. By integrating commercial sustainability with a social mission, social entrepreneurship directly addresses gender-based inequalities while strengthening both individual and communal forms of agency (Agrawal et al., 2023; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Women who participate in social enterprises gain access to income-generating opportunities, credit, training, and market linkages, resources that enhance economic independence and business resilience (British Council, 2020). Simultaneously, social enterprises amplify women's visibility, confidence, and influence within their households and communities, often reshaping gender norms through demonstrable leadership and economic contribution (Mair et al., 2012).

The concept of emancipatory entrepreneuring (Rindova et al., 2009; Branzei, 2012) offers a compelling lens for interpreting these dynamics. Emancipatory entrepreneuring refers to entrepreneurial action that disrupts constraints, reconfigures resource relationships, and makes transformative claims that alter social structures (Jennings et al., 2016). In Kenya, women-led social enterprises, particularly those linked to local cooperatives, clean-energy distribution, childcare innovation, and community health, illustrate how negotiated agency and market-oriented adaptation can challenge patriarchal norms while advancing community development (Njenga et al., 2021; Wachira, 2012). These ventures embody the interaction between resource mobilisation (finance, networks, skills), agency expansion (confidence,

decision-space, leadership), and socially recognised achievements (income stability, community voice).

Economic empowerment in these contexts manifests through stable income streams, asset accumulation, improved access to credit, and successful engagement with procurement opportunities, including county-level programmes and the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) initiative. Social empowerment emerges through enhanced leadership visibility, improved mobility and safety in public spaces, and increased legitimacy in community and institutional contexts, often evidenced through artefacts such as tender documents, memoranda of understanding, cooperative constitutions, or public roles in civic events. These dimensions are interdependent: economic resources elevate social standing, which in turn strengthens women's voice, bargaining power, and capacity to influence household or community decisions (Jamal et al., 2016).

Thus, social entrepreneurship functions as both a vehicle and a process of empowerment. It enables women to mobilise social capital, acquire capabilities, and participate in networks that amplify collective agency. Moreover, it offers a culturally resonant framework that aligns with African feminist ideals of mutual support, negotiation, and community uplift. By fusing enterprise logic with social transformation, social entrepreneurship in Nairobi becomes a space where women re-negotiate agency, redefine value creation, and collectively reshape the socio-economic conditions of their lives. These insights directly inform the study's integrated framework, where empowerment is understood as a cumulative, relational process shaped by resources, agency, achievements, and the conversion conditions specific to Nairobi's gendered urban context.

2.5 Synthesis of literature and identified gaps

The literature reviewed in Sections 2.1–2.4 reveals substantial intersections between social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, yet it also exposes persistent conceptual, mechanistic, contextual, and theoretical gaps that justify the present study. Four cross-cutting themes crystallise across global, African, and Kenyan scholarship: (i) the multidimensional and processual character of empowerment, (ii) the hybrid and institutionally contingent nature of social entrepreneurship, (iii) the centrality of networks and collective agency, and (iv) the contextual embeddedness of empowerment within African socio-cultural systems. First, empowerment is consistently conceptualised as a multidimensional, processual construct that traverses economic, social, and political domains and requires shifts in both resources and agency (Kabeer, 1999; Mayoux, 2000; Sen, 1999). Studies emphasise that empowerment entails more than increased income; it encompasses confidence, mobility, leadership, and the capacity to participate in public and household decision-making (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Rowlands, 1995). However, as the preceding sections showed, much of the literature merely catalogues empowerment outcomes without interrogating the mechanisms through which entrepreneurial action cultivates and sustains agency. Few studies analyse how women convert resources into achievements under structural and cultural constraints, or how these processes unfold within specific market and institutional environments such as Nairobi.

Second, scholarship on social entrepreneurship repeatedly highlights its hybrid nature, balancing commercial viability and social mission while navigating competing institutional logics (Dees, 1998; Drayton, 2002; Battilana & Lee, 2014). Yet the causal pathways linking social entrepreneurship to empowerment remain under-theorised. Existing work tends to foreground exceptional success cases or charismatic social innovators (Haugh & Talwar, 2014; Richardson et al., 2017), offering limited insight into the incremental, negotiated, and often fragile empowerment processes within ordinary, resource-constrained ventures. Moreover, as

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 demonstrated, very few studies examine how hybrid organising interacts with gendered institutions, public procurement regimes, and Nairobi's informal and formal markets. Third, the literature underscores the importance of social capital, bonding, bridging, and linking ties in amplifying women's capabilities, market access, and organisational resilience (Wachira, 2012; Njenga et al., 2021). Yet these networks are often treated descriptively as background conditions rather than as active conversion mechanisms through which women translate resources into empowerment outcomes. This omission obscures how network strategies, leveraging chamas, mentorship, procurement brokers, or community legitimacy, mediate women's ability to navigate constraints, expand opportunities, and negotiate agency in urban spaces. Fourth, although African feminist scholars have articulated contextually grounded understandings of empowerment, emphasising relationality, negotiated agency, spirituality, and collective uplift (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020), much global scholarship continues to universalise Western-centric frameworks. These approaches underestimate the communal, negotiated, and context-specific ways African women exercise agency within family, market, and community systems. As Section 2.4 highlighted, empowerment in Nairobi cannot be understood solely through individualistic models; it must be situated within broader socio-cultural and institutional dynamics that shape, enable, and constrain women's choices.

The reviewed literature reveals four major gaps that this study seeks to address. First, a conceptual gap persists, as existing scholarship tends to describe empowerment outcomes without adequately theorising the causal processes through which social entrepreneurship generates multidimensional empowerment for women. Second, there is a mechanistic gap, with limited attention given to the social, institutional, cultural, and digital conversion factors that shape how resources are, or are not, translated into agency and tangible achievements. Third, a significant contextual gap emerges from the underrepresentation of urban African settings,

particularly Nairobi, whose hybrid regulatory environment, gendered procurement systems, mobility and safety constraints, and uneven entrepreneurial ecosystems create distinctive empowerment pathways that remain insufficiently studied. Finally, a theoretical gap emerges from the limited integration of African feminist perspectives and social capital frameworks, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the negotiated, relational, and collective forms of agency that underpin women's empowerment in African cities. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi, the study examines how empowerment unfolds through iterative processes of resource mobilisation, network building, hybrid organising, and negotiated agency. In doing so, it fills conceptual, mechanistic, contextual, and theoretical gaps, contributing to a grounded, context-sensitive understanding of how social entrepreneurship advances women's empowerment in the urban Global South.

2.6 Theoretical framework

This study adopts a single, integrated framework in which Empowerment Theory serves as the causal anchor and the Capability Approach as the supporting framework. Empowerment Theory forms the core linkage, modelling empowerment as a process that moves from resources to agency and then to achievements. The Capability Approach explains how resource access is converted into outcomes, with specific conversion factors affecting each stage. Two nested lenses, Social Capital and African feminist perspectives, further specify the mechanisms and contextual moderators that shape these key relationships. Social capital tracks how effects travel through social networks and institutions, while African feminist perspectives clarify how gendered relations mediate the conversion of agency into sustained empowerment. Together, these components are systematically mobilised to structure constructs, discipline interpretation, and guide inference, with Nairobi's urban context shaping how empowerment gains are sustained or lost.

2.6.1 Empowerment as anchor: process, scale, and causality

Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 2001; Mayoux, 2000; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) anchors this study because it (i) treats empowerment as processual rather than static, (ii) integrates micro-level changes (self-efficacy, decision-making) with meso-level associational life and macro-level voice, and (iii) offers a tractable causal sequence linking resources to agency and ultimately to achievements, that can be empirically interrogated. Here, resources include finance, skills, reputational capital, supplier–buyer linkages, and intermediary support; agency encompasses self-efficacy, intra-household and enterprise decision-making space, and leadership uptake; achievements include income stability, asset control, social recognition, and community voice. Analytically, the study expects agency to mediate the relationship between resource access and achievements: resource gains that do not shift decision-space should not be read as empowerment. Indicators, therefore, emphasise processual and relational dimensions (who decides, who influences, and how decisions evolve) rather than outputs alone. After establishing the Empowerment Theory foundation, the next section details how the Capability Approach deepens this understanding by identifying and explaining relevant conversion factors.

2.6.2 Capability as support: conversion factors and valued functionings

The Capability Approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000) explains why identical resource bundles yield divergent outcomes. It foregrounds conversion factors such as time availability, mobility and safety conditions, digital and market access, caregiving burdens, and normative acceptance that determine what women can be and do. In the empirical analysis, these factors are treated as moderators of the resources-to-agency relationship and then of the achievement pathway. Capabilities also supply the evaluative horizon: success is judged against valued functionings, what women themselves have reason to value, ensuring the analysis remains grounded in lived aspirations rather than narrow efficiency metrics. Thus, the

capability lens provides both the why behind heterogeneous outcomes and the ought that disciplines indicator selection. The following section turns to social capital theory to explore mechanisms by which these effects travel through networks and institutions.

2.6.3 Social capital as a nested mechanism lens: how effects travel

Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) serves as a mechanism lens in this study, examining how empowerment processes move from individuals to collective and institutional domains. In this framework, bonding ties such as chamas, neighbourhood associations, and faith-based groups are key. They provide safety nets, reduce entry risks, and support initial resource pooling. Bridging ties connect women to wider networks of suppliers, buyers, mentors, and peers. These links expand market reach and diversify opportunities. Linking ties help women access institutional actors, such as public procurement systems, development programmes, and donor agencies. This enables them to enter higher-value markets and influence decision-making spaces. The analysis investigates whether moving from bonding to bridging and linking correlates with strengthened agency. It also examines whether this change translates economic gains into social recognition and voice. The framework also considers the possibility of negative social capital. These include being stuck in low-opportunity networks, exclusionary gatekeeping, or facing reputational sanctions for defying gender norms. Such effects can mute, distort, or reverse expected empowerment outcomes. Building on this, the next section situates these mechanisms within Nairobi's urban context by introducing African feminist perspectives as a lens for negotiated agency and intersectionality.

2.6.4 African feminist perspectives as a nested contextual lens: negotiated agency and intersectionality

African feminist scholarship (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004) emphasises that women's agency in Nairobi is typically exercised through negotiation, relational dynamics, and

communal obligations shaped by gendered power structures. This perspective enhances the framework in two principal ways. First, analytically, it moderates expectations regarding capability conversion by acknowledging that caregiving demands, mobility constraints, and safety concerns may limit the extent to which income or resource gains translate into social recognition, leadership, or expanded decision-making space. Second, interpretively, it safeguards contextual fidelity by highlighting the culturally nuanced strategies women employ, such as redistributing care work, negotiating mobility, or managing reputations to operate within patriarchal norms while mitigating social penalties. Furthermore, intersectional attributes; including age, marital status, disability, and settlement type are explicitly incorporated to avoid homogenising women's experiences and to account for variations in empowerment pathways across Nairobi's diverse urban landscape.

2.6.5 Integrated causal model and boundary conditions

Integrating these components produces a coherent causal narrative. Participation in social enterprises expands women's access to resources such as credit, skills, market linkages, and intermediary support, these serve as foundational inputs in the empowerment process. Resource gains deepen women's agency. This is expressed through greater self-efficacy, wider decision-space in households and organisations, and increased leadership uptake. Strengthened agency then enables women to secure tangible achievements: income stability, control over assets, heightened social recognition, and participation in community or policy arenas. Transitions in social capital, from bonding ties to more heterogeneous bridging and vertically oriented linking ties, serve as key relational mechanisms connecting economic improvements to social or institutional visibility. Throughout this chain, capability conversion factors and negotiated forms of agency shape how effectively resources translate into agency and how agency becomes achievement.

The framework also identifies boundary conditions. Where conversion factors are strongly adverse, acute time poverty, mobility or safety limitations, or restrictive norms, or where women remain confined to bonding networks, empowerment may stall at the agency stage despite better resources. Conversely, in more permissive normative environments and as bridging and linking ties deepen, even modest resource improvements can yield disproportionately strong gains in social recognition and public voice. The model is therefore sensitive to both enabling conditions and structural constraints within Nairobi's urban context.

2.6.6 Disconfirming evidence and falsifiability

The framework remains open to empirical challenge and does not function as a closed system. First, if increases in resources do not lead to shifts in women's agency or decision-making space, Empowerment Theory would be called into question. Second, if changes from bonding to bridging or linking ties do not alter social visibility or voice, Social Capital Theory would be weakened. Third, if conversion factors such as mobility, time, or digital access do not account for differences in empowerment across women's narratives, the Capability Approach would be challenged. Finally, if relational dynamics, negotiated agency, or intersectional positions do not explain variations across participants, African feminist perspectives would be undermined.

Specifying these possible disconfirmations keeps the framework analytically open rather than descriptive or self-confirming. It shapes sampling strategy, trains the coding process to catch negative and contrasting responses, and guides interpretation to avoid overstated causal claims. This approach strengthens the study's qualitative rigour. It makes the framework a robust interpretive scaffold rather than an unfalsifiable set of assumptions.

2.6.7 Operational mapping to concepts, analysis, and indicators

The framework structures the study's qualitative operational design by linking each theoretical component to concrete empirical markers explored in interviews. Resources are illuminated through narratives of access to working capital, participation in trainings, relationships with buyers and suppliers, and forms of intermediary support. Agency is understood through accounts of enhanced confidence, expanded decision-making in households or enterprises, and movement into leadership roles. Achievements are through stories of income stability, control over assets, community recognition, and participation in policy or collective processes. Conversion factors, including time constraints, mobility, and safety conditions, and digital or market access, are analysed to explain differences in how women describe the translation of resources into agency or achievements. Social capital is explored through bonding ties, the emergence of bridging connections, and linking relationships with institutional actors.

Rather than imposing a predetermined causal model, the analysis traces how patterns surfaced organically within women's narratives. It compares these lived experiences with the conceptual expectations to see where they align, diverge, or produce new insights. The study examines how resources, agency, and achievements appear sequentially within participants' accounts, and how conversion factors or negotiated agency shape these transitions. Process tracing is used qualitatively to follow the temporal flow of events and the unfolding of mechanisms as narrated by respondents. At all stages, interpretation is guided by the integrated anchor–support–lens architecture, ensuring theoretical coherence while avoiding overstatement.

2.6.8 Framework fit: why this scaffold suits the Nairobi context

Women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi operate within hybrid legal structures, intermediation-dependent markets, and gendered limitations on time, mobility, and safety. A simplistic "inputs produce outcomes" model would obscure why certain empowerment gains

hold while others dissipate under structural pressure. The Empowerment–Capability scaffold, nested with social capital and African feminist perspectives, is particularly well suited to this landscape. It retains the discipline of a single causal sequence, accommodates heterogeneous conversion processes, illuminates how effects spread through networks and institutions, and anchors interpretation in culturally grounded understandings of agency. This integrated architecture, rather than a collection of unrelated theories, organises the conceptual model, informs indicator development, guides coding decisions, and shapes the interpretive narrative that follows.

2.7 Conceptual framework for the study

The conceptual framework translates the integrated theoretical scaffold into an interpretive model that explains how women's participation in social entrepreneurship relates to empowerment within Nairobi's socio-economic context. It brings together the anchor theory of empowerment, the supporting lens of the Capability Approach, and two mechanism lenses, social capital and African feminist perspectives, to illuminate how empowerment unfolds, what shapes it, and under what conditions it is strengthened or constrained. Rather than predicting outcomes, the framework offers a structured way to understand the pathways, contingencies, and relational dynamics that emerged in the women's narratives.

2.7.1 Conceptual logic

At its centre, the framework views empowerment as an evolving, relational process that begins when women engage in social entrepreneurial activities. Participation exposes women to new forms of financial, informational, and relational resources, including training programmes, market linkages, digital tools, and supportive organisational networks. These resources enhance women's capacity to act, strengthening their sense of agency, broadening their decision-making space, and enabling greater leadership involvement both at home and

within enterprise or community settings. As the agency deepens, women begin to articulate empowerment outcomes across interconnected domains. Economic empowerment appears in narratives of income stability, asset accumulation, successful navigation of procurement systems, and more resilient business models. Social empowerment emerges through increased public voice, expanded mobility and safety, greater legitimacy, and the confidence to engage with institutional actors. Crucially, this movement is not linear. Empowerment unfolds through recursive interactions: gains in legitimacy or business success reinforce confidence, widen networks, and attract new opportunities that further expand women's resources and agency. The process is therefore cumulative, shaped by the interplay of individual initiative, relational support, and the broader structural environment.

2.7.2 Mechanisms: Social Capital as the transmission pathway

Social capital serves as the primary pathway through which empowerment flows from the individual level into collective and institutional spheres. Women typically begin by drawing on bonding ties such as chamas, neighbourhood groups, and mutual-support networks that offer emotional reassurance, risk-sharing, and small-scale financial buffers in the early stages of entrepreneurship. These intimate networks anchor the first steps of agency activation. As enterprises grow, women cultivate bridging ties that connect them to a wider range of actors, including mentors, suppliers, professional peers, and ecosystem partners. These horizontal relationships facilitate learning, expand collaboration, and open market access. Over time, some women expand their reach by building links with institutional actors such as county governments, non-governmental organisations, corporations, accelerators, and development agencies. These vertical relationships provide legitimacy, access to procurement systems, and opportunities for policy engagement. Movement across this continuum, from bonding to bridging to linking, strengthens women's resource bases, enhances visibility, and helps transform economic gains into social empowerment. The mechanism lens therefore clarifies

how change travels and why some women's initiatives become recognised while others remain peripheral.

2.7.3 Moderators: capabilities and negotiated agency

The framework also recognises that empowerment unfolds unevenly across women's lives because the translation of resources into meaningful achievements depends on both capability conditions and negotiated forms of agency. From the Capability Approach, relevant factors include time-use flexibility, mobility and safety conditions, digital connectivity, and community acceptance of women's entrepreneurship. These conditions shape how effectively women can apply new skills, mobilise networks, or pursue emerging opportunities. African feminist perspectives highlight that agency is rarely exercised in isolation. Instead, women navigate empowerment within webs of relational obligation, communal expectations, and gendered norms. Their strategies often involve negotiating between caregiving, reputation, and communal responsibilities, and the pursuit of autonomy and entrepreneurial growth.

Where capability conditions are enabling, and negotiations are successful, empowerment deepens more quickly. Where barriers such as time poverty, restrictive norms, or limited mobility persist, empowerment may remain partial, stall temporarily, or require continuous relational work to sustain.

2.7.4 Boundary conditions

The framework acknowledges several contextual constraints that shape how empowerment materialises. In settings where women's market participation is symbolic, where their networks remain confined to bonding ties, or where policy and administrative environments are ambiguous or exclusionary, empowerment gains are likely to be fragile or short-lived. Under such conditions, women may experience increased confidence or skills yet remain constrained in opportunities for scale, recognition, or influence. Conversely, empowerment can be significantly strengthened where women are embedded in high-bridging

and linking networks, particularly when supported by intermediaries such as NGOs, procurement programmes, or enterprise accelerators. These environments can magnify the significance of even small resource gains by expanding access, legitimacy, and collective voice. This recognition of boundary conditions underscores that empowerment is not inherent in entrepreneurial activity itself but emerges from the interaction of resources, agency, social relations, and structural environments.

2.7.5 Expected relationships

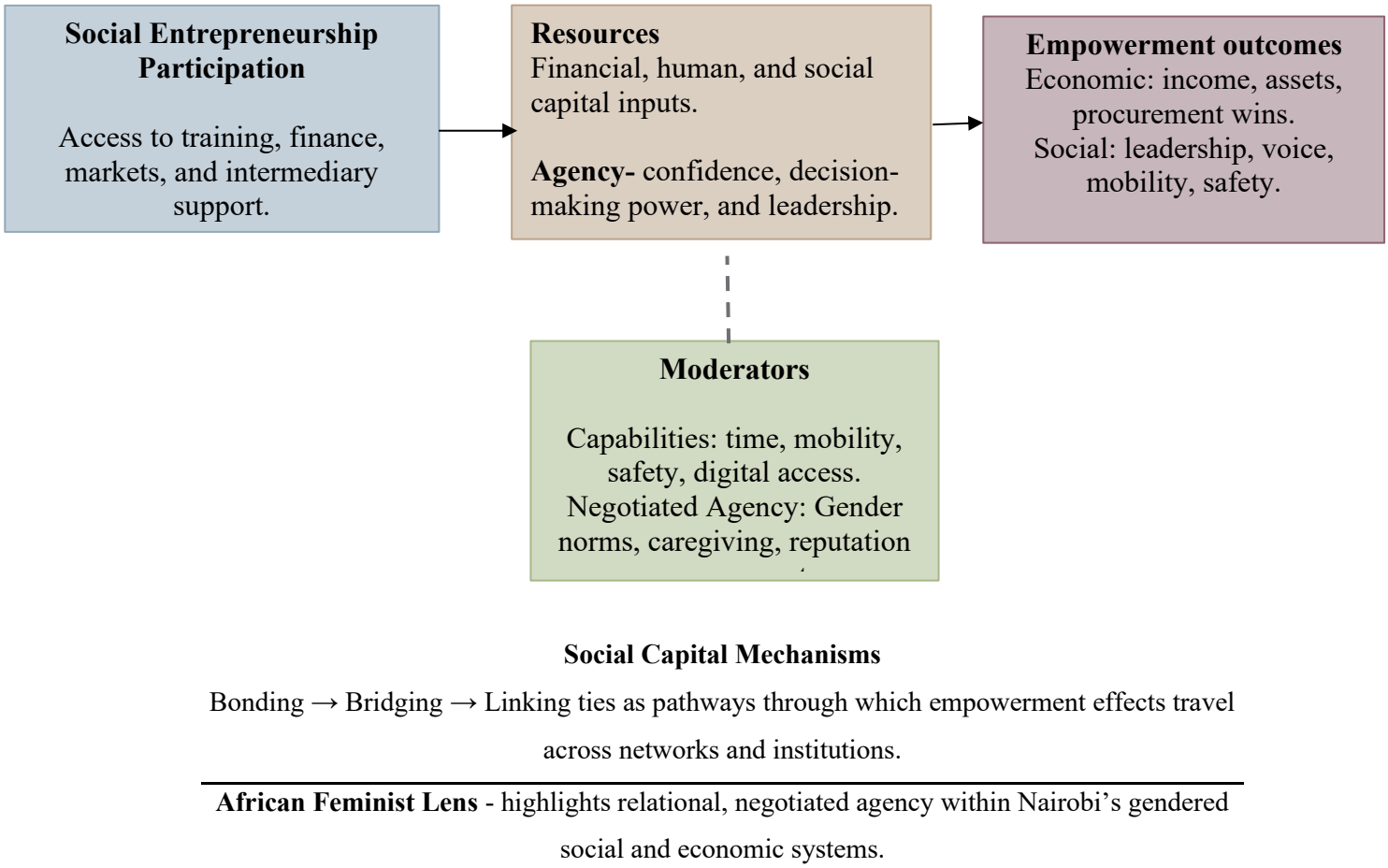
Pathway	Relationship	Theoretical Link
SE participation → Resources	Positive	Access to finance, training, networks (Empowerment Theory)
Resources → Agency	Positive (mediated)	Confidence, decision-space, leadership (Empowerment Theory)
Agency → Achievements	Positive	Income stability, recognition, voice (Empowerment Theory)
Bonding → Bridging → Linking ties	Mechanistic transmission	Network expansion enabling capability conversion (Social Capital Theory)
Conversion factors (capabilities)	Moderating	Enable or constrain transformation of agency into achievements (Capability Approach)
Negotiated agency (African feminist)	Moderating	Context-specific negotiation shaping empowerment sustainability

2.7.6 Conceptual model

Figure 2.1 below visually depicts the model as a multi-level process. Social Entrepreneurship Participation (leftmost block) leads to increased Resources; financial, informational, and social. These Resources directly increase the Agency. The agency then produces Empowerment Outcomes. This sequence forms the model's central causal chain. Capability Conversion Factors act as moderators above this chain. They influence how much Resources turn into Agency, and how Agency turns into Empowerment Outcomes. Social

Capital Mechanisms connect each stage below. They represent bonding, bridging, and linking ties that help diffuse and make each process effective. The outer frame, shaped by African Feminist Perspectives, shows how negotiated agency, communal obligations, and intersectional constraints affect every stage. This set-up highlights that empowerment comes from iterative, relational processes in Nairobi's gendered socio-economic context, not as an automatic or linear outcome.

Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework: Social Entrepreneurship and Women's Empowerment in Nairobi



2.8 Summary of the literature review and theoretical framework

This chapter examined the foundations linking social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment in Nairobi. Social entrepreneurship globally ties social purpose to enterprise; in the Global South, it is shaped by weak institutions, informal economies, and collective norms. In this context, social entrepreneurship offers women real opportunities for economic participation and social change by providing community resources, strengthening networks, and fostering innovation in relationships.

The chapter reviewed women's empowerment and its economic, social, and political dimensions. This study focuses on the economic and social aspects. Here, empowerment refers to women expanding their capacity to make strategic life choices where such agency was previously limited. In Africa, this occurs within relational, negotiated, and collective structures shaped by social and family obligations. African feminist perspectives highlight these dynamics by showing that agency is exercised through cooperation and reciprocity, with strategies that maintain social cohesion while challenging gender constraints.

The literature review revealed four major gaps. First, existing research does not clearly explain how social entrepreneurship fosters multidimensional empowerment and often relies on descriptive correlations. Second, it pays little attention to how social, cultural, institutional, and digital factors affect how resources become agency and achievements. Third, studies underrepresent cities like Nairobi, which have unique regulatory systems, gendered procurement practices, and varied entrepreneurial ecosystems. Fourth, the limited integration of African feminist and social capital perspectives constrains understanding of negotiated and collective agency, which is central to empowerment in African cities.

To address these gaps, the chapter advanced a unified theoretical scaffold. Empowerment Theory provides the causal structure: resources lead to agency, which enables achievement. The Capability Approach, by comparison, explains how personal, social, and

environmental conversion factors shape differences in empowerment outcomes. Meanwhile, Social Capital and African feminist perspectives specify mechanisms and contextual moderators, such as networks or norms that influence empowerment. Together, these frameworks clarify how participation in social entrepreneurship leads to empowerment by driving resource acquisition, fostering agency formation, and negotiating social positioning, with each process linked to its respective theory.

The chapter concluded by presenting a conceptual framework that operationalises these theoretical insights and clarifies key relationships among empowerment, network quality, the enabling environment, and women's ability to navigate and renegotiate gendered norms. This framework grounds the empirical chapters that follow and ensures coherence between theory, method, and interpretation. The study is rooted in Nairobi’s socio-economic realities and contributes to wider scholarly debates on gender, entrepreneurship, and development.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological foundation of the study. It details the research philosophy, design, and procedures used to investigate how social entrepreneurship, defined here as the pursuit of innovative, market-driven approaches to social problems affects women's empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya. It describes the research paradigm, approach, design, and the methods for selecting participants, collecting, and analysing data. The chapter emphasises methodological rigour and the trustworthiness of findings, ensured through systematic validation. It outlines the ethical protocols observed, including institutional approvals and participant safeguards, and discusses challenges faced in the field. By providing a clear account of methodological choices, constraints, and ethical considerations, this chapter establishes the research's credibility and lays the groundwork for presenting and interpreting findings in later chapters.

3.1 Research paradigm

This study adopts an interpretivist epistemological paradigm (Saunders et al., 2009; Gephart, 2004) to understand and interpret participants' subjective experiences within their social and cultural contexts. Interpretivism recognises that reality is socially constructed and plural, shaped by individuals' lived experiences and meanings. This approach integrates human interests, positionality, and reflexivity into the research process (Gephart, 2004) and is suited to exploring the complex realities of social entrepreneurship and its influence on women's economic and social empowerment in Kenya.

Positivist and post-positivist paradigms focus on measurement, prediction, and hypothesis testing. Critical realism seeks to identify underlying causal mechanisms. In contrast, interpretivism aligns with this study's aim, helping to reveal context-embedded meanings and

the lived agency of women social entrepreneurs as they navigate Nairobi's socio-cultural and policy terrains. This approach also reflects the study's theoretical framework, drawing on Empowerment Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Capital Theory, and African Feminist perspectives, all of which prioritise experience, relationality, and negotiated agency as empirical objects rather than relying solely on proxy indicators. Recognising that women's empowerment and entrepreneurial experiences in Kenya are deeply embedded in history and culture (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004), interpretivism challenges universal narratives of women's entrepreneurship by foregrounding local realities, agency, and resilience. This lens highlights empowerment as a collective, relational process shaped by women's roles within families, communities, and social networks central to their entrepreneurial journeys.

Through engagement with women social entrepreneurs, the study foregrounds participants' voices and captures how they understand and redefine social entrepreneurship within Kenyan socio-economic and cultural systems. This feminist orientation complements interpretivism by showing how gender, culture, and power structure opportunities and barriers to empowerment. It reinforces the need for locally grounded, culturally resonant strategies to foster durable empowerment. The interpretivist paradigm, enriched by African feminist insights, assumes reality is subjectively and socially constructed through human interaction (Saunders et al., 2009; Willis, 2007). By focusing on the interwoven dimensions of gender, culture, and enterprise, this study seeks a nuanced, contextual understanding of how Kenyan women social entrepreneurs enact empowerment in everyday practice.

3.1.1 Researcher Positionality

The researcher is based in Nairobi and is professionally embedded within civil society and social enterprise networks. This positionality provides contextual fluency and access while necessitating reflexive vigilance. To mitigate potential bias, the study disclosed relevant affiliations, avoided participant recruitment through current work channels, maintained

reflexive memos, triangulated interview data with documents and public datasets, and conducted targeted member-checking.

3.2 Research approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the personal experiences, beliefs, and contextual factors shaping the journeys of women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi. The qualitative tradition is well-suited to studies that seek to understand how individuals interpret and construct meaning from their lived realities (Pulido et al., 2014). In this context, it allowed for the systematic exploration of subjective perspectives, motivations, and the relational dynamics that underpin empowerment processes. A qualitative approach enabled an in-depth and nuanced understanding of how social entrepreneurship contributes to women's empowerment by examining the interconnections among resource access, decision-making agency, socio-economic participation, and overall well-being. Rather than imposing predetermined categories, the design privileged participants' voices and interpretations, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm adopted in this study.

This methodological approach, following Creswell and Poth (2016), uses qualitative inquiry to explore how individuals or groups interpret social phenomena. It recognises the complexity, context, and reflexivity essential to understand empowerment in Nairobi's entrepreneurial landscape. Gathering detailed narrative accounts from participants, this approach offers multidimensional insights into how women navigate and redefine empowerment through social entrepreneurship.

3.3 Research design

The study adopted an exploratory research design to examine the role of social entrepreneurship in advancing women's empowerment. a theme that remains under-researched within the Kenyan context. Exploratory designs are particularly appropriate for investigating

emerging or insufficiently theorised phenomena, enabling researchers to uncover new insights, clarify concepts, and identify relationships that may inform future studies (Stebbins, 2001). This orientation aligns with the study's interpretivist and qualitative underpinnings, both of which privilege discovery, depth, and contextual understanding. The exploratory design offered the flexibility required to respond dynamically to themes and insights that emerged during data collection, allowing the researcher to capture the diverse experiences and meanings that women social entrepreneurs attach to empowerment. This adaptability was crucial for engaging with Kenya's complex socio-economic environment, where structural conditions such as inequality, youth unemployment, and climate vulnerability shape both opportunities and constraints for entrepreneurial activity (Mwobobia, 2016; Yin, 2018). By situating the inquiry within Nairobi's specific cultural and policy milieu, the design recognised that women's entrepreneurial trajectories are embedded in context-specific realities. Prior studies (for example, Njenga et al., 2021) underscore that structural and institutional barriers continue to limit women's participation in enterprise. The exploratory design, therefore, enabled this study to surface contextually grounded explanations of how social entrepreneurship functions as both an economic and social pathway toward empowerment, highlighting the relational, adaptive, and innovative strategies women employ to navigate these constraints.

3.4 Population and sample

Estimates of the number of social enterprises in Kenya vary. The British Council (2018) found about 43,933, of which 44% were women-led. Later syntheses suggest growth to about 85,000, reflecting varied definitions and sectoral expansion (WEF, 2023). Nairobi has the most innovation hubs, accelerators, and financial intermediaries, creating a dense ecosystem of women-led social enterprises. This concentration justifies selecting Nairobi County as the focus of this study.

The target population for this study comprised all women social entrepreneurs operating in Nairobi County between January 2023 and December 2024. For this research, 'women social entrepreneurs' refers specifically to women who founded or held senior leadership roles in organisations with a primary social mission that generate a substantive share of their income through the sale of goods or services, instead of relying exclusively on grants. 'Mission–market hybrids' are ventures that combine commercial discipline with social purpose. This definition reflects operational criteria widely used in Kenyan social enterprise mapping exercises and aligns with the study's theoretical focus. By grounding the population in these characteristics, the study ensured attention to enterprises embodying both social and economic logics, thereby providing a relevant and analytically coherent basis for examining empowerment processes.

3.4.1 Target population

The study focused on women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi County, a distinctive and underexplored group making vital contributions to Kenya's social and economic development. The target population was defined to include participants with substantive leadership experience, sectoral diversity, and demonstrable social impact, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how women conceptualise and practise social entrepreneurship in Nairobi's evolving ecosystem. First, participants were required to have at least three years of experience in founding or leading a social enterprise. This threshold ensured that respondents had moved beyond the start-up phase and had sufficient exposure to the operational, strategic, and social dimensions of enterprise management. Sustained experience also enabled meaningful reflection on challenges, learning processes, and model evolution within their ventures. Second, the study included women operating across diverse sectors, including economic empowerment, financial inclusion, environmental sustainability, education, health, technology, and gender advocacy. This heterogeneity allowed the study to capture the varied expressions

and logics of social entrepreneurship, highlighting how sector-specific constraints and opportunities shape women's practices and interpretations of empowerment. Third, inclusion was contingent on participants demonstrating measurable social impact, particularly in addressing issues affecting women and marginalised communities. This ensured the research remained grounded in mission-driven enterprises achieving tangible outcomes, such as improved livelihoods, enhanced community resilience, or expanded access to education and healthcare. Such focus aligns with Dees' (1998b) framing of social entrepreneurship as a vehicle for systemic social change, bridging economic sustainability with inclusive development.

3.4.2 Sampling strategy

The study employed purposive sampling, complemented by snowball techniques, to identify information-rich cases capable of providing deep insight into the dynamics of women's social entrepreneurship in Nairobi (Patton, 2014). Participants were selected based on clearly defined inclusion criteria designed to ensure relevance and analytical value. Eligible women had accumulated at least three years of leadership experience in a social enterprise, indicating that they had moved beyond the initial start-up phase and could speak to both operational and strategic dimensions of their work. They operated in sectors central to women's empowerment, such as education, health, finance, agribusiness, environment, and technology, and demonstrated tangible social outcomes, including improvements in livelihoods, access, and community voice. In addition, participants demonstrated ethical leadership and sustained community engagement, reflecting core norms of social entrepreneurship (Dees, 1998b; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006; Peredo & McLean, 2006). These criteria ensured the inclusion of women who could meaningfully articulate the entrepreneurial, social, and empowerment processes unfolding within Nairobi's diverse social enterprise landscape.

3.4.3 Recruitment sources

Participants were recruited through sector-specific referrals and curated professional networks to ensure a diverse and information-rich sample. Recruitment drew from five primary sources. First, the study engaged alumni of the Ashoka Visionary Program and other social innovation fellowship networks, which provided access to established leaders within the ecosystem. Second, industry experts and university partners recommended women heading notable social enterprises across Nairobi. Third, participants were identified through LinkedIn groups, particularly Social Enterprise Kenya and related practitioner communities where women social entrepreneurs and leaders actively share their work. Fourth, additional respondents were sourced from WhatsApp communities administered by local incubators and accelerators, such as community entrepreneurship hubs, which host women social entrepreneurs, programme alumni, and emerging innovators. Finally, media and award profiles spotlighting impactful women-led organisations were reviewed to capture high-visibility and grassroots ventures alike. Recruitment through both online and offline channels ensured diversity in enterprise size, sector, and organisational maturity. Eligible participants included women social entrepreneurs, executive directors, programme leads, and impact coordinators of registered ventures who met the study's inclusion criteria and provided informed consent. Table 3.1 summarises the distribution of participants across recruitment categories, illustrating the breadth and representativeness achieved through this multi-source strategy.

Table 3. 1: Overview of selection sources

Selection	Number interviewed
Ashoka visionary program	16
Industry leaders	6
University professors	5

Selection	Number interviewed
Online platform	10
Media (Citizen TV)	2
Total	**39**

3.4.4 Determining the inclusion criteria

First, participants were required to employ an innovative and socially transformative business model, ensuring that selected enterprises had introduced novel solutions to critical social or environmental challenges. Innovation was considered across product design, service delivery, or operational structures, reflecting Weerawardena and Mort's (2006) emphasis on innovation as a defining feature of social entrepreneurship. Second, participating enterprises were expected to demonstrate sustainability and scalability, confirming their financial viability and potential for long-term impact and replication. This ensured the inclusion of ventures capable of maintaining operations beyond donor dependency while expanding their reach to new communities or markets. Third, participants needed to exhibit a commitment to systemic change, distinguishing social entrepreneurship from traditional commercial entrepreneurship. Selected enterprises actively sought to address entrenched inequalities through structural interventions, advocacy, or transformative service models (Dees, 1998b). Finally, participants were required to demonstrate ethical leadership and community engagement, ensuring that they operated with transparency, accountability, and mission-driven integrity in serving their constituencies (Peredo & McLean, 2006). Taken together, these criteria collectively ensured that the sample reflected the hybrid, values-driven, and socially embedded nature of social entrepreneurship. Building on these inclusion criteria, the next section outlines how participants were recruited to the study.

3.4.5 Participant recruitment

Participant recruitment employed a multi-pronged approach to ensure a representative, diverse sample of women social entrepreneurs across Nairobi's social enterprise ecosystem. First, participants were identified through expert networks and professional associations linked to women-led social ventures in Kenya. These networks provided access to established and emerging entrepreneurs operating across multiple sectors. Second, snowball sampling was employed, in which initial participants referred the researcher to other qualified women in their networks who met the inclusion criteria. This approach was particularly effective for reaching grassroots and community-based entrepreneurs whose impactful work may not be well documented but holds substantial local significance. Third, targeted outreach was conducted through organisations and innovation hubs such as Ashoka, Social Enterprise Kenya, and local incubators and accelerators supporting women-led ventures. These institutions facilitated connections with women representing varying levels of visibility, experience, and enterprise maturity. Through this inclusive recruitment strategy, the study captured rich, contextually grounded perspectives from women across Nairobi's social entrepreneurship landscape, spanning sectors, business models, and operational scales. The following section details the final sample size achieved through these recruitment efforts.

3.4.6 Final sample size

The final sample comprised thirty-nine (39) women social entrepreneurs, with sample size determined by data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights surfaced (Bowen, 2008; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010). This ensured a credible understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative scholars recommend 20–50 participants depending on study complexity, design, and thematic diversity (Kumar et al., 2020; Mason, 2010). The study initially targeted 35–50 participants for sufficient breadth and depth across Nairobi's social enterprise ecosystem. Saturation was reached after 33 interviews, at which point recurring

themes emerged. The subsequent six interviews (34–39) confirmed cross-sector consistency in domains such as health, education, agribusiness, finance, and environment. Using an iterative constant-comparison process in ATLAS.ti, no new codes appeared after Interview 33. Saturation was documented in an audit trail, including memos and time-stamped codebook versions, ensuring transparency and dependability. The final sample size allowed for nuanced analysis of women's experiences, challenges, and empowerment strategies, ensuring rigour and transferability to comparable contexts in Kenya and beyond. The next section describes the unit of analysis used in the study.

3.5 Unit of analysis

The primary unit of analysis was the individual woman social entrepreneur operating within Nairobi County. The study examined these women's entrepreneurial strategies, leadership approaches, decision-making processes, business models, and social impact initiatives. By situating individual agency within organisational and ecosystem-level dynamics, the analysis explored how women navigate systemic barriers, create economic opportunities, and foster community transformation through their enterprises. Analysing both individual and organisational dimensions provided insight into the intersections of gender, entrepreneurship, and social innovation within Kenya's evolving development landscape. This dual-level examination highlights women social entrepreneurs as central actors in driving inclusive economic development and addressing structural social challenges. With the unit of analysis established, the next section introduces the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants.

3.5.1 Respondent demographic and professional profile

The thirty-nine Women Social Entrepreneurs (WSE01–WSE39) who took part in this study represent a diverse demographic and professional cohort, reflecting the heterogeneity

of Nairobi's social enterprise landscape. As shown in Table 3.2, participants vary widely in age, educational attainment, leadership roles, organisational forms, sectoral engagement, and years of entrepreneurial leadership, key variables for understanding how positionality shapes entrepreneurial practice and empowerment trajectories.

The age distribution spans from the early twenties to the late sixties, with the majority concentrated between 30 and 49 years old. This mid-career cluster reflects women with established professional identities and significant leadership responsibilities within their organisations. The presence of younger participants (20–29) introduces perspectives from early-stage entrepreneurs, while older participants (50–70) contribute long-term institutional and sectoral experience, offering an intergenerational view of women's entrepreneurship and agency formation.

Educational backgrounds are equally diverse. A substantial proportion of participants hold postgraduate degrees, such as in Business Administration, International Development, Gender Studies, or Public Health. Others hold undergraduate qualifications in areas such as Business, Sociology, Engineering, ICT, or Community Development. A smaller number of women attained secondary-level education but brought extensive experiential knowledge through grassroots leadership or long-term sectoral engagement. This diversity demonstrates that women's entry into social entrepreneurship is shaped not only by formal education but also by lived experience, community trust, and adaptive learning.

Leadership roles across the sample were senior, including women social entrepreneurs, Chief Executive Officers, Executive Directors, Regional Directors, and Programme or Project Leads. These positions indicate the centrality of participants in strategic decision-making, governance, and mission delivery. They also reflect the responsibilities associated with resource mobilisation, network formation, and engagement with institutional stakeholders, key dimensions that impact empowerment processes. Participants led

organisations registered under diverse forms, such as NGOs, charitable trusts, companies limited by guarantee, private limited companies, hybrid structures (trust plus company), community-based organisations, and for-profit businesses with embedded social missions. This legal diversity mirrored Kenya's hybrid regulatory environment, where organisational form often reflected funding requirements, sector norms, and mission–market alignment. Sectorally, the sample was broad and multidimensional: participants operated initiatives in ICT and digital innovation, agribusiness and food systems, clean energy and climate innovation, livelihoods and financial inclusion, women's empowerment, sanitation and waste management, disability rights, sexual and reproductive health, trauma-informed psychosocial support, criminal justice reform, construction and built environment, education, sports and recreation, and frugal or sustainability-oriented innovation. Many ventures spanned multiple sectors, illustrating the integrative, problem-solving ethos of social entrepreneurship in Nairobi.

Leadership tenure among participants ranged from 3–4 years to over eight years, providing a spectrum of organisational maturity. Early- to mid-tenure leaders (3–7 years) highlighted challenges of consolidation, resource scarcity, and market-building, while long-tenure leaders (8+ years) offered insights into institutional endurance, policy engagement, and cumulative network capital. This temporal diversity enhances the study's ability to trace empowerment across entrepreneurial life stages. Overall, participants were highly engaged, mission-driven leaders blending professional expertise with deep community embeddedness. Their various backgrounds and organisational contexts enriched the study both empirically and analytically, providing a strong foundation for understanding social entrepreneurship as a pathway to empowerment in Nairobi's complex socio-economic environment.

Table 3.2 Participants' demographic

ID	Age band	Highest education	Role	Legal form (organisation)	Sector(s)	Years leading
WSE01	50–54	Postgraduate	Logistics Manager	Non-profit (Kenya & US)	Agricultural solutions	8+ yrs
WSE02	31–34	Undergraduate	Executive Director	Community-Based Organisation	Advocacy & livelihoods	5–7 yrs
WSE03	31–34	Undergraduate	Program Manager	Private company	Community development	3–4 yrs
WSE04	20–24	Undergraduate	Partnership Director	CBO & Non-profit	Disability rights	8+ yrs
WSE05	50–54	High school	Executive Director	NGO	Sexual & reproductive health	8+ yrs
WSE06	45–49	Postgraduate	Chief Executive Officer	NGO	Livelihoods, entrepreneurship & women's empowerment	8+ yrs
WSE07	45–49	Postgraduate	Executive Director	Hybrid (company + trust)	Disability rights	8+ yrs
WSE08	35–39	Undergraduate	East Africa Director	For-profit business	Agriculture / innovation / clean energy	5–7 yrs
WSE09	45–49	Postgraduate	Executive Director	Private limited company	ICT business solutions	3–4 yrs
WSE10	30–34	Undergraduate	Executive Director	Private limited company	Sports & recreation	8+ yrs
WSE11	45–49	Postgraduate	Executive Director	Company limited by guarantee	Criminal justice	5–7 yrs
WSE12	35–39	Postgraduate	Executive Director	Charitable trust	Public transport	8+ yrs
WSE13	25–29	Postgraduate	Founder/Business Dev. Director	Private limited company	Wellness & nutrition	5–7 yrs
WSE14	40–44	Postgraduate	Program Manager	CBO	Trauma & psychosocial support	8+ yrs
WSE15	35–39	Undergraduate	Founder/Executive Director	Trust (corporation)	Community development	5–7 yrs
WSE16	35–39	Undergraduate	Co-Founder	Non-profit organisation	ICT & innovation	8+ yrs
WSE17	30–34	High school	Founder	Non-profit organisation	ICT & innovation	5–7 yrs
WSE18	65–70	Postgraduate	Founder/Executive Director	NGO	Microfinance & financial services	8+ yrs
WSE19	60–64	Undergraduate	CEO	Non-profit organisation	Women & girls' empowerment	8+ yrs
WSE20	35–39	Postgraduate	Co-Founder & CEO	NGO	Construction / built environment	5–7 yrs
WSE21	40–44	Postgraduate	Executive Director	NGO	Community development	8+ yrs

WSE22	35–39	Postgraduate	Chief Executive	Non-profit organisation	Entrepreneurship support	8+ yrs
WSE23	25–30	Undergraduate	Executive Director	Co. limited by guarantee	Innovation / clean energy	5–7 yrs
WSE24	45–49	Postgraduate	Founder	Non-profit organisation	Women's economic empowerment	5–7 yrs
WSE25	45–49	Undergraduate	Founder/Executive Director	Private limited company	Fashion / human-centred design	5–7 yrs
WSE26	40–45	Undergraduate	Executive Director	Private limited company	Sanitation & cleaning products/services	8+ yrs
WSE27	40–45	Undergraduate	Executive Director	Private limited company	Women's economic empowerment	8+ yrs
WSE28	40–45	Undergraduate	Founder & CEO	Company limited by guarantee	Sexual & reproductive health	Not available
WSE29	50–55	Postgraduate	Regional Director	Non-profit organisation	Education	8+ yrs
WSE30	40–45	Postgraduate	Founder	Trust	Criminal justice	8+ yrs
WSE31	25–30	Undergraduate	Chief Executive	Company limited by guarantee	Agribusiness / innovation	8+ yrs
WSE32	40–45	Postgraduate	Founder	Private company	Waste management / plastic recycling	3–4 yrs
WSE33	31–35	Undergraduate	Founder	Private company	Early childhood / daycare	Not available
WSE34	40–45	Postgraduate	Managing Director	Non-profit organisation	Technology & innovations	8+ yrs
WSE35	40–45	Undergraduate	Executive Director	NGO	Innovation & communication	8+ yrs
WSE36	30–34	Undergraduate	Project Development Manager	NGO	Innovation & sanitation	8+ yrs
WSE37	35–39	Undergraduate	COO & Co-Founder	Private company	Frugal innovation	5–7 yrs
WSE38	40–45	Undergraduate	Marketing Manager	Company limited by guarantee	Innovation & clean energy	8+ yrs
WSE39	30–34	Undergraduate	Founder	Private company	Innovation & sustainability	3–4 yrs

3.5.3 Sectoral representation and illustrative vignettes

The women social entrepreneurs in this study operate in many industries. This reflects the diversity and adaptability of Nairobi's social enterprise ecosystem. Their ventures address key issues in inclusive development, gender equity, and community resilience. These examples show the different ways social entrepreneurship empowers. Participants lead

enterprises focused on financial inclusion, microfinance, and livelihoods support. They provide training, enterprise development services, and concessional finance to underserved groups. For example, vignettes such as MenaFinance Trust (B-18) and SheCapital Hub (B-22) show how access to resources, including loan schemes, mentorship, or MSME support improves agency and income stability for women and youth.

Agriculture and agri-innovation form another key cluster. Organisations such as HarvestBridge Initiative (B-1), BioFuel FarmTech (B-9), and AgriCredit Bridge (B-31) combine sustainable farming, regenerative inputs, and climate finance. These initiatives show how women use agricultural solutions to build household resilience, expand market reach, and secure productive assets.

Turning to technology and ICT ventures, organisations like TechLift Academy (B-16), SheCode Network (B-17), and TechGirls Kenya Trust (B-34) deliver digital skills training, coding bootcamps, and innovation platforms. Together, these models foster bridging and linking social capital. They help women, especially youth, move into formal employment or leadership roles in tech.

In the health and well-being sector, enterprises meet needs related to sexual and reproductive health, trauma recovery, disability inclusion, and psychosocial support. Vignettes such as GirlSpark Collective (B-6), HealingPath CBO (B-14), and EnableNow Trust (B-5) show how rights-based and community-driven approaches foster confidence, mobility, and social recognition. These are all crucial for empowerment.

Environmental sustainability and circular-economy ventures include EcoCook Alliance (B-23), GreenLoop Recycling (B-32), and CharBriq Energy (B-38). These organisations bring together frugal innovation, clean energy, and recycling value chains. They advance environmental stewardship and household well-being. In contrast, smaller clusters

focus on other sectors: construction (ConstructHer Academy, B-20), public transport (TransitSafe Trust, B-12), education (ReadAfrica Digital, B-29), childcare (CareCircle 24/7, B-33), and criminal justice reform (JusticePath Collective, B-11; JusticeReentry Trust, B-30). These groups demonstrate diverse empowerment routes through skills, awareness, reintegration, and increased community resources.

To clarify the practical application of sectoral patterns, the study developed anonymised illustrative vignettes (Table 3.3). These are not standalone case studies. Rather, they are analytical exhibits that show how theoretical concepts such as resource mobilisation, capability conversion, and social capital transitions manifest within actual organisations. In this way, the vignettes bridge theoretical frameworks with organisational practice. This helps make abstract mechanisms more understandable and concrete. All vignettes are drawn from participants WSE01–WSE39. Each describes either the respondent's own organisation or an enterprise they founded, led, or are formally connected to through governance or partnership.

Vignette selection followed five key criteria: (i) theoretical relevance to the empowerment framework; (ii) maximum variation in organisation type, size, and sector; (iii) triangulated evidence from interviews, documents, and records; (iv) transferability of mechanisms; and (v) ethical screening to minimise deductive disclosure. Each vignette provides a concise relational descriptor (e.g., "Founded by WSE07" or "Employer of WSE10") and is cited as "Vignette B–k (Pseudonym)." Linking sectoral mapping to these vignettes grounds the analysis in lived experience, clarifying how specific organisational models yield tangible empowerment outcomes for women in Nairobi.

Table 3.3 Organisation Vignettes

Vignette	Organisation (pseudonym)	Type	Sector	Relation to respondents	Why illustrative (what it shows)
B-1	HarvestBridge Initiative	Non-profit (registered in Kenya & US); mission-driven social enterprise logic	Agriculture, agri-inputs/produce distribution (subsidised farm produce)	Employed by study respondent: WSE1 serves as Logistics Manager (sector: Agricultural Solutions).	Raises farmer living standards via a non-profit model that bundles access to inputs through subsidised distribution, aligning revenue with social purpose, an empowerment pathway your respondents rely on to convert resources into agency and income stability.
B-2	CivicChama Network	Community-Based Organisation	Civic participation; livelihoods/financial inclusion via *chamas*	Founded/led by WSE2 (Executive Director, Advocacy & Livelihoods).	Demonstrates chama-based empowerment: donor-funded programmes that build savings/agency in low-income groups.
B-3	Agrifin Hub	Private limited company (impact-oriented)	Enterprise support (women & youth MSMEs; agri/MSME linkages)	Led by WSE9 (Executive Director, ICT business solutions) (mapping by code).	An ecosystem intermediary offering training/market linkage that converts resource access into measurable enterprise outcomes; use this label in-text: "Vignette B-3 (Agrifin hub)" (renaming SE9).
B-4	SoftCap Studio	Private company	MSME support & training	Programme Manager: WSE3 (Community Development).	Shows soft-capital through training + home-instructor support, sustained by partner

					funding/sponsorships, a practice-led route to entrepreneurship.
B-5	EnableNow Trust	CBO → Non-profit	Disability rights & inclusion	Partnership Director: WSE4 (Disability Rights).	Illustrates a hybrid community/donor finance mix (local fundraising, donor grants, hub activities, board fees) enabling sustained inclusion work.
B-6	GirlSpark Collective	NGO (Trust/NGO board)	Girls' empowerment & SRH	Executive Director: WSE5 (SRH; grassroots).	Captures girls' capability gains via life-skills, backed by grants/crowdfunding/alumni networks, a pathway your respondents often partner with.
B-7	UpliftCycle	NGO	Women's economic empowerment & entrepreneurship	CEO: WSE6 (Livelihoods/Entrepreneurship & WEE).	Exemplifies skills + zero-interest loan bundles, showing how concessional finance becomes agency and income stability.
B-8	EqualAccess Consortium	Hybrid (company + trust)	Disability rights & inclusion	Led by WSE7 (Executive Director, Disability Rights).	Shows a dual-vehicle model, paid consultancies alongside donor-funded programmes, typical of hybrids balancing cashflow with mission.
B-9	BioFuel FarmTech	For-profit business	Clean energy & regenerative farming	Regional lead WSE8 (Agri/Innovation/Clean Energy).	Demonstrates product-driven impact with biodigester sales + carbon-credit revenues, linking climate finance to women's agri livelihoods.

B-10	PlayWorks Initiative	Private limited company	Sports/play & health education	Executive Director WSE10 (Sports & Recreation).	Classic earned-revenue SE: product sales sustain jobs and health-education outcomes, usable as a measurement-led case.
B-11	JusticePath Collective	Company limited by guarantee	Criminal-justice reform & women's livelihoods	Executive Director WSE11 (Criminal Justice).	Blends grants + profits from business hubs, illustrating re-entry and income-generation pathways for vulnerable women.
B-12	TransitSafe Trust	Charitable trust	Public transport safety & gender	Executive Director WSE12 (Public Transport).	Move from advocacy to fee-based trainings/memberships; an ecosystem intermediary improving everyday safety at scale.
B-13	VitalGlow Naturals	Private limited company	Wellness & nutrition; cosmetics	Founded by WSE13 (Founder/Business Dev. Director).	Market-entry SE: affordable product sales sustain mission while expanding women's consumer agency/income options.
B-14	HealingPath CBO	Community-based organisation (CBO)	Trauma & psychosocial support	Program Manager: WSE14.	Training-led revenues (contracts, institutes) make mental-health capability gains financially sustainable at community level.
B-15	SafeSteps Girls Trust	Corporation/Trust	Girls & young mothers' empowerment	Founded/led by WSE15 (Exec. Director).	Rights-based SE using grants + fundraising to convert protection/education services into measurable life-chances.

B-16	TechLift Academy	Non-profit organisation	Women in tech: coding/design/entrepreneurship	Co-founded by WSE16.	Grant/partner/alumni mix funds capability conversion (skills → jobs), mirroring practice-led upskilling among WSE networks.
B-17	SheCode Network	Non-profit organisation	Women in tech: hackathons/bootcamps/networking	Founded by WSE17.	Sponsorships + event fees + grants underpin scalable cohorts, strengthening bridging social capital for women social entrepreneurs.
B-18	MenaFinance Trust	NGO	Microfinance & women's economic empowerment	Founded by WSE18 (Founder/Executive Director).	Demonstrates financial inclusion via micro-loans and service-fee model complemented by grants, useful for tracing capability gains and repayment discipline.
B-19	YW Collective Kenya	Non-governmental organisation	Young women's leadership & livelihoods (education/advocacy/economic initiatives)	Led by WSE19 (CEO).	Federated, membership-based model with diversified revenues (membership fees, donations, grants) that builds bridging/linking social capital for women's empowerment.
B-20	ConstructHer Academy	NGO	Construction skills, certification & job placement for women	Co-founded/led by WSE20 (Co-Founder & CEO).	Training-fees + grants + corporate partnerships show a pathway from skills to formal employment, illustrating capability conversion and market entry.

B-21	Safeguard Girls Initiative	NGO	Child protection & education	Run by WSE21 (Executive Director).	Rights-based SE: grant/sponsorship funding sustaining rescue, schooling, and advocacy, salient for agency gains under structural constraints.
B-22	SheCapital Hub	Non-profit organisation	MSME training, mentorship, enterprise support	Led by WSE22 (Chief Executive, entrepreneurship support).	Translates training/consulting into women's business agency and income via fee + grant blend.
B-23	EcoCook Alliance	Company limited by guarantee	Clean cookstoves / carbon credits	Led by WSE23 (Exec. Director, innovation/clean energy).	Product + carbon revenue shows climate-aligned affordability for low-income households.
B-24	WEE Policy Lab	Non-profit organisation	Women's economic empowerment: research, advocacy, capacity building	Founded by WSE24 (Women's economic empowerment).	Converts evidence + policy into enabling conditions; consultancy/grants sustain programming.
B-25	ArtisanLink Studio	Private limited company	Ethical fashion / artisan exports	Founded by WSE25 (Founder/ED, fashion design).	Market access for artisan women; sales + partnerships + online store fund growth.
B-26	Pristine Hygiene Co.	Private limited company	Cleaning & hygiene services/products	Executive Director: WSE26 (Sanitation & cleaning).	Service fees + product sales; inclusive hiring & reinvestment create community empowerment.
B-27	MamaNet Platform	Private limited company	Parenting info, community, e-commerce	Led by WSE27 (Executive Director, WEE/ICT).	Ad + brand partnerships + services; scalable peer support improving household decisions.

B-28	DigniPads Trust	Company limited by guarantee	Menstrual health education & products	Founded/CEO: WSE28 (SRH).	Product sales + grants expand dignity goods; clear capability gains for girls/women.
B-29	ReadAfrica Digital	Non-profit organisation	Literacy: digital books & reading culture	Regional Director: WSE29 (Education).	Grants/partnerships/consulting sustain literacy access at scale.
B-30	JusticeReentry Trust	Trust (non-profit)	Prisoner rehabilitation & reintegration	Founded by WSE30 (Criminal justice).	Diversified grants/partnerships; structured reintegration pathways reduce recidivism.
B-31	AgriCredit Bridge	Company limited by guarantee	Agri-finance access for smallholders	Chief Executive: WSE31 (Agribusiness/innovation).	Service-fee/partnership model converts finance access into yield & income stability.
B-32	GreenLoop Recycling	Private company	Waste recycling & eco-products	Founded by WSE32 (Waste mgmt & plastics).	Mixed revenues (B2B, grants, CSR partnerships, education) show circular-economy pathways.
B-33	CareCircle 24/7	Private company	Childcare/daycare services	Founded by WSE33 (Daycare services).	Reliable childcare unlocks women's labour-market participation; fee + program + partnership mix.
B-34	TechGirls Kenya Trust	Non-profit organisation	Women in tech: coding/design/entrepreneurship	Managing Director: WSE34 (Tech & innovations).	Grants + partnerships + alumni contributions; classic skills→jobs capability pathway.
B-35	YouthTech Lab	NGO	ICT training for disadvantaged youth	Executive Director: WSE35 (Innovation & comms).	Donor/partner funding builds bridging capital and employability for youth.
B-36	EcoSan Services	NGO	Sanitation; waste-to-fuel briquettes	Project Dev. Manager: WSE36 (Innovation & sanitation).	Fee + product sales + grants; frugal tech improves urban

					services and women's safety/time.
B-37	MilkMat Kiosk Co.	Private company	Nutrition & affordable milk dispensing	COO & Co-Founder: WSE37 (Frugal innovation).	Service/membership/partnership revenues; improves food security for low-income families.
B-38	CharBriq Energy	Company limited by guarantee	Clean energy (charcoal briquettes)	Marketing Manager: WSE38 (Innovation & clean energy).	Product + partnership revenues; accessible energy alternative with gendered time/cost gains.
B-39	BioCycle Feeds	Private company	Waste-to-protein animal feeds; waste collection	Founded by WSE39 (Innovation & sustainability).	Circular model converts waste streams into inputs; dual revenue from feed sales + collection.

3.6 Data collection

This section outlines the methods used to collect data for the study, combining document analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture the complex experiences and insights of Nairobi's women social entrepreneurs. Document analysis provided contextual foundations, while interviews offered direct personal perspectives; their integration enabled triangulation, ensuring both contextual breadth and interpretive depth.

3.6.1 Document analysis

Document analysis was undertaken to complement and contextualise interview data. Specifically, this process involved systematically reviewing secondary sources, including policy documents, organisational reports, media articles, and scholarly publications. These materials were examined to situate participants' narratives within broader discourses on social entrepreneurship, gender, and development in Kenya. Document analysis is a valuable qualitative method for enhancing empirical depth and tracing the institutional, historical, and policy contexts shaping lived experiences (Bowen, 2009; Rapley, 2018).

A structured online search was conducted using predefined keywords such as "Social Entrepreneurship in Kenya," "Policy and Practice on Social Entrepreneurship," "Women and Social Entrepreneurship in Kenya," "Social Entrepreneurship and Women's Empowerment," and "Gender Equality Initiatives through Social Entrepreneurship." This process generated an initial pool of eighty-three documents. Each document was then systematically screened for relevance, credibility, and contextual fit. Only materials that substantively addressed social entrepreneurship in the Kenyan context, explicitly engaged with issues of gender, empowerment, or social inclusion, and offered meaningful insights into policy, practice, or public discourse were retained for further analysis. Through this rigorous screening process, twenty-seven documents were selected for detailed review. These comprised key government

frameworks, including Kenya Vision 2030 and reports from the Women Enterprise Fund; policy briefs and analytical papers from international agencies such as UN Women, the British Council, and Ashoka; and media features and organisational case studies profiling women-led social enterprises. Collectively, these documents provided essential macro-level context, tracing the institutional, policy, and cultural landscapes within which women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi operate.

The documents provided a macro-level understanding of Kenya's policy, institutional, and cultural environment, enriching the interview findings by situating participants' accounts within a broader structural and historical frame. Integrating documentary evidence with interview data generated a multi-layered perspective, illuminating how regulatory frameworks, funding ecosystems, and gender norms affect women's conceptualisation and practice of social entrepreneurship. This triangulated approach strengthened analytical validity and enabled the identification of both alignments and disjunctures between official discourse and lived experience (Bowen, 2009; Denzin, 2017).

3.6.2 In-depth interviews

Primary data were collected through thirty-nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, with follow-up sessions conducted where clarification or elaboration was needed. A standardised interview guide anchored discussion around four thematic areas: motivation, constraints, resource mobilisation, and empowerment pathways, while flexible probing allowed narrative depth and contextual nuance. Of the thirty-nine interviews, twenty-eight were conducted face-to-face and eleven virtually. Face-to-face sessions facilitated deeper rapport, observation of non-verbal cues, and immersion in participants' work environments, yielding valuable contextual insights into their daily operations, leadership practices, and team dynamics. These observational dimensions enriched the understanding of the socio-cultural factors shaping women's entrepreneurial experiences.

Virtual interviews enhanced inclusivity, accommodating participants with geographical or time constraints. While this format expanded reach and accessibility, it introduced challenges such as unstable internet connections, audio delays, and reduced visibility of non-verbal expressions. Nonetheless, the use of virtual platforms proved crucial in ensuring representation across Nairobi's dispersed social enterprise landscape and maintaining participant comfort and flexibility.

3.6.3 Pre-testing of the interview instrument

The interview guide was pre-tested with a small group of women social entrepreneurs who shared similar characteristics with the main study sample. This pilot exercise served as an important step in evaluating the clarity, flow, and overall effectiveness of the instrument in generating rich and meaningful data. During pre-testing, several limitations became apparent. The initial guide was overly long and repetitive, risking participant fatigue without adding analytical value. Some questions proved too broad, leading to diffuse responses that lacked the depth or specificity required for interpretive analysis. Participants also indicated a preference for more story-driven, conversational engagement rather than highly structured questioning, noting that they expressed their experiences more naturally and insightfully in flexible narrative form.

These insights informed a careful refinement of the interview guide. The revised instrument contained fewer, more focused questions, supported by adaptable probes and follow-up prompts that encouraged deeper reflection and allowed participants to shape the conversation. This redesign aligned the tool more closely with the study's exploratory and interpretivist orientation, enabling a conversational flow that captured richer, more nuanced accounts. The refinement strengthened both the authenticity and analytical quality of the data while ensuring that the interview process remained responsive to the study's central objectives.

3.6.4 Challenges encountered

Data collection presented several logistical and operational challenges that required adaptability and reflexive problem-solving. While virtual interviews provided inclusivity and convenience, particularly for participants outside central Nairobi, they occasionally faced technical disruptions, such as poor connectivity and delayed audio transmission. These interruptions sometimes disrupted conversational flow and limited the ability to observe nonverbal cues, which are essential to qualitative interpretation. Additionally, participant rescheduling and non-attendance emerged as recurrent issues due to competing professional commitments or unforeseen circumstances. These instances required ongoing communication, flexible planning, and adjustments to time management to maintain participant engagement and ensure data completeness. Despite these obstacles, the challenges reinforced the importance of strategic field planning, flexibility, and methodological resilience. By maintaining ethical engagement and data quality throughout, the researcher upheld high standards of credibility and rigour. These experiences also contributed to reflective learning, underscoring the value of adaptability and persistence in qualitative fieldwork within dynamic and unpredictable research environments.

3.7 Data analysis

The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic analysis framework, renowned for its methodological flexibility and analytical rigour in qualitative research. Data analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti, which facilitated systematic data management, coding, and theme development across multiple data sources, including interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials. The use of ATLAS.ti enhanced transparency, traceability, and analytical depth, allowing the researcher to visualise relationships among codes, categories, and emergent themes. This systematic approach revealed how women's

experiences in social entrepreneurship were shaped by both their individual aspirations and broader cultural, economic, and policy contexts. The process combined inductive and theoretically informed reasoning, consistent with the study's interpretivist orientation and integrated theoretical framework.

3.7.1 Six-Step Thematic Analysis Framework

Building upon the qualitative approach outlined earlier, thematic analysis followed the sequential steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012), adapted to fit the context and objectives of this study.

Table 3.4: Six-step thematic analysis framework

Step	Description
1. Familiarisation with the data	The researcher immersed herself in the dataset by reading and re-reading interview transcripts and document summaries, noting preliminary impressions, recurring patterns, and contextual linkages.
2. Generating initial codes	Using ATLAS.ti, nodes (codes) were created to label text segments reflecting emerging ideas, such as opportunities, constraints, policy influences, and gendered dynamics, systematically organising raw data into meaningful categories.
3. Searching for themes	Codes were examined for conceptual connections and grouped into broader themes, for example clustering insights around systemic inequalities, social support mechanisms, and entrepreneurial resilience, to capture how structural and personal factors interact.
4. Reviewing themes	Initial themes were reviewed against the complete dataset to ensure fidelity to participants' narratives. Overlaps and inconsistencies were resolved through merging, refining, or discarding themes, strengthening internal coherence and thematic distinctiveness.
5. Defining and naming themes	Through iterative coding and reflection, each theme was clearly defined and linked to specific research questions. The process highlighted interactions between women's experiences, structural

	barriers, and entrepreneurial strategies. Themes such as Empowerment Mechanisms and External Support Systems illustrated how women mobilise resources and navigate systemic constraints.
6. Producing the report	Representative excerpts were selected to exemplify each theme, ensuring participants' voices remained central. These findings were synthesised in the empirical chapters, connecting individual stories to broader theoretical and empirical debates on social entrepreneurship, gender, and empowerment.

3.7.2 Codebook and thematic structure

A structured codebook was developed through an iterative process that combined inductive coding with theoretically informed categories derived from the study's conceptual framework. As coding progressed, first-order descriptive codes were refined into second-order analytic categories, which were subsequently clustered into five overarching themes. These themes, including conceptualising social entrepreneurship, economic empowerment pathways, social empowerment pathways, conversion and capability factors, and relational and contextual dynamics, represent the core domains through which women in Nairobi experience and articulate empowerment. Each theme contains subthemes supported by explicit code definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and theoretical anchors. This structure ensures transparency and coherence between raw data, emergent patterns, and the study's theoretical scaffolding. Table 3.5 presents the final streamlined codebook, demonstrating how thematic patterns were derived from interview transcripts, documentary evidence, and analytic memos. These themes informed the organisation of Chapters Four and Five and guided interpretation along the study's resources to agency and then to the achievements pathway.

Table 3.5: Themes and codes emerging from thematic analysis

Theme	Code	Definition	Theoretical Tag
Conceptualising Social Entrepreneurship	Mission–Market Balance	Integration of social purpose with commercial logic.	Empowerment; SE logic
Conceptualising Social Entrepreneurship	Social Innovation	Novel models addressing community challenges.	Capability (conversion factors)
Conceptualising Social Entrepreneurship	Hybrid Identity	Negotiated identity between business and social roles.	African Feminist (agency)
Economic Empowerment Pathways	Access to Finance	Capital access via microcredit, AGPO, WEF, savings groups.	Capability (resources)
Economic Empowerment Pathways	Income Stability	Predictable or diversified revenue streams.	Empowerment (achievement)
Economic Empowerment Pathways	Asset Growth	Accumulation of business or household assets.	Empowerment (achievement)
Social Empowerment Pathways	Decision-Making Power	Greater influence over household or organisational decisions.	Empowerment (agency)
Social Empowerment Pathways	Voice & Advocacy	Participation in public forums, associations, policy spaces.	Empowerment → Social Capital
Social Empowerment Pathways	Collective Solidarity	Group-based mutual support structures (*chamas*, networks).	Social Capital (bonding/bridging)
Conversion & Capability Factors	Education & Skills	Formal or experiential learning improving capability.	Capability (education)
Conversion & Capability Factors	Digital Inclusion	Use of mobile money, e-commerce, digital tools.	Capability (technology)
Conversion & Capability Factors	Market Access	Entry into value chains or	Capability + Social Capital

Theme	Code	Definition	Theoretical Tag
		procurement systems.	
Relational & Contextual Dynamics	Negotiated Agency	Navigation of gender norms to exercise power.	African Feminist (relational agency)
Relational & Contextual Dynamics	Cultural Legitimacy	Community or institutional validation of women entrepreneurs.	African Feminist (contextual)
Relational & Contextual Dynamics	Policy Environment	Impact of state, donor, or legal frameworks.	External structural context
Outcomes & Transformations	Leadership Emergence	Transition into sectoral or community leadership roles.	Empowerment (achievement)
Outcomes & Transformations	Inter-Generational Impact	Benefits extended to dependents or wider community.	Empowerment (social change)
Outcomes & Transformations	Sustainability & Resilience	Strategies sustaining enterprise during shocks.	Capability (resilience)

3.7.3 Analytical integration and interpretation

Analytical integration extended beyond thematic description by systematically linking emergent patterns to the theoretical scaffold developed in Chapter Two. Codes and candidate themes were repeatedly compared against the agency's resources and then against the achievements logic of Empowerment Theory, the conversion-factor sensitivities of the Capability Approach, and the bonding–bridging–linking mechanisms of Social Capital Theory, with African feminist insights guiding attention to relational and negotiated forms of agency. This iterative comparison ensured that theme development was theoretically coherent rather than solely inductive or surface-level.

Interpretation used pattern-matching to assess whether participants' narratives aligned with or challenged hypothesised pathways. This focused on the move from resource access to

agency expansion, and then to empowerment outcomes. The analysis also noted that contextual moderators, such as mobility constraints, caregiving burdens, safety, and digital access, shaped these paths. Divergent or negative cases were intentionally examined to strengthen explanations, refining themes when experiences contradicted expected patterns. This reflexive, theory-informed process illuminated how empowerment unfolded within Nairobi's social enterprise ecosystem, as well as the structural and relational conditions where it stalled, intensified, or transformed.

3.8 Study limitations

Despite the study's methodological rigour, several limitations must be acknowledged. The research relied mainly on self-reported narratives. While these offer rich qualitative insights, they may be influenced by social desirability bias, selective recall, or personal interpretation. These accounts reflect participants' subjective experiences and perceptions, not strictly objective realities. This is an inherent trade-off in an interpretivist and experience-centred inquiry. Including virtual interviews improved accessibility and allowed women with geographic or time constraints to participate. However, remote formats sometimes limited the researcher's ability to observe non-verbal cues, environmental context, and interpersonal dynamics. These are often essential for interpretive depth. Technical disruptions, such as unstable internet connectivity or audio delays, occasionally interrupted conversational flow and may have affected the richness of some exchanges. These challenges were mitigated through careful follow-up, detailed note-taking, and triangulation with documentary data, but they illustrate the practical and interpretive constraints common in field-based qualitative research. Recognising these limitations reinforces the need for reflexivity and transparency when interpreting the study's findings within the methodological and contextual bounds of the study.

3.9 Validity and reliability

Triangulation, which uses diverse data sources such as interviews, document analysis, and contextual reports, strengthens the reliability of findings by cross-verifying information from multiple perspectives. Member checking involved participants in reviewing transcripts and initial findings, ensuring accurate and authentic interpretation of data while fostering collaborative validation. Through reflexivity, we employed a reflective journal and revisit analytic decisions to continually assess and reduce potential researcher bias. We documented the methodology and analysis steps in detail and with transparency, making the research process traceable and replicable. These combined measures significantly enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, providing a comprehensive representation of participants' perspectives and contextual realities.

3.10 Ethical appraisal

Ethical integrity guided every stage of the research, with a strong focus on participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. The study received formal ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Non-Medical at the University of the Witwatersrand (HREC 14/49 Ondiek), as well as Kenya's National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). These approvals confirmed that the study followed institutional and national guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Each respondent received a detailed information sheet about the study's objectives, procedures, risks, and possible benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents could withdraw or refuse to answer questions at any time, with no penalty.

To protect confidentiality while preserving analytic value, all participants are referenced only by study codes (WSE01–WSE39), with minimal role and sector cues. Organisation names have been replaced with pseudonyms; where contextual detail was

required, only the legal form and registration year were disclosed to illustrate governance and enterprise tenure. Quotations were lightly edited for clarity and grammatical coherence. The universal key linking participant codes to identities is held exclusively by the Principal Investigator and stored on encrypted media separate from all research files. This protocol ensures confidentiality while maintaining sufficient transparency to establish analytic credibility and positional awareness.

Throughout the research, the researcher engaged in reflexive practice. They critically assessed how personal positionality, cultural differences, and power asymmetries might shape data collection, interpretation, and representation. This ongoing reflexivity enhanced the study's ethical and interpretive integrity. It ensured that participants' voices were authentically and respectfully represented in the analysis.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and details the research paradigm, design, sampling, data collection, and analytic strategies used to examine how social entrepreneurship affects women's empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya. The study, guided by an interpretivist epistemology, used a qualitative and exploratory design to capture women social entrepreneurs' lived experiences and the contexts shaping their empowerment. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and complemented with document analysis for depth. Purposive and snowball sampling yielded 39 participants across multiple sectors, reflecting the diversity of Nairobi's social enterprise ecosystem and enhancing the credibility of the emerging patterns.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic framework, operationalised through ATLAS.ti to ensure systematic coding, analytic transparency, and traceability. Rigour was maintained through triangulation, member checking, reflexive memoing, and an audit trail that documented coding iterations and saturation. Ethical integrity

was upheld through formal approvals (HREC 14/49 Ondiek; NACOSTI), informed consent procedures, strict confidentiality protocols, and sustained reflexive engagement with the researcher's positionality. Although the study faced limitations, including reliance on self-reported narratives and occasional logistical challenges associated with virtual interviews, these were mitigated through careful follow-up, triangulation, and methodological transparency.

These methodological choices provided a strong, ethical foundation for analysing how women in Nairobi see, practise, and experience empowerment through social entrepreneurship. The next chapter presents the empirical findings. These findings are organised to highlight the mechanisms, conversion factors, and social capital dynamics that shape empowerment outcomes within Nairobi's social enterprise landscape.

CHAPTER FOUR: WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NAIROBI, KENYA

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines how women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi understand, practice, and sustain social entrepreneurship. It shows how meanings are formed, limited, and turned into a strategy. Drawing on 39 in-depth interviews, the chapter explores both ideas and real experiences: how women define social entrepreneurship, organise their ventures, navigate barriers, and stay focused under pressure.

The analysis proceeds in four clusters. First (Findings 4.1–4.6), conceptual variation is mapped along a continuum: from service-first, community-oriented initiatives to hybrid, reflexive, and measurement-led models that blend social purpose with commercial viability. Here, "profit-plus-impact" consistently emerges as a protective rather than diversionary logic, an adaptive strategy for sustaining mission under gendered obligations. Peer solidarity provides early ballast through bonding ties, but as scaling ensues, deliberate transitions to bridging and linking networks become necessary. Sustainability encompasses a triad: financial continuity, external impact, and internal justice. In this context, scarcity catalyses frugal innovation and data-informed iteration. Finally, a label–practice gap persists, as women code-switch identity across audiences, continually balancing institutional legibility with local legitimacy.

Next, the second cluster (Findings 4.7–4.10) identifies formative influences that shape these meanings. Experiential grounding in community work supplies the initial vocabulary; cultural logics of care and communal obligation orient practice toward collective well-being and make imported terminologies feel externally imposed; educational and accelerator exposure stratify conceptual clarity and tool uptake; and organisational form and revenue

model (NGO, hybrid, or for-profit) determine how legitimacy, accountability, and mission are defined in practice.

Building on this, the third cluster (Findings 4.11–4.16) situates these practices within Kenya's broader economic and policy context. While Vision 2030, SDG promises, and digital access open doors, patriarchal attitudes, weak institutions, and unclear rules slow real progress. Public funds like the Women Enterprise Fund often do not fit hybrid businesses, causing delays and cash shortages. Large procurement arrangements still exclude without targeted inclusion steps, and SDG talk rarely translates into real local support. Civil society groups partly fill these gaps by offering guidance, mentoring, and advocacy that boost women's bargaining power and access to opportunities.

Finally, the last cluster (Findings 4.17–4.22) examines how women deploy strategic repertoires to navigate constraints and sustain empowerment. Practice-led capacity building improves employability and market readiness. Flexible and mission-linked finance expands decision-space. Advocacy-plus-innovation models address exclusion and enable (re)integration. Intersectional ventures convert community trust into participation and employability. Clean-energy and circular-economy models deliver co-benefits for the environment, health, and income. Digitalisation reduces frictions in payments, credit, and communication, though adoption remains uneven.

Each finding follows a clear structure: claim, evidence, interpretation, theory (Empowerment as the main lens; Capability as support; Social Capital and African feminism as additional layers), and practical implications. Together, these findings build the synthesis (Section 4.6), showing the path from entry to stability and scaling, while refining the integrated framework. The synthesis shows how women social entrepreneurs turn limited resources and strong relationships into lasting empowerment through flexible, local, and relationship-based social enterprise, connecting the themes discussed above.

4.1 Findings - Social entrepreneurship: Kenyan women social entrepreneurs' perspective

This section analyses how women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi conceptualise social entrepreneurship. It explores how these meanings vary across different contexts, from service-first/community care models to hybrid mission–market approaches and reflexive, measurement-led enterprises. The analysis foregrounds locally embedded logics shaped by gendered roles, communal obligations, and socio-economic constraints. It adopts an intersectional perspective on how these factors co-produce entrepreneurial practice (Mancini & Bello, 2016; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999). Empowerment Theory provides the causal anchor (resources → agency → achievements). The Capability Approach specifies conversion factors that condition outcomes. Social Capital and African feminist lenses explain movement through bonding, bridging, and linking ties, as well as the relational and negotiated forms of agency that accompany them.

Finding 4.1: Conceptions exist along a continuum ranging from service-oriented to hybrid, reflexive models.

Women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi described social entrepreneurship as a flexible, context-shaping continuum rather than a fixed organisational identity. At one end of this spectrum, several participants associated social entrepreneurship closely with community service or philanthropy. For instance, one respondent who worked in agricultural coordination emphasised that her focus was "starting businesses that help people" (WSE1, personal interview, 4 December 2023). Similarly, a leader in sexual and reproductive health explained that "giving back to the community, money comes second" captured her everyday understanding (WSE5, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Moving along the spectrum, a second group articulated a more balanced mission–market orientation, describing their ventures as intentionally combining revenue generation with social purpose. For example, an

executive director working in criminal justice reform explained that her role required "balancing profit and social good" because financial stability ensured that community programmes continued without interruption (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). At the other end, a smaller but notable group offered the most reflexive and measurement-led accounts. One microfinance founder stated that her team “measure[s] it, revisit[s] the data, and keep[s] adjusting,” describing a continuous cycle of experimentation and review that guided enterprise strategy (WSE18, personal interview, 16 January 2024). Together, these narratives reveal a distinctly Kenyan spectrum that extends from service-first models to hybrid mission–market arrangements and, finally, to data-driven, reflexive enterprises. This diversity reflects contextual pragmatism rather than conceptual ambiguity. Women interpret social entrepreneurship through the lived realities of resource scarcity, gendered care obligations, and community expectations. What often begins as voluntary service or informal support gradually formalises into a more structured enterprise as the work expands, financial needs intensify, or external partners require accountability.

This range of approaches makes sense for these women. Many begin by helping their communities, giving them a chance to respond directly to local needs. As their ventures grow and blend social and business goals, access to capital, connections, and credibility yields outcomes such as a steadier income and job growth. The Capability Approach highlights how simple habits, like keeping records or basic budgeting help women plan, negotiate, and reinvest. Ventures often start with strong family and community support, but as they mature, they begin building bridges to new partners, such as suppliers and funders. Growth is rarely a straight line: women develop at their own pace, balancing the desire to keep good standing in their communities with the need to become more competitive and professional.

Taken together, these insights underscore the need for differentiated support models at various points along the spectrum. For example, service-oriented initiatives benefit from foundational tools such as cash-flow templates and simplified outcome metrics (Njenga et al., 2021). Moving toward hybrid ventures, these require balanced governance routines that align mission and revenue (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). At the reflexive, data-led end, enterprises need access to innovation grants and shared data infrastructure (Moriggi, 2024). Recognising where a woman-led enterprise sits along this spectrum enables tailored support while respecting local ethics of care, reciprocity, and communal responsibility.

Figure 4.1: Perceptions of Social Entrepreneurship: A Kenyan Spectrum

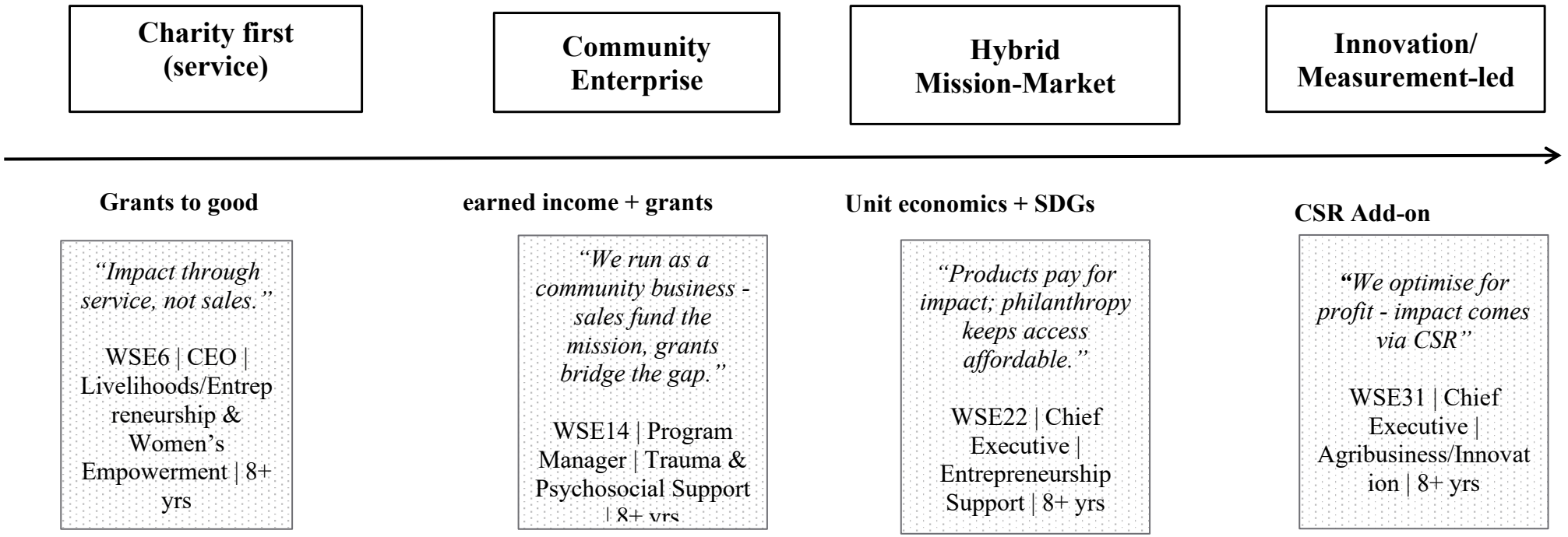


Fig. 4.1 shows mapped perceptions of SE across respondents; grey dots represent coded placements (counts by theme).

Finding 4.2: The 'profit-plus-impact' approach represents a survival strategy shaped by gendered obligations, rather than an indication of mission drift.

Across the sample, women described profitability as inseparable from social purpose, framing it not as mission drift but as a survival strategy embedded in gendered responsibilities. Financial continuity was repeatedly presented as the condition that enabled social impact. For example, a respondent working in criminal justice reform explained that social entrepreneurship "means balancing profit and social good" because without steady revenue, programmes and staff livelihoods could not be sustained (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). Another participant, who leads a community development initiative, highlighted the extended relational demands placed on women entrepreneurs. She explained that her earnings "support both my household and my wider family" (WSE15, interview, 3 December 2023), underscoring the inseparability of income generation from broader caregiving and kinship obligations. A leader working with adolescent girls expressed the same tension: "If the business does not bring in money, I cannot continue paying staff or helping others" (WSE19, personal interview, 10 February 2024). These narratives reflect a broader reality in Nairobi's entrepreneurial landscape: women's enterprises must function simultaneously as mission-driven organisations and as economic safety nets. Revenue generation is therefore not a deviation from social purpose but a mechanism for its survival. Profit is framed instrumentally, as the means through which caregiving obligations, payroll commitments, and community responsibilities can be met in contexts characterised by irregular cash flows and economic volatility.

This survival logic is supported by several theoretical perspectives. Empowerment Theory holds that stable revenue widens women's decision space, allowing them to retain staff, negotiate contracts, and preserve autonomy during financial stress (Kabeer, 1999; Datta &

Gailey, 2012). The Capability Approach positions practices like disciplined budgeting and diverse income streams as conversion factors, turning potential into capabilities such as timely payments, risk-buffering, and better planning (Sen, 1999; Agrawal et al., 2023). These routines broaden choices and boost confidence (Moriggi, 2024). For Social Capital theory, financial stability moves women beyond family, church, and other bonding networks toward building bridging and linking ties with suppliers, lenders, and institutions (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Mayoux, 2000), enhancing market access and legitimacy (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). An African feminist lens clarifies that these shifts are negotiated rather than linear; women balance survival, social obligations, and moral expectations, exercising relational agency among kin, staff, and community (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

Reframing profit as a gendered survival logic has implications for policy and practice. Financial instruments designed for women-led social ventures should include grace periods, revenue-linked repayment terms, and flexible working capital to accommodate caregiving responsibilities and cash flow fluctuations (Njenga et al., 2021). Governance support should help women social entrepreneurs codify their purpose through simple mission statements, purpose clauses, and three-to-five indicator impact scorecards, so that their hybrid identity remains coherent as ventures grow. Light-touch measurement systems should pair financial metrics with social outcome indicators to protect mission integrity without overburdening lean teams (Moriggi, 2024). Far from signalling mission drift, profit-plus-impact represents a deliberate integration of purpose and pragmatism. Women-led social enterprises sustain empowerment not by choosing between care and commerce but by weaving them together in ways that stabilise livelihoods, uphold social commitments, and preserve mission-driven impact over time (Agrawal et al., 2023).

Finding 4.3: Peer solidarity, represented by bonding ties, mitigates constraints, while effective scaling necessitates the development of bridging and linking ties.

Across the interviews, women emphasised that peer solidarity, especially through women-only collectives such as chamas was a critical driver of early entrepreneurial efforts. These informal networks not only filled gaps left by inaccessible formal institutions but also provided essential emotional support, trustworthy relationships, and adaptable financial resources. One participant explained, "We need to pull each other up… the challenges we face as women entrepreneurs are different. Chama savings have been a lifeline, helping us pool resources and invest in shared economic goals," (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Several respondents traced these practices to deep-rooted traditions of mutual aid. As WSE8 described, "it is something we have always done in our community to support one another, even before it had a name" (Personal interview, 7 November 2023).

Even among participants with formal partnerships, grants, or contracts, informal networks remained central to daily operations, primarily because of their flexibility and responsiveness to immediate needs, especially during periods of unstable cash flows. One respondent stated, "We still rely on informal networks for day-to-day financial support because they are more flexible and responsive to immediate needs," highlighting the persistence and limits of formal finance (WSE22, personal interview, 7 January 2024). While many acknowledged the role of bonding networks, several noted their limitations. As one founder put it, "Chamas help us start, but they are not always reliable for long-term growth" (WSE19, personal interview, 10 February 2024). Early mentorship and collaboration were described by another as providing "the foundation for growth and sustainability," but true scaling involved "moving beyond irregular contributions to working with suppliers, buyers, and financiers" (WSE5, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Together, these accounts clarify the progression: initial bonding ties support collateral and risk-taking but bridging and linking ties are essential for achieving sustainability and scale, ultimately moving solidarity into more formal and opportunity-enabling spaces.

This pattern follows a clear causal and relational logic. Under Empowerment Theory, mutual aid in bonding networks expands women's agency by reducing entry barriers and pooling early risks, while real empowerment occurs when agency turns into outcomes such as revenue, assets, or greater decision-making authority (Kabeer, 1999; Datta & Gailey, 2012). Drawing on the Capability Approach clarifies that partnerships, cohort credentials, supplier credit, and small purchase orders are key factors that make grassroots ventures legible to institutional markets (Sen, 1999; Agrawal et al., 2023). In addition, the Social Capital lens explains that moving from bonding to bridging and linking ties shifts how resources and opportunities circulate: bonding gives emotional security and micro-finance, bridging connects to mentors and markets, and linking opens access to procurement, finance, and policy systems (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Mayoux, 2000; Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Finally, the African feminist lens adds that this shift is rarely linear or only practical. Women maintain bonds rooted in care, reciprocity, and belonging. Agency is relational and expands into formal markets while maintaining community obligations (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

These insights have implications at both venture and ecosystem levels. Organisations, accelerators, and ecosystem builders can support the shift from bonding to bridging through supplier-negotiation clinics, procurement-readiness bootcamps, and compliance packs covering registration, tax, safeguarding, and monitoring and evaluation (Moriggi, 2024). At the system level, governments, lenders, and funders can recognise cohort-based credentials in SME financing and assign scoring advantages to verified women-led ventures in public tenders (Njenga et al., 2021). Such measures retain the benefits of solidarity and trust, while opening bridging and linking pathways needed for scale and inclusion. Thus, empowerment remains rooted in relational ethics but extends into spaces for sustainable growth within Nairobi's social enterprise ecosystem (Agrawal et al., 2023).

Finding 4.4: Sustainability comprises three pillars: financial continuity, external impact, and internal justice.

Across the interviews, women described sustainability not as a narrow financial target but as a three-part architecture. It comprises financial continuity, external social impact, and internal justice. Their accounts revealed sustainability as simultaneously economic, moral, and organisational. Many articulated it as an outward responsibility. “It’s not just running a business; it is uplifting others,” one participant explained. She emphasised that community benefit is inseparable from enterprise purpose (WSE21, personal interview, 20 December 2023). Others highlighted inward-facing obligations that shape organisational culture. As one founder noted, “Leaders must consider the well-being of their team and community… even if that means changing policies” (WSE25, personal interview, 4 December 2023). This orientation reflected a broader ethic of care. It influenced how women structured roles, distributed power, and protected staff welfare. Yet financial continuity emerged as a persistent source of strain. Several participants described the tension between social commitment and economic fragility. “Sometimes it feels like we are expected to do more for others than we can afford. The business must survive, too,” one respondent observed. This illustrates the pressure to sustain outreach despite thin margins (WSE30, personal interview, 14 December 2023). Beneficiaries' price sensitivity compounded these challenges. “People like our idea but go where it’s cheaper,” another founder explained. This underscores the vulnerability of purpose-driven ventures operating in competitive or low-income markets (WSE10, personal interview, 28 November 2023). These narratives portray sustainability as a tri-pillar equilibrium. Weakness in any one pillar jeopardises the others. Fragile finances undermine staff welfare and restrict community programmes. Poor organisational culture erodes credibility. Mission drift diminishes community trust. Sustainability, therefore, is understood not as an endpoint but as a dynamic balance that must be continually maintained.

This triadic model reflects a structured causal logic. Under Empowerment Theory, stable organisational routines, such as predictable payroll and transparent budgeting, broaden agency. These practices institutionalise decision-making power beyond the founder. Sustainability then becomes a collective capacity instead of an individual burden (Kabeer, 1999; Datta & Gailey, 2012). The Capability Approach views routine managerial practices, such as maintaining a modest cash buffer or flexible scheduling for caregivers as conversion factors. These actions enlarge what an enterprise can reliably do. Everyday routines quietly build resilience, protect continuity, and strengthen legitimacy with buyers, partners, and funders (Sen, 1999; Agrawal et al., 2023). Social Capital Theory argues that internal justice and ethical practice strengthen team bonds and signal trustworthiness to outsiders. Fair treatment, transparent communication, and accountability norms build relational credibility. This deepens bridging ties with suppliers and customers and enhances linking ties with institutional actors (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). In hybrid ventures, such internal discipline helps prevent fragmentation between social and commercial logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Haugh & Talwar, 2014). The African feminist lens shows sustainability as a moral practice rooted in relational expectations. Women social entrepreneurs navigate care duties and reciprocity while making pragmatic financial choices. Sustainability becomes a negotiated equilibrium that balances community obligation and organisational survival (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

These insights translate into actionable implications. Evaluation frameworks used by funders, lenders, and ecosystem intermediaries should incorporate all three sustainability pillars. Internal justice, including on-time pay, staff retention, and workplace safety, should be assessed alongside external impact indicators. Support programmes should combine revenue-diversification tools with lightweight managerial instruments, such as 90-day cash runway checks, unit economics dashboards, or simple cash flow templates. These tools operate as

capability-enhancing conversion factors that preserve time, reduce volatility, and sustain achievements (Moriggi, 2024). For many women-led enterprises, sustainability emerges not as a static status but as an ongoing moral and managerial balancing act, anchored in care, reinforced by competence, and sustained through collective responsibility. When the tri-pillared structure holds, women deepen their economic resilience, expand social legitimacy, and strengthen agency across both their organisations and communities (Agrawal et al., 2023).

Finding 4.5: Scarcity drives frugal innovation and promotes reflexive, data-informed iterative processes.

Constraints do not immobilise women social entrepreneurs; they sharpen adaptability and spark frugal innovation anchored in discipline, pragmatism, and continuous learning. Interviews showed that the scarcity of capital, staff, equipment, or infrastructure became a spur to creativity, experimentation, and efficiency. One founder said, “We track the numbers, review them regularly, and adapt accordingly,” highlighting a structured response to client needs and financial shifts (WSE18, personal interview, 16 January 2024). Another shared, “Innovation springs from resource limitations… we adapt quickly” (WSE21, personal interview, 20 December 2023). A third described daily work as "an ongoing negotiation between ambition and available means… a test of resilience that is both practical and visionary” (WSE20, personal interview, 15 March 2024). These accounts reveal a consistent pattern of frugal innovation and entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Agrawal et al., 2023). Women repurpose assets, use short feedback loops, and tap community knowledge to refine products, cut costs, and strengthen delivery. This innovation is not improvisational but reflexive and iterative, guided by informal metrics, peer advice, customer feedback, and embodied learning (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Scarcity turns experimentation into a habit rather than an exception (Moriggi, 2024). Participants track repeat purchases, delivery times, gaps, and cash flow, enabling quick adjustments with few resources.

Scarcity sharpens focus: it reveals what works, what is affordable, and what value sustains trust (Agrawal et al., 2023; Nnaemeka, 2004).

These adaptive behaviours show agency under constraint. Empowerment Theory explains: repeated cycles of testing and refinement build self-efficacy, competence, and market agency as women see their ability to handle uncertainty and make informed choices (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach notes that low-cost tools, dashboards, cash-flow sheets, and client logs are conversion factors: by structuring tacit knowledge, they expand feasible actions for women social entrepreneurs (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Social Capital Theory shows how reliable delivery and adaptive learning through prompt responses and effective adjustments strengthen trust among suppliers, buyers, and beneficiaries, extending enterprise reach beyond local networks (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The African feminist perspective frames this innovation as relational and negotiated: women's iterative experimentation is sequenced around caregiving, mobility, and community duties, embedding innovation in relational ethics and aligning enterprise with community norms (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

These findings suggest the ecosystem should treat constraint-driven iteration as a strategic asset for women social entrepreneurs. Concrete steps follow: small, time-bound innovation grants tied to key indicators such as on-time delivery, unit cost, repeat purchase rate, or cash on hand can finance experimentation without burden. Shared data systems and simple templates for inventory, invoicing, and cash flow tracking will standardise measurement and save time in service delivery. Mentorship can link micro-grants with brief monthly reviews, plus supports like data bundles, transport or childcare stipends, so caregivers remain included. Tracking two or three simple social-outcome indicators will help enterprises balance mission and market during professionalisation. Connecting reliable delivery to supplier credit, procurement micro-lots, or matched working capital can help scale successful experiments.

These structures support skills women social entrepreneurs already use: disciplined adaptation, relational learning, and frugal resource use. They respect women social entrepreneurs' time, requiring only brief weekly reporting and preserving reflective space for ongoing learning. When recognised as legitimate innovation, scarcity-driven iteration deepens empowerment and resilience across enterprises and the broader ecosystem.

Finding 4.6: A gap remains between self-identification and actual practices, as women continue to code-switch their identities depending on the audience.

Across the interviews, women described a clear gap between the formal label 'social entrepreneur' and the practical realities of their work. The term often reflected the influence of external institutions, universities, donors, and global development actors. It did not reflect community-rooted definitions. One participant called it 'too academic… linked to external frameworks rather than our local practices' (WSE6, personal interview, 22 November 2023). Others adopted the term for strategic reasons. As one respondent said, 'When I apply for funding, I say social entrepreneur… in the community, I say I run a business that helps people' (WSE19, personal interview, 18 December 2023). The lack of a legal category for hybrid ventures reinforced this divide. As one shared, 'There's no registration for social enterprises… calling myself one does not change anything' (WSE22, personal interview, 7 January 2024). These accounts reveal a persistent gap. Women practise social entrepreneurship but use local idioms of service, reciprocity, and community responsibility. Their work remains anchored within local moral economies. Yet, to access resources, grants, and procurement opportunities, they must master global impact language. Code-switching has become a routine way to preserve community legitimacy while meeting the demands of formal systems.

Identity code-switching becomes a form of negotiated agency. Under the Empowerment Theory, shifting self-presentation allows women social entrepreneurs to interface with different audiences. They use institutional language as needed. At the same time,

they ground legitimacy in local norms (Kabeer, 1999). Through the Capability Approach, artefacts like cohort certificates, pitch decks, and mission statements become conversion factors. These tools make hybrid purpose clear to funders and partners, even without a legal form (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). In Social Capital terms, dual vocabulary helps maintain trust within communities. It also helps build ties across donor, investor, and policy networks (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The African Feminist perspective highlights that these shifts are relational, not opportunistic. Women adapt external labels to fit local moral worlds. This keeps their identities aligned with values such as care, reciprocity, and belonging (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

Addressing the label–practice gap requires recognition systems that prioritise practice over terms. Regulatory guidance could enable women social entrepreneurs to embed hybrid missions within existing legal forms. For example, they could use a purpose clause, a short mission statement, and outcome indicators. This avoids the need for a separate organisational category (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Procurement and financing platforms should accept proof of purpose, like cohort credentials or short impact summaries. These serve as evidence of mission alignment. Donors and investors can simplify things by using label-agnostic applications. This lets women describe their work in culturally rooted language (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Intermediaries can provide simple onboarding guides. This helps women explain mission and impact without using unfamiliar labels (Mayoux, 2000). These reforms would ease the mental and administrative burden of identity navigation. Women could maintain community legitimacy while accessing formal opportunities (Agrawal et al., 2023). Normalising hybrid purpose, not just the label would reflect how women in Nairobi practise social entrepreneurship. Their approach is grounded in local ethics yet fluent in required institutional language (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Moriggi, 2024).

4.2 Findings - Factors influencing the conceptualisation of social entrepreneurship

Four interacting domains shape how women in Nairobi understand and practise social entrepreneurship. These are: (i) experience from hands-on community work; (ii) cultural logics of communal obligation; (iii) education and connections from accelerator networks; and (iv) organisational mission and revenue model. Together, these domains create the interpretive frame through which women define social entrepreneurship. They also help women locate their ventures along a continuum: from service-first to hybrid to reflexive, measurement-led models. Each domain influences later choices about financing, governance, measurement, and market interface. The next four findings (4.7–4.10) look at each domain. They show how each fits into the study's theoretical architecture: Empowerment Theory as the anchor, the Capability Approach as support, and Social Capital and African feminist perspectives as nested lenses. These findings draw clear implications for both practice and policy.

Finding 4.7: Experiential grounding through hands-on community work influences women's conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship.

Across the interviews, women described social entrepreneurship as grounded in daily work rather than an abstract idea. Their definitions stemmed from what they did. It was not about titles. One respondent called it "local development initiatives that uplift the community" (WSE3, personal interview, 15 November 2023). Another explained it as "making a difference through business" (WSE14, personal interview, 1 December 2023). Several rejected formal terms: "We don't call it that… we just do what needs to be done for women around us" (WSE19, personal interview, 18 December 2023). These accounts show that women define social entrepreneurship through concrete actions. They employ marginalised groups, reinvest funds locally, solve nearby problems, and meet community obligations (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Mayoux, 2000). Action comes before the label. Their work is still seen as social

entrepreneurship, even if they do not use that term. Purpose, responsibility, and connection to others shape meaning more than outside definitions (Nnaemeka, 2004; Agrawal et al., 2023).

This focus on practice shows empowerment as something people do. Empowerment Theory says hands-on involvement builds skills. It leads to better problem-solving, more confidence, and visible results for the community. These are signs of growing agency and voice (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach shows how simple habits like keeping informal ledgers or price notes, help businesses run smoothly. These routines increase bargaining power and open new choices for reinvestment or growth (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Social Capital Theory explains that work based on strong local ties lays the groundwork for outside connections. Trust in the community encourages new ideas and lowers risk. As ventures grow, these ties help form supplier credit and institutional partnerships (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The African Feminist view highlights that lived experience shapes action. Women make decisions based on family care, moral duties, and community needs. This ensures that business growth remains linked to social belonging and ethical standards (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

These findings suggest a new way for ecosystem support. Instead of starting with outside models, support providers should use women's own experiences. Applied Learning Clinics could focus on real transactions, receipts, and daily tasks. This might lead to simple tools such as one-page pricing sheets, cash-flow trackers, or scripts for supplier credit, followed by short reflection sessions to name the skills learned (Austin et al., 2012; Tracey & Phillips, 2007). Recognition systems could mark milestones such as running payroll, obtaining supplier credit, or signing a first buyer. These milestones make local skill and knowledge visible for accelerators, funders, and partners (Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Bruton et al., 2010). Valuing experience as the foundation of social entrepreneurship connects informal work to formal

support. This helps build women's confidence, improves skills, and makes community ventures more visible in Kenya's economy, without overlooking local values and relationships.

Finding 4.8: Cultural frameworks of communal obligation direct meaning toward collective well-being and make externally imposed labels appear incongruent.

Across the interviews, participants consistently grounded their enterprises in communal responsibility rather than in market-oriented or externally defined categories. Many viewed the term social entrepreneur as foreign, overly technical, or reflective of Western institutional discourse. As one founder remarked, the term "feels Western… it doesn't capture what we do" (WSE20, personal interview, 12 January 2024). Another echoed this distance: "We just help our people… social entrepreneurship is what others call it" (WSE10, personal interview, 6 December 2023). These women did not oppose the principles of social enterprise; rather, they articulated their work through familiar moral vocabularies of reciprocity, care, and collective uplift (Mayoux, 2000; Datta & Gailey, 2012). "Helping one another is not charity; it's how our community survives," explained one respondent (WSE2, personal interview, 17 November 2023). Others framed enterprise decisions, such as hiring practices, as forms of community commitment: "We employ people from around us first; it's about collective progress" (WSE19, personal interview, 18 December 2023). These narratives reveal a culturally embedded logic in which entrepreneurship is understood less as an individual or profit-oriented pursuit and more as an act of community stewardship and shared responsibility (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Under such a moral economy, the term social enterprise often feels externally imposed or conceptually distant, even where everyday practices closely align with global definitions (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). What anchors legitimacy is not the terminology itself but the degree of embeddedness, mutual support, and contribution to collective well-being (Agrawal et al., 2023).

These interpretations reflect empowerment as deeply situated and relational. Under Empowerment Theory, agency is expressed collectively, with women framing advancement as group progress rather than individual gain (Kabeer, 1999). Decision-making, risk, and labour are shared, enabling women to address community problems through cooperative strategies. The Capability Approach shows how norms of reciprocity, care, and trust function as cultural conversion factors, such as turning intentions into effective capabilities by embedding economic activity within moral expectations and social legitimacy (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). According to Social Capital Theory, dense bonding ties generate trust, facilitate early adoption, and enhance reputational stability, which are critical advantages in resource-constrained environments. Yet these same ties can cap scale unless reinforced with bridging and linking relationships to suppliers, institutional buyers, and state systems (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). From an African feminist perspective, women navigate expansion not by abandoning communal ethics but by reframing market participation as an expression of care, responsibility, and moral stewardship (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012). This relational agency allows them to maintain legitimacy across both community and institutional spaces.

These insights carry practical implications for policy, funding, and ecosystem support. Programmes should recognise local descriptors such as women's cooperative, community initiative, or chama enterprise as legitimate indicators of purpose-driven practice rather than insisting on imported terminology (Mayoux, 2000; Nnaemeka, 2004). Evaluation frameworks incorporating peer endorsements, beneficiary committees, and co-created safeguards can integrate measures of community legitimacy alongside financial metrics (Moriggi, 2024). Donors and public agencies should adopt label-agnostic assessments that prioritise practice and outcomes over nomenclature or legal form and interpret language code-switching as a strategic adaptation rather than inconsistency (Down & Warren, 2008; Bruton et al., 2010). Inclusive

procurement pathways featuring simplified onboarding checklists and modest scoring incentives for women-led, community-embedded organisations would reduce both administrative and cultural barriers to public-market participation (OECD, 2022; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). By aligning recognition, financing and evaluation systems with Kenya's prevailing moral economies, the ecosystem would better reflect how women already practise social entrepreneurship as a form of collective stewardship, oriented toward community well-being and sustained through relational agency. Such alignment would expand pathways for empowerment, enhance visibility, and strengthen organisational resilience.

Finding 4.9: Educational exposure differentiates levels of conceptual clarity and influences the adoption of measurement and strategy tools.

Across the interviews, participants' understandings of social entrepreneurship varied markedly with their exposure to formal education, accelerator training, and experiential learning. Women with limited or informal training often framed social entrepreneurship in broad, benevolent terms. One participant described it simply as "starting businesses that help people" (WSE1, personal interview, 15 November 2023), while another offered a similarly general definition, noting that it meant "balancing profit and social good… but still unclear" (WSE11, personal interview, 22 January 2024). By contrast, respondents who had engaged in accelerator programmes, particularly those with international, cross-sector, or cohort-based exposure, articulated more sophisticated hybrid models integrating commercial, social, and environmental aims. One explained that social entrepreneurship involved "securing funds while also prioritising environmental protection… something we have always done, even before it had a name" (WSE8, personal interview, 7 February 2024). These women also demonstrated greater comfort with strategy tools and data use. As one put it, "monitors performance data, revisits it frequently, and adjusts their approach" to respond to changing client demands and financial uncertainty (WSE18, personal interview, 19 December 2023).

However, participants emphasised that conceptual awareness does not automatically translate into consistent practice. Time scarcity, limited staffing, and competing care responsibilities frequently constrained the implementation of measurement and strategy tools. “I know impact assessment, but I don’t have the time or staff to track everything formally,” one founder explained (WSE28, personal interview, 11 December 2023). Others described lingering definitional ambiguity despite exposure: “It involves innovation, but I don’t have a textbook definition” (WSE7, personal interview, 2 December 2023), and “the wide-ranging scope makes it hard to pin down a single definition” (WSE32, personal interview, 4 January 2024). Collectively, these accounts show that educational exposure sharpens conceptual clarity and expands strategic toolkits, but persistent structural and time constraints hinder their consistent application. Learning increases capacity but sustaining that capacity requires ecosystem supports attuned to women’s lived realities.

These patterns show how knowledge shapes agency and capability. Under Empowerment Theory, training widens women’s decision space and boosts negotiation confidence. It also strengthens their ability to engage with buyers, financiers, and institutional partners (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach clarifies how micro-credentials, templates, and coaching act as conversion factors. These tools make budgeting, pricing, and tracking performance more feasible, turning potential into realised functionings (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). From a Social Capital perspective, cohort-based learning builds bridging relationships. These settings transmit know-how, mentorship, and problem-solving skills, broadening women’s opportunity structures (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012). An African Feminist lens highlights that learning uptake is negotiated alongside caregiving, household obligations, and mobility constraints. Thus, agency is exercised relationally as women balance professional growth with the ethic of care embedded in daily life (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

These insights call for a more adaptive, continuous model of capacity development in Kenya's ecosystem. Tiered training frameworks should allow women to enter at appropriate levels, ranging from foundational financial literacy to hybrid strategy and lean-impact management, enabling cumulative rather than episodic progression (Agrawal et al., 2023; Datta & Gailey, 2012). Portable micro-credentials or digital badges could enhance visibility to lenders and procurement evaluators. Time-saving tools such as one-page cash-flow trackers, concise impact scorecards incorporating three to five indicators, and simple pricing templates can embed strategic routines without overwhelming already-stretched teams (Moriggi, 2024). Light-touch, ongoing support, including monthly "impact office hours," shared dashboards, or periodic check-ins, can help sustain the application while respecting women's care responsibilities (Mayoux, 2000). These measures reframe education as a continuing capability system rather than a one-off intervention (Sen, 1999). By embedding learning, reflection, and measurement into the everyday rhythms of enterprise life, ecosystem actors can translate exposure into practice and practice into durable empowerment, strengthening operational resilience and deepening the social impact of women-led ventures across Nairobi (Kabeer, 1999; Haugh & Talwar, 2014).

Finding 4.10: The organisational mission and revenue model, whether NGO, hybrid, or for-profit, determine the criteria for defining social entrepreneurship.

Across interviews, organisational form and revenue logic strongly shaped how women define social entrepreneurship. NGO and advocacy leaders stressed solidarity, collective uplift, and representation. One participant described it as mutual support: "We need to come together and see how to pull each other up because the challenges we face as women entrepreneurs are different" (WSE2, personal interview, 8 November 2023). Another noted her disability-focused work enhanced both advocacy and leadership: "Through my work empowering women

with disabilities, I've… grown into a leader who inspires others to push for change" (WSE7, personal interview, 2 December 2023).

For donor-funded organisations, collaboration, facilitation, and long-term programme continuity formed the core of their identity. As one respondent explained, "Mentorship and collaboration provided the foundation for the growth and sustainability of what we have today" (WSE5, personal interview, 17 November 2023). Here, sustainability rested less on commercial tools and more on partnership building and stable relational networks. By contrast, women operating commercially oriented enterprises defined social entrepreneurship through market mechanisms such as employment, pricing, reinvestment, and access to services. "It wasn't just about starting a business; it was about giving women hope and opportunities they never thought possible," one founder explained (WSE29, personal interview, 9 January 2024). For this group, social value flowed directly from business activity rather than from donor-funded programmes. These narratives reveal that organisational form powerfully shapes what "counts" as social entrepreneurship. NGOs emphasise rights, representation, and community voice; hybrids work to balance mission and market; and for-profits foreground economic empowerment and opportunity creation. Despite these differences, all models converge around a shared commitment to social transformation, underscoring an ecosystem that is institutionally diverse yet normatively coherent.

These distinctions illuminate how structure mediates empowerment, capability, and legitimacy. Under Empowerment Theory, organisational routines, from decision-making structures to resource mobilisation practices, determine how women convert agency into achievements (Kabeer, 1999). NGOs concentrate agency in advocacy and public voice; hybrids navigate dual pressures around mission and sustainability; and commercial ventures redistribute empowerment through income generation, job creation, and local reinvestment. The Capability Approach clarifies how formalisation, such as registration documents, audited

accounts, and governance artefacts, acts as a conversion factor that unlocks grants, contracts, and credit (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). More formal structures tend to translate purpose into measurable outcomes more consistently and enjoy stronger negotiation power with buyers, donors, and state actors (Haugh & Talwar, 2014; Agrawal et al., 2023). From a Social Capital perspective, organisational forms cultivate distinct relational infrastructures. NGOs build linking ties to donors, policymakers, and advocacy coalitions; hybrids rely on bridging ties with suppliers, buyers, and ecosystem actors; for-profits depend primarily on market-facing relationships. The ventures that thrive are those able to layer bonding, bridging, and linking ties across institutional boundaries (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). An African feminist reading highlights how care, reciprocity, and relational accountability infuse governance across organisational types. Women leaders maintain legitimacy and cohesion by framing leadership as stewardship rather than hierarchy (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Organisational diversity does not diminish this ethic; it offers multiple routes for embedding care within different institutional environments.

These findings suggest the need for differentiated yet connected forms of ecosystem support. Training should be sequenced according to organisational maturity, from foundational financial management to hybrid strategy and lean-impact measurement. Legibility tools, including micro-credentials or digital badges, should be recognised by lenders and procurement bodies. Time-saving operational supports, such as simple cash-flow templates and three-to-five-indicator dashboards, can embed strategic routines without overwhelming small teams. Light-touch advisory mechanisms, such as periodic “impact office hours” or shared dashboards, can sustain learning and strengthen bridging ties. By recognising how organisational form shapes access, accountability, and legitimacy, ecosystem actors can better support the diversity of women-led social enterprises. Such alignment helps translate shared social missions into financially viable and organisationally durable practice, embedding

empowerment, capability, and care into the institutional fabric of Kenya's evolving social enterprise landscape.

4.3 Findings - Socio-economic and political environment

The findings indicate a complex enabling environment for women-led social enterprises in Nairobi. At the macro level, economic growth, progressive policies, and global gender equality agendas expand opportunities (World Bank, 2024; GoK, 2015). National initiatives, such as Kenya Vision 2030, the Women Enterprise Fund, and the AGPO scheme, further demonstrate the state's commitment to inclusive entrepreneurship (Kiraka et al., 2015). At the city level, Nairobi functions as an innovation hub, characterised by extensive financial networks, 84.8% digital finance penetration (FinAccess Household Survey, 2024), and numerous accelerators, which together create an ecosystem conducive to hybrid ventures (UNDP, 2023). Despite these advantages, persistent barriers remain. In particular, patriarchal norms, weak institutions, and inflexible financing hinder the conversion of opportunity into empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Ebrahim et al., 2014). Accounts from participants highlight these tensions, emphasising the challenging trade-offs between organisational mission and survival.

Finding 4.11: While macro-level opportunities are increasing, patriarchal and institutional barriers continue to impede progress.

Participants described Kenya's macroeconomic environment as supportive of women-led social enterprises. They frequently cited key policy frameworks, such as Vision 2030 and the SDGs. A real GDP growth rate of 5.6 per cent in 2023 created opportunities in agribusiness, eco-tourism, and digital finance (World Bank, 2024). However, respondents pointed to a clear gap between national progress and the reality for individual enterprises. One participant said, "Kenya's society is deeply patriarchal, making it particularly challenging for women to rise to leadership roles" (WSE1, personal interview, 15 November 2023). Another said, "We are expected to do more for others than we can afford. The business must survive too" (WSE30,

personal interview, 5 January 2024). Others described the ongoing challenge of convincing donors and investors: “It isn’t just getting funding; it’s proving you deserve continuous investment… expectations are sometimes unrealistic” (WSE21, personal interview, 20 December 2023). These perspectives show a paradox: macro-level growth creates new opportunities, but patriarchal norms, administrative barriers, and inconsistent support restrict access. Opportunities exist in theory but are often out of reach in practice (Kabeer, 1999; Nnaemeka, 2004; Agrawal et al., 2023).

These findings indicate that macro-level opportunities are insufficient without targeted mechanisms to address the frictions limiting women’s participation. Three key implications emerge: First, capability enablers should be integrated into sectoral programs, for example, providing childcare vouchers, safe-transport stipends, and flexible scheduling to reduce conversion barriers for women entrepreneurs. Second, gender-responsive procurement at the county and national levels should operationalise inclusion by implementing specific measures, such as set-asides, micro-lots, simplified onboarding checklists, and supplier-credit windows of 30 to 60 days. These steps embed women-led enterprises directly into public supply chains. Third, market on-ramps (such as anchor-buyer arrangements in agriculture, creative industries, and eco-tourism) can convert women’s existing legitimacy into contracts, expanding scalable market access. These interventions supplement, rather than replace, macroeconomic growth strategies and are designed to ensure that growth reaches the “last mile.” By explicitly embedding capability supports, procurement equity, and market linkages within Kenya’s development framework, macro-level gains can more reliably translate into women’s empowerment. In this way, inclusion can become a tangible reality for women-led social enterprises (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999; Agrawal et al., 2023).

Finding 4.12: Although public funds are accessible, misalignment between program design and bureaucratic procedures often leads hybrid enterprises to experience mission drift.

Participants characterized Kenya's public financing architecture as supportive in intent but exclusionary in practice. Although initiatives such as the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) and other state-backed schemes aim to increase access to capital, their operational models frequently do not accommodate the specific needs of women-led hybrid enterprises. One participant described public financing as a "one-size-fits-all model" (WSE7, personal interview, 2 December 2023). Another noted that the WEF remains significantly underutilised due to "lack of awareness, excessive bureaucracy, and limited alignment with the actual financial realities of women operating in informal economies" (WSE11, personal interview, 22 January 2024). A third respondent highlighted the inflexibility of public finance categorisation: "You are judged as either a clear-cut business or charity… but the real work is finding a balance" (WSE19, personal interview, 18 December 2023). Collectively, women reported that eligibility filters, extensive documentation requirements, inflexible repayment terms, and slow disbursement processes are misaligned with their liquidity cycles and operational needs. As a result, many women social entrepreneurs are compelled to pursue short-term revenue-generating activities to maintain solvency, even when these activities undermine their social mission. This dynamic exemplifies design-induced mission drift, where external structures, rather than internal decisions, alter organisational priorities.

This misalignment restricts women's decision-making capacity and diminishes empowerment outcomes. According to Empowerment Theory, poorly designed financial instruments reduce agency by shortening financial runways and compelling women to prioritise immediate survival over long-term strategy, thereby limiting their pursuit of both social and commercial objectives (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach asserts that finance

is empowering only when repayment terms, covenants, and eligibility criteria function as effective conversion factors. Flexible, context-sensitive instruments facilitate hybrid ventures, whereas rigid instruments constrain them (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). From a Social Capital perspective, public funds also act as relational infrastructure. When distributed through cohort-based mechanisms, they foster bridging ties among women social entrepreneurs, lenders, and public agencies, thereby enhancing trust, repayment coordination, and creditworthiness (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012). The African feminist perspective emphasises that funding design must account for gendered constraints, such as caregiving responsibilities and mobility barriers. Absent these considerations, financial programmes risk penalising women for fulfilling socially prescribed roles (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Brush et al., 2009). First, product redesign is essential. Funds like WEF and Uwezo should incorporate revenue-linked repayment schedules, short grace periods, tiered compliance requirements for informal versus formal ventures, and simplified onboarding (GoK, 2015; OECD, 2022). Second, mission preservation mechanisms, such as mission-lock clauses or concise, outcome-based KPIs, can help ensure that liquidity relief does not unintentionally erode social purpose (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Battilana & Lee, 2014). Third, cohort-based financing models can reduce administrative burdens, create peer learning loops, and strengthen repayment discipline through shared experience and collective accountability. By aligning financial instruments with the operational and social realities of women-led hybrid ventures, Kenya's public financing architecture can move from symbolic inclusion to substantive empowerment. Such reforms would enable women not only to access capital but also to sustain mission integrity, strengthen organisational resilience, and scale their contributions within Nairobi's evolving social enterprise ecosystem.

Finding 4.13: Megaprojects and procurement processes lack effective inclusion mechanisms, which perpetuates the exclusion of women from value chains.

Respondents consistently observed that Kenya's major public investments generate national-scale economic activity but provide limited practical entry points for women-led enterprises. Flagship initiatives such as LAPSSET and other infrastructure programs stimulate growth, yet women social entrepreneurs remain structurally peripheral to these high-value opportunities. One participant highlighted this disconnect: "Large infrastructure projects like LAPSSET… benefit the economy, but women and marginalised groups remain excluded due to systemic barriers and lack of targeted inclusion strategies" (WSE10, personal interview, 6 December 2023). Another described the procedural frustrations: "Sent from one desk to another" (WSE24, personal interview, 4 January 2024). These experiences reveal two intertwined mechanisms of exclusion. Procedurally, opaque onboarding processes, fragmented communication, and demanding documentation requirements create high transaction costs that deter small or first-time applicants. Structurally, bid-size thresholds, registration prerequisites, and financing demands overwhelmingly favour large established firms, effectively excluding women-led social enterprises from public procurement and anchor-buyer value chains. This exclusion is analytically consistent with several theoretical frameworks. Empowerment Theory positions procurement as a structural lever that shapes women's decision-making power, influencing their ability to convert opportunities into agency and achievement. In the absence of inclusive procurement mechanisms, visibility may increase but agency remains stagnant (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach emphasizes that procurement readiness, including compliance documentation, pricing competence, and delivery planning serves as a conversion factor. Without these capabilities, formal opportunities cannot be translated into feasible contracts (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). From a Social Capital perspective, participation in large value chains requires bridging and linking ties with suppliers, anchor buyers, county offices, and procurement officers. Intermediaries who broker introductions, provide bid support, or guide women through tender processes are essential relational bridges

across institutional thresholds (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The African Feminist perspective further highlights that the bureaucratic demands of procurement, including multiple office visits, long queues, safety risks, and complex forms impose disproportionate burdens on women who are already balancing caregiving, mobility constraints, and household obligations (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Brush et al., 2009).004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Brush et al., 2009).

These insights suggest three concrete reforms to embed inclusion within procurement systems, moving beyond symbolic commitments. First, reserved set-asides and micro-lots within megaproject contracts would guarantee participation by women-led social enterprises, enabling entry into value chains through appropriately scoped work packages (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2021). Second, procurement-readiness support, including negotiation clinics, bid-writing bootcamps, and standardized onboarding kits, would strengthen capabilities and reduce procedural barriers. Third, a transparent and predictable on-ramp design is essential: clear eligibility criteria, simplified compliance checklists, and 30–60-day supplier-credit windows would make awarded contracts financially viable for smaller ventures. Integrating these inclusion levers into Kenya's procurement architecture would transform national-scale investment into distributed opportunity. This approach would enable women-led social enterprises to access public value chains, deepen economic equity, and translate growth into empowerment across Kenya's evolving social enterprise landscape.

Finding 4.14: Although alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is widespread, effective grassroots implementation is limited by inadequate resources and insufficient adaptation to local contexts.

Within the sample, women social entrepreneurs consistently articulated their initiatives using the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), frequently mapping their ventures to specific goals to establish legitimacy in global development discourse. For

example, TechLift Academy (Vignette B-16) aligns its training programs for young women with SDG 8, while GreenLoop Recycling (Vignette B-32) situates its model at the intersection of SDGs 5, 8, and 17 by emphasizing environmental stewardship and women's economic empowerment. As one respondent stated, "Goal 5 is critical… ensuring that our challenges are recognised and acted upon" (WSE4, personal interview, 7 December 2023). Another respondent underscored the limitations of low-income environments: "Accessing financial resources for women entrepreneurs in an income-constrained setting is almost impossible" (WSE1, personal interview, 15 November 2023). These perspectives illustrate a strong rhetorical and symbolic adoption of SDG language, yet reveal inconsistent translation into operational or financial outcomes, particularly in income-constrained areas of Nairobi where digital access, infrastructure, and capital flows are limited. While SDG framing can increase visibility among donors, investors, and policy actors, the absence of reliable resources and institutional support often prevents alignment from resulting in stable revenue, contracts, or sustained programmatic backing. This dynamic produces a persistent tension between global coherence and local effectiveness.

This pattern is analytically robust. From the perspective of Empowerment Theory, SDG alignment enhances recognition of women's agency by situating their work within global development priorities. However, empowerment remains partial unless resources, decision-making authority, and implementation mechanisms, such as budgets, partnerships, and procurement pathways are decentralized to organizational and community levels (Kabeer, 1999; United Nations, 2015). The Capability Approach indicates that SDGs become transformative only when supported by practical conversion factors, including predictable financing, affordable digital infrastructure, and locally tailored delivery systems that operationalize mission objectives (Sen, 1999; Sachs, 2015). The Social Capital framework underscores that cross-sector partnerships, such as purchase orders, service agreements, and

co-delivery arrangements, serve as relational mechanisms that translate SDG rhetoric into concrete opportunities. These bridging and linking connections facilitate the transition from recognition to revenue, enabling measurable progress (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The African Feminist perspective emphasizes that effective localization must address gendered barriers. Time poverty, mobility constraints, and care responsibilities significantly influence women's participation in SDG programs, especially in rural or peri-urban areas where infrastructure deficits intensify these challenges (Nnaemeka, 2004; Brush et al., 2009).

Bridging the divide between SDG rhetoric and practical implementation necessitates the development of new local institutions. First, county-level SDG contracts could link payments to measurable outcomes in sectors such as care work, green jobs, sanitation, or recycling, thereby enabling women-led enterprises to receive compensation for their impact (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; OECD, 2022). Second, integrating rural internet infrastructure upgrades with working-capital programs would ensure that digital access and financial support advance concurrently (World Bank, 2024). Third, deploying accessible toolkits and intermediaries to connect women's ventures with schools, clinics, and county programs would expand procurement and contracting opportunities. When supported by adequate funding, locally tailored solutions, and robust partnerships, SDG initiatives can transition from aspirational discourse to tangible action (Haugh & Talwar, 2014; Sen, 1999). For women social entrepreneurs in Kenya, such changes operationalize global goals, linking social purpose with income generation and reinforcing their contributions to inclusive community development (Agrawal et al., 2023; Datta & Gailey, 2012).

Finding 4.15: Regulatory ambiguity constitutes the primary constraint on women-led social enterprises. Existing legal forms distort organisational alignment and elevate compliance and tax costs, thereby limiting effectiveness and growth.

Participants consistently reported operating in a regulatory grey zone that neither recognises nor accommodates hybrid missions. One founder stated, “The absence of a clear legal framework leaves social enterprises stuck between being treated as traditional businesses or NGOs” (WSE15, personal interview, 3 December 2023). Another participant noted, “We spend a lot of time dealing with bureaucratic processes… there are no clear policies for our type of organisation” (WSE5, personal interview, 17 November 2023). Women-led ventures often adapt NGO, CBO, CLG, and PLC forms to accommodate hybrid activities. This misfit results in identity confusion, inconsistent tax treatment, and significant compliance demands that consume limited managerial resources (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Instead of fostering innovation, the regulatory environment generates friction, leading to administrative fatigue and restricted strategic planning (Agrawal et al., 2023). The lack of hybrid recognition leaves enterprises structurally fragile, with mission-driven work persisting despite insufficient regulatory support (Datta & Gailey, 2012). Within the integrated theoretical framework, this ambiguity is both analytically consistent and empirically significant (Kabeer, 1999; Nnaemeka, 2004).

Under the Empowerment Theory, an unclear legal status weakens women’s agency in contracting, advocacy, and procurement. It limits their ability to claim institutional space, challenge inequitable rules, or negotiate from a position of recognised legitimacy (Kabeer, 1999). Through the Capability Approach, legal clarity itself acts as a conversion factor: it stabilises governance, increases eligibility for grants and credit, and signals accountability to partners and regulators (Sen, 1999; Haigh & Hoffman, 2012; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Without this clarity, potential capabilities remain unrealised. Viewed through Social Capital Theory, formal recognition strengthens linking ties with state agencies, donors, and investors, and increases bridging ties with suppliers and contracting partners. Ambiguity, by contrast, undermines trust and slows access to institutional networks that underpin growth (Putnam,

2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). The African Feminist lens shows how compliance burdens disproportionately affect women, whose time is already stretched by care work, mobility constraints, and domestic responsibilities. Formalisation thus becomes a negotiated, time-intensive process rather than a neutral administrative step (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

Turning regulation from a constraint into an enabling structure requires interventions centred on fit, fairness, and functionality. First, legal recognition for hybrid enterprises is essential. A purpose-locked company form or official guidance on hybrid use within CLG, PLC, NGO, and CBO categories would strengthen governance, improve access to blended finance, and clarify contracting rights (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012; Kerlin, 2010; Kiraka et al., 2015). Second, impact-linked tax incentives could reduce compliance burdens while rewarding measurable mission integrity, using tiered relief structures appropriate for small and women-led ventures (OECD, 2022; Golubovic & Bullain, 2006). Third, a simplified single-window compliance pack, combining registration, tax, safeguarding, and light monitoring templates, would streamline administrative workflows and reduce the fixed costs that currently burden hybrid organisations (Bruton et al., 2010; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Clarifying legal pathways and reducing bureaucratic load would transform regulation into a capability-enhancing system. For women-led social enterprises in Kenya, such reform would stabilise operations, attract trust-based investment, and enable women social entrepreneurs to redirect their time and strategic energy toward innovation, community impact, and sustained empowerment.

Finding 4.16: Civil society intermediaries contribute to addressing the institutional gap by implementing advocacy and capacity-building initiatives, although these efforts only partially resolve the issue.

Analysis of thirty-nine interviews from 2023–2024 shows that women social entrepreneurs consistently consider civil society organisations (CSOs) and ecosystem

intermediaries the most effective actors in bridging the gap between policy intent and enterprise reality. One co-founder stated, “We’ve partnered with civil society groups to push for policies that support women’s empowerment” (WSE16, personal interview, 2 November 2023). Other respondents described CSOs as essential buffers against bureaucratic opacity. An Executive Director observed, “The lack of clear policies… we spend a lot of time dealing with bureaucratic processes” (WSE5, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Another participant characterized the regulatory landscape as “walking a tightrope” (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). A further respondent succinctly expressed frustration: “Sent from one desk to another” (WSE24). In this context, CSOs and intermediary platforms fulfil three connected roles. First, they amplify women’s collective voice by convening policymakers, coordinating joint submissions, and advocating for regulatory reforms that individual entrepreneurs cannot pursue on their own. Second, they alleviate compliance burdens by providing legal toolkits, tax and safeguarding guidance, and targeted mentorship. This support helps women navigate registration, governance, and reporting requirements. Third, they facilitate connections between women social entrepreneurs and anchor buyers, donors, and philanthropies, relationships usually inaccessible to early-stage or resource-constrained enterprises (SEK, 2021; Ashoka, 2023; KCDF, 2022; British Council, 2020; Mati, 2020; Owiti, 2014; Magutu, 2023). The Kenyan ecosystem provides clear examples of these functions. Social Enterprise Kenya (SEK) worked with the Micro and Small Enterprise Authority (MSEA) to advocate for legal recognition of hybrid ventures, a reform pathway unavailable to most enterprises acting individually (SEK, 2021; MSEA, 2021). Ashoka East Africa shares best practices through its fellow network. This enables women social entrepreneurs to adopt governance, impact measurement, and compliance practices without compromising their mission (Ashoka, 2023). The Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) supports these efforts at the community level. Its Change the Game Academy combines small grants with community

fundraising and women-focused livelihood support. This approach generates both liquidity and local legitimacy in thin or volatile markets (KCDF, 2022).

These intermediary roles mirror the broader literature on policy entrepreneurship. Kenyan CSOs frequently act as policy entrepreneurs, leveraging evidence, building coalitions, and exploiting political windows to advocate for regulatory clarity and inclusion of mission-led enterprises within national and county policy frameworks (Mati, 2020; Owiti, 2014; Magutu, 2023). Sectoral data underscore their importance: women lead approximately 44 per cent of Kenya's social enterprises, suggesting that CSO-designed supports, when sensitive to time poverty, safety, and mobility constraints, produce disproportionately strong gender outcomes (British Council, 2020). The empirical evidence thus positions CSOs as the "connective tissue" of Kenya's social-enterprise ecosystem: strengthening voice, lowering compliance burdens, and opening pathways to markets, procurement, and policy arenas. Yet gaps remain, particularly in low-income areas of Nairobi County, where intermediary density is thin, and support is episodic.

Three practical measures can help consolidate and expand these gains. First, County–CSO Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) can formalise onboarding, referral, and advocacy roles. This step will help establish predictable institutional channels for hybrid ventures. Second, a single-window starter pack can combine modular, gender-responsive compliance and readiness toolkits addressing registration, tax, safeguarding, procurement, and basic impact tracking. This approach will reduce fixed administrative costs for small and early-stage enterprises. Third, procurement and micro-grant pilots can incorporate micro-lots, supplier-credit windows, and small catalytic grants within CSO partnerships. These actions will deliver rapid value and shorten time-to-contract for women-led ventures. By institutionalising and adequately funding these intermediary functions, policymakers and donors can transform the CSO layer. This change will shift it from an informal support network to a robust institutional

infrastructure for empowerment, effectively linking policy, practice, and gender equity within Kenya's social enterprise landscape.

4.4 Findings - Strategies employed by women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi

This section examines how women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi turn their ideas into practical strategies. These strategies span four areas: economic empowerment (such as skills, mentoring, and finance); social and community development (including disability inclusion, gender-based violence response, youth, and reintegration); environmental sustainability (clean energy, circular waste-to-value, and public health); and technology-driven innovation (digital literacy, e-payments, and market access). The study's framework shows that these strategies increase agency (Empowerment: Kabeer, 1999) when paired with conversion factors like curricula, toolkits, flexible finance, and simple measurement tools. This approach broadens the range of available choices (Capability: Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Advancement often depends on moving from close social ties within groups to wider connections, and sometimes even to institutional partnerships (Social Capital: Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Findings 4.17 to 4.22 describe a step-by-step progression: starting with entry (skills, savings), moving to stability (flexible funding, basic inputs, governance), and reaching scale (digital markets, procurement, advocacy partnerships). This progression shows how local approaches can become more formal and professional while keeping strong community values (Austin et al., 2012).

Finding 4.17: Capacity and capability building increase individual agency and improve income potential.

Capacity and capability building is the most effective means for women social entrepreneurs to expand their agency and income potential. Structured, practice-led programmes not only increase employability and market readiness but also yield tangible

economic gains, as evidenced by direct links between skill acquisition and stable income. Of the thirty-nine organisations in the sample, eleven deliver explicit economic-empowerment programmes. Respondents consistently report client acquisition and integration into new value chains stemming directly from newfound capabilities. As one chief executive stated, “Our mission is to provide individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to take control of their economic futures” (WSE22, personal interview, 7 January 2024). Another respondent emphasised how capability development translates to social returns: “We provide the training and marketing support needed for women entrepreneurs to reach new markets while also empowering them to contribute to sustainable community development” (WSE3, personal interview, 11 November 2023). Many initiatives now address digital capability gaps essential for access to higher-value markets, as one founder observed: “We aim to bridge the gender gap in technology by providing mentorship and hands-on training” (WSE16, personal interview, 2 November 2023). Digital tools are therefore not simply technical accessories, but gateways to visibility, efficiency, and competitiveness, as another respondent noted: “digital literacy is no longer optional, for payments, customer communication, and global reach” (WSE29, personal interview, 9 October 2023).

These patterns show a clear path to empowerment. Empowerment Theory holds that gaining new skills gives women more choices and helps them feel more confident in the market. This way, they can negotiate with suppliers, clients, and financiers as capable people, not as dependents (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach shows that structured courses, mentoring, toolkits, and templates help women turn their intentions into employability, sound pricing, basic accounting, and better business routines (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Social Capital Theory explains that cohort-based learning builds strong ties within groups and creates new links with suppliers, buyers, mentors, and others in the ecosystem (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012). These connections form networks that open new markets. An African

feminist view reminds us that agency is shaped by demands on care, time, and mobility. Flexible, care-aware training enables women to participate without being punished for their domestic roles (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

In summary, building capacity and capability is pivotal to expanding women's agency and economic participation. Several scalable models exist: First, training should be delivered through short, stackable modules, such as pricing, procurement, record-keeping, and digital literacy for cumulative progression rather than one-off workshops (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Agrawal et al., 2023). Second, portable micro-credentials, recognised by lenders, buyers, and procurement agencies, can enhance institutional visibility and reduce informational barriers. Third, light outcome-based tracking, using three to five indicators reviewed quarterly, can reinforce accountability and learning without imposing administrative burdens on small teams (Moriggi, 2024). County innovation hubs and community training centres provide viable delivery platforms, enabling public and philanthropic actors to extend capability-building beyond Nairobi and embed empowerment within local economies (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Through alignment with lived constraints and real market demands, effective capability building expands women's agency, employment, and sustained economic participation (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999).

Finding 4.18 - Finance as the critical link between entrepreneurial intent and organisational continuity.

Interview data consistently indicate that finance serves as the pivotal link between entrepreneurial intent and organisational continuity for women. Although only three of the thirty-nine organisations studied explicitly prioritise financial inclusion, all rely on a combination of informal, digital, and semi-formal mechanisms to mobilise and stabilise liquidity. As one founder stated, "Our model is about empowering underserved women by providing accessible credit and financial services. This enables them to grow their businesses"

(WSE18, personal interview, 16 January 2024). For many organisations, initial capital mobilisation depends on bonding finance through informal savings groups. According to one executive director, “Chamas provide a critical lifeline for women in underserved communities, enabling them to pool resources and invest in shared economic goals” (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). However, the limitations of these mechanisms are widely recognised. As one CEO reflected, “Chamas help us start but are not always reliable for long-term growth” (WSE19, personal interview, 10 February 2024). Concurrently, digital finance platforms such as mobile banking, fintech wallets, and micro-loan systems are expanding liquidity at the margins. One director observed, “Women in informal businesses often struggle with credit access. Mobile banking and fintech solutions are game changers, they help us save, borrow, and grow our businesses” (WSE35, personal interview, 12 January 2024). These accounts illustrate a financing continuum: bonding finance provides initial access, digital tools enhance convenience and liquidity, and scaling requires bridging to microfinance institutions, banks, anchor-buyer credit cycles, and public procurement lines. Persistent constraints, including small ticket sizes, inconsistent contributions, household spending shocks, and liquidity volatility continue to impede the translation of entrepreneurial intent into sustained enterprise growth.

Predictable and flexible finance emerges as a core mechanism of empowerment. Under Empowerment Theory, access to finance expands women’s decision-making space and reduces dependence on patriarchal lenders or informal gatekeepers (Kabeer, 1999). Through the Capability Approach, loan design, such as revenue-linked repayments, grace periods, and simplified covenants, operates as a conversion factor, transforming unpredictable cash flows into manageable continuity (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). The Social Capital lens clarifies that chamas build bonding capital, but upward mobility requires bridging ties to MFIs and linking ties to buyers, financiers, and government agencies (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al.,

2012). An African feminist perspective underscores that repayment flexibility and ease of access are essential, given the gendered realities of care work, mobility constraints, and relational obligations. Rigid repayment schedules often penalise women for structural conditions beyond their control (Nnaemeka, 2004; Brush et al., 2009). These insights point to a set of practical reforms that can turn finance from a gatekeeper into a capability amplifier. First, integrate chama contribution histories as alternative credit scoring inputs, enabling women to build formal credit profiles from bonding finance. Second, design financial products that are fit for purpose, including revenue-linked repayments, brief grace periods, and two-track compliance systems that distinguish between formal and informal enterprises. Third, public financing schemes such as the Women Enterprise Fund and Uwezo Fund should link liquidity support to three to five mission-aligned KPIs, protecting purpose integrity. These mechanisms integrate finance, learning, and flexibility into a mutually reinforcing empowerment cycle. Structured capability building enhances women's operational and financial competence, while adaptive financial products stabilise cash flows. When both are attuned to gendered time and care constraints, they facilitate the transformation of fragile start-ups into resilient, socially embedded enterprises. Thus, finance and capability function as interconnected drivers that sustain women's negotiated empowerment within Kenya's evolving social enterprise ecosystem.

Finding 4.19: Advocacy-plus-innovation models address structural barriers and support (re)integration.

Women social entrepreneurs address structural exclusion by combining rights-based advocacy with practical economic tools, facilitating reintegration into social and economic life. This advocacy-plus-innovation model directly tackles discrimination while also creating tangible opportunities for work, income, and restored dignity. As one director explained, "We combine restorative justice with economic empowerment to create pathways for meaningful

reintegration" (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). Others underscored the importance of collective support and shifting societal mindsets, especially in sectors such as menstrual health, where advocacy and stigma reduction are essential to market entry and economic opportunity. These models pair legal aid, rights education, and gender-norm transformation with vocational training, job placement, product innovation, and microcredit schemes. Here, reducing stigma serves as both a moral and economic strategy, enabling women historically marginalised to return to the workforce with legitimacy, skills, and confidence. Reintegration is achieved through both systemic changes and practical capability-building.

These advocacy–enterprise models illustrate empowerment as both systemic and experiential. Under Empowerment Theory, challenging discriminatory institutions expands women's choice sets, strengthens public voice, and positions them as agents capable of reshaping the policy, justice, and labour systems that once constrained them (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach shows how bundled mechanisms such as legal support, employer brokerage, adaptive reporting, and skills training serve as conversion factors that translate social inclusion into measurable economic participation (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Through the lens of Social Capital, linking ties with justice systems, shelters, and anchor employers reinforce bridging ties with inclusive businesses and community networks, stabilising reintegration pathways (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012). An African feminist reading emphasises dignity and care, highlighting that trauma-sensitive facilitation, safe venues, flexible hours, transport support, and psychosocial accompaniment make participation feasible for women navigating layered vulnerabilities and caregiving responsibilities (Nnaemeka, 2004; Fraser, 2014).

These examples highlight key design principles for effective policy and program architecture supporting (re)integration. First, bundled reintegration programmes should combine legal assistance, vocational training, and employer placement, reducing drop-off and

accelerating the journey from exclusion to work (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Agrawal et al., 2023). Second, establish clear, outcome-linked milestones such as training completion, job placement, and retention to align funding and progress without creating extra administrative burden (Guest et al., 2020). Third, require trauma-sensitive, care-aware supports including transport, childcare, counselling, and flexible scheduling to remove barriers to participation (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mayoux, 2000). Advocacy-plus-innovation models show how women-led social enterprises ground rights discourse in practical, dignity-anchored reintegration, shift justice work from remedy to proactive transformation, and promote empowerment at every level (Tamale, 2020; Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999).

Finding 4.20: Intersectional social initiatives depend on trust networks to achieve inclusion.

Women-led social enterprises addressing disability, gender-based violence (GBV), youth exclusion, and reintegration depend on trust networks. These networks help transform participation into employability, healing, and public voice. Legitimacy in communities forms the basis for structural inclusion. As one leader stated, "Inclusion is not just about accessibility but about ensuring that disabled individuals have a voice in shaping policies and opportunities that affect them" (WSE7, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Other leaders see the transformation of cultural norms as central: "We focus on shifting societal mindsets that undervalue women's contributions" (WSE15, personal interview, 3 December 2023). Trust is essential for trauma recovery. "[Trauma] healing is most effective when it is community driven," said one programme manager (WSE14, personal interview, 2 November 2023). In reintegration, trust combines with economic innovation: "We combine restorative justice with economic empowerment to create pathways for meaningful reintegration" (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). Women use legitimacy from shared experience, mutual aid, and trusted facilitators to create structured participation. Safe venues, peer referrals, and collective

circles provide entry points for vulnerable groups, leading to counselling, accredited training, job placements, or incubation pathways. Over time, trust-based structures help people move from passive inclusion to employability, leadership, and civic engagement. Legitimacy acts as a catalyst and currency, turning empathy into sustained participation and expanding women's social agency.

These intersectional models see empowerment as a process. This process links social belonging with material opportunity. Empowerment Theory says that recognition and practical support expand women's decision-making and self-efficacy. This enables participation in public, organisational, and economic domains (Kabeer, 1999; Fraser, 2014). The Capability Approach identifies services, referrals, and structured training as conversion factors. These factors turn participation into employable skills, income stability, and civic voice (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). The Social Capital perspective states that bonding ties support engagement and psychological safety. Bridging and linking ties to health, justice, and labour-market institutions support empowerment beyond the community (Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 2011). An African feminist view sees agency as relational and negotiated. This agency is grounded in care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility, not competition (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001).

To apply these insights to policy and programs, treat trust as a resource rather than just an outcome. First, strengthen referral networks by linking community initiatives with health, legal, and skills providers. This ensures continuity of care and opportunity. Second, fund participation enablers such as stipends, childcare, and transport allowances. These supports remove hidden costs that might exclude marginalised people. Third, recognise community legitimacy in processes by accepting peer endorsements, beneficiary committees, or community-based vetting as valid credentialing in funding and procurement (Shakespeare, 2013; Herman, 2015). By institutionalising trust, social enterprises turn empathy into an

infrastructure for empowerment. Here, inclusion is both a pathway and an outcome. Through this approach, Kenyan women build not only enterprises but also the social foundations for equitable participation and dignity-centred development.

Finding 4.21: Clean energy and circular models generate health, income, and climate co-benefits

Women social entrepreneurs demonstrate that integrating clean energy, circular waste-to-value systems, and community health equity delivers tangible and interconnected benefits. Specifically, clean energy initiatives reduce operating costs and boost productivity; circular waste-to-value systems generate income while improving the local environment; and community health efforts, such as affordable nutrition and menstrual products, protect women from economic and health shocks. Respondents corroborate these connections: “Clean energy solutions are not just about reducing emissions; they are about improving health, creating jobs, and empowering women” (WSE8, personal interview, 3 November 2023); and “By introducing solar-powered solutions, we are... ensuring that women entrepreneurs have a reliable source of energy for their businesses” (WSE23, personal interview, 3 October 2023). Others further elaborate: “We aim to improve community health by offering affordable and nutritious food options” (WSE13, personal interview, 18 January 2024) and “Our mission is to break the stigma around menstrual health while providing affordable and sustainable hygiene products” (WSE28, personal interview, 17 January 2024). These synergistic interventions strengthen household resilience, foster women’s participation in value chains, and weave sustainability into daily economic life.

These models demonstrate the convergence of ecological and social logics to produce both material and moral empowerment. According to Empowerment Theory, reliable energy, clean production methods, and accessible health inputs enhance women’s productive agency, supporting consistent production, increased time-on-task, and greater autonomy in market

participation (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach identifies operational enablers, such as last-mile distribution, quality standards, and service contracts, as conversion factors that transform environmental intent into sustainable, income-generating outcomes (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). From a Social Capital perspective, trust-based delivery models increase adoption by leveraging bonding and bridging ties through cooperatives, chamas, self-help groups, and women's associations (Putnam, 2000). An African feminist perspective further illustrates how these enterprises integrate climate action with everyday ethics of care, responsibility, and interdependence, framing sustainability as a relational and socially embedded practice rather than a purely technical field (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001). This synthesis aligns with broader scholarship: modern energy access enhances health, productivity, and gender inclusion (Sovacool, 2012); circular-economy models transform waste streams into value and resilience (Ghisellini et al., 2016); and affordable nutrition and menstrual-health innovations expand capabilities by supporting continuity in education, further supporting women social entrepreneurs. Public and private stakeholders can reinforce these gains by integrating green and care-centered design into procurement and finance systems. First, anchor-buyer initiatives involving schools, clinics, and county facilities can generate predictable demand for clean-cook, solar, nutrition, and menstrual-health products. Second, working-capital facilities with 30–60-day supplier credit terms and small-lot contracting can alleviate liquidity constraints and enable women-led green ventures to fulfil orders consistently. Third, streamlined quality metrics focused on uptime, safety, and efficacy can ensure accountability without imposing excessive administrative burdens on micro-enterprises (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). By combining financial flexibility with institutional demand and care-oriented design, Kenya's women-led clean-energy and circular-economy enterprises can deliver triple dividends: increased economic security, improved community health, and enhanced environmental resilience. These ventures exemplify how social entrepreneurship

grounded in stewardship and solidarity can translate global sustainability objectives into tangible, locally driven change. Ability goals into grounded, locally owned transformations.

Finding 4.22: Digital tools reduce barriers in markets, payments, and credit, yet persistent skills gaps remain.

Women social entrepreneurs identified digitalisation as a primary driver that lowers everyday market entry barriers, broadens market reach, and deepens financial agency. One respondent stated, "Digital literacy is no longer optional… to access global markets, process payments, and communicate with customers" (WSE29, personal interview, 9 October 2023). Technology, as another emphasised, redefines inclusion: "Mobile banking and fintech solutions are game changers… to save, borrow, and grow their businesses" (WSE35, personal interview, 12 January 2024). Respondents positioned digital tools as enablers for entrepreneurship and increased visibility: "We provide training and marketing support… for women entrepreneurs to reach new markets," noted one programme manager (WSE3, personal interview, 11 November 2023). Mentorship was cited as key to bridging gendered tech gaps: "We aim to bridge the gender gap in technology by providing mentorship and hands-on training" (WSE16, personal interview, 2 November 2023). These accounts converge on a sharpened argument: while digitalisation multiplies capabilities by compressing transaction costs and expanding access, significant skills gaps remain. Digital platforms allow greater autonomy, but their benefits dissipate without sustained, practice-led training and consistent access. Thus, the main challenge is not technology's potential but ensuring its equitable and lasting adoption.

These dynamics reveal a sharpened argument: technology fundamentally transforms operational efficiency and women's market agency, but the pathways are mediated by multiple factors. Empowerment Theory underscores that digital tools shift women from passive to active market actors by increasing control over pricing, transactions, and communication (Kabeer,

1999). The Capability Approach highlights that practical, short digital learning modules convert digital literacy into business routines (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). From a Social Capital viewpoint, cohort-based digital-skills training extends social learning and supports family obligations through flexible scheduling (Putnam, 2000; Austin et al., 2012). An African feminist lens shows that digital adoption among women is shaped by gendered care and mobility constraints, making technological empowerment a relational, context-specific process (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001). The main argument: digitalisation's promise is realised only when these intersecting factors are addressed.

To ensure that digitalisation functions as an inclusive capability rather than a selective advantage, ecosystem actors should prioritise integration and continuity. First, bundle tools and access by pairing digital-skills modules with subsidised devices, data bundles, and intuitive applications so training immediately translates into utility. Second, adopt practice-first learning through short, iterative sprints, such as e-payment setup, digital storefront creation, weekly cash-flow tracking, or basic CRM routines, which emphasise doing over theory. Third, create credential-to-credit links by ensuring that micro-certificates and digital badges are recognised by lenders, anchor buyers, and procurement bodies, thereby improving women's access to contracts and finance. Fourth, embed light, outcome-oriented tracking using a one-page cash flow sheet and a 3–5 KPI scorecard (e.g., on-time delivery, repeat sales, days cash on hand) to balance accountability with administrative feasibility (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). By embedding digital practice within social learning structures and designing interventions around women's care-time and mobility constraints, Nairobi's women social entrepreneurs are transforming technology from a distant promise into an everyday infrastructure of inclusion, agency, and empowerment.

This chapter has shown that women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi define and practise social entrepreneurship as a negotiation between community care and market engagement,

rooted in local realities. Thirty-nine interviews revealed that empowerment is shaped by relational expectations, gendered constraints, and institutional gaps, with digitalisation and structured governance increasingly central. The sharpened main argument emerging from these findings: women's agency and empowerment in social enterprise is actively built through integrating digitalisation, capability, and social capital approaches, not just accessed through resources. The next section synthesises these insights to clarify how practices convert relationships and resources into sustainable empowerment.

4.5 Conclusion and theoretical synthesis

The analysis demonstrates that women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi engage in social entrepreneurship along a dynamic spectrum, ranging from service-first, community-oriented activities to hybrid, reflexive, and measurement-driven models, rather than adhering to a single fixed type (Mair & Martí, 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). This spectrum captures the evolution from initial stages rooted in caregiving and communal obligation, to the later formalisation that introduces revenue models, lean metrics, and governance routines sustaining social purpose alongside commercial viability (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Austin et al., 2012; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Importantly, peer solidarity provides trust, micro-capital, and morale through bonding ties; however, as ventures aim for sustained growth, the transition to bridging markets and linking with anchor buyers and public systems becomes essential, enabling legitimacy to be converted into contracts and working capital (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Yet, scalability is constrained by care responsibilities, mobility limitations, and limited financial resources, reflecting broader gendered constraints that suppress earnings and influence market behaviour (Brush et al., 2009; Delecourt & Fitzpatrick, 2021). Within these parameters, "profit-plus-impact" serves as a protective logic rather than evidence of mission drift, as predictable revenue maintains mission viability for households dependent on the enterprise (Smith et al., 2013; Battilana & Lee, 2014). Respondents further

define sustainability as comprising three interdependent pillars: financial continuity, external impact, and internal justice (including fair pay, safety, and supportive policies), noting that neglect of any pillar undermines the others (Doherty et al., 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014). In summary, iteration and lean measurement serve as confidence-building practices that refine product–market fit and strengthen claims to resources, rather than merely technocratic exercises (Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Finally, scarcity catalyses bricolage and frugal innovation, enabling the transformation of local knowledge into cost-effective solutions (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Bhatti & Ventresca, 2013; George et al., 2012).

The concept of "social entrepreneurship" is deeply embedded in communal logics that prioritise collective uplift and relational legitimacy, which accounts for both the gap between labels and practice and the strategic code-switching observed across different audiences (Kerlin, 2010; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Levels of education and exposure influence conceptual clarity and the adoption of tools: participation in accelerators transmits relevant vocabulary and technical methods, but limited time and staff capacity result in measurement practices that are often light and episodic (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Tracey & Phillips, 2007). Organisational form and revenue model whether NGO, hybrid, or for-profit further determine what is recognised as social entrepreneurship and how it is operationalised (Nicholls, 2006; Battilana & Dorado, 2010). The broader operating environment remains ambivalent. Macroeconomic growth, digital inclusion, and emerging sectoral opportunities coexist with patriarchal norms, misaligned public finance instruments, procurement barriers, and regulatory ambiguity, all of which impede translating opportunities into sustained gains (World Bank, 2024; Bruton et al., 2010; Muthuri & Gilbert, 2015). The lack of a fit-for-purpose legal category forces many hybrid ventures to adopt NGO, CBO, and PLC structures, thereby increasing compliance and tax burdens (Ndung'u, 2023; Maseno et al., 2025). Civil-society intermediaries serve as capability brokers and policy entrepreneurs by providing compliance toolkits,

facilitating donor engagement, and enabling buyer linkages, although their coverage remains inconsistent across countries (Mati, 2020; Owiti, 2014).

To follow these patterns, mission-linked finance and short grace periods help protect purpose during cash flow issues (Ebrahim et al., 2014). Procurement support, small contract options, credit access, and simple onboarding turn legitimacy into actual business (Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Clear rules or legal recognition for hybrid businesses would cut compliance barriers and attract mixed funding (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012; Ndung'u, 2023). Partnerships between CSOs and the state can spread standard tools, from registration to procurement, and build links to employers for reintegration programs (Mati, 2020). Providing care-friendly delivery, childcare support, transport assistance, and flexible schedules aligns with the realities women face (Kabeer, 1999; Nnaemeka, 2004).

4.5.1 Theory synthesis: advancing the framework

This section brings empirical findings into the study's main theoretical framework. It revisits four lenses, Empowerment Theory, the Capability Approach, Social Capital, and African Feminist perspectives to show how they explain women's social entrepreneurship in Nairobi. The synthesis compares patterns of agency, adaptation, and scale with these constructs and moves the framework past its initial design. This shows empowerment as a negotiated, capability-dependent, and relational process present in daily enterprise practice.

The findings redefine empowerment as a process within households and networks, rather than as individual choices. "Profit-plus-impact" is a gendered, adaptive logic, not a mission deviation. Achievements include income, internal justice (such as on-time pay and safety), and contract-readiness, all of which make the agency resilient during volatility (Kabeer, 1999; Doherty et al., 2014). Conversion factors fall into four types: (i) finance terms (revenue-linked repayment, short grace periods); (ii) organisational routines (simple cash-flow sheets, brief KPI scorecards, purpose clauses); (iii) infrastructure and tools (reliable energy,

digital systems, health inputs); and (iv) care enablers (childcare, safe transport). Capability sets expand when tailored locally but shrink when absent (Sen, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). The network progresses from bonding to bridging to linking ties, now managed actively. Identity code-switching keeps legitimacy across audiences. CSO intermediaries help build linkages and reduce first-time transaction risk. Procurement readiness marks the formal move from trust to contract (Putnam, 2000; Littlewood & Holt, 2018; Mati, 2020). Agency is relational, negotiated, and ethically grounded. Care, safety, and communal responsibility drive growth and justify profit with and for others. This reframes "drift" as context-sensitive balancing rather than failure (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001). These elements together create pathways to stability and scale. Women typically start with practical skills and bonding finance (for example, chamas), then stabilise through flexible capital, reliable inputs, and simple routines, later scaling through digital markets, procurement paths, and CSO advocacy. Locally defined conversion factors link resources and relationships to actual gains, showing when agency leads to lasting social and economic results in Nairobi (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999; Putnam, 2000). This synthesis explains how achievements happen and why losses accumulate when these factors are missing.

Overall, this chapter has examined how Kenyan women social entrepreneurs conceptualise and operationalise social entrepreneurship within complex social, economic, and institutional environments. The evidence demonstrates that, in response to these complexities, women social entrepreneurs move fluidly between community-based and market-oriented logics, blending economic innovation with collective care to sustain impact. Their ventures are thus both adaptive and informed by relational ethics, while remaining responsive to market realities. Success depends as much on relational capital as on financial or technical inputs. Although patriarchal norms, policy ambiguity, and financial exclusion continue to constrain the sector, the women profiled in this study illustrate that social entrepreneurship functions

both as a livelihood strategy and as a lever for structural change. Through hybrid models, digital tools, and locally grounded alliances, they convert scarcity into creativity and transform dependency into agency. These findings reinforce the study's integrated theoretical framework: empowerment is expressed as negotiated agency; capabilities operate as context-specific conversion factors; and social capital emerges as the connective mechanism that translates opportunity into achievement. Looking ahead, the next chapter builds on these insights by tracing in greater detail how finance, networks, digital tools, and care infrastructures interact along the pathway from entry to stability to scale, ultimately shaping the conditions for durable empowerment.

Chapter Five: Social entrepreneurship pathways to women's economic and social empowerment in Nairobi

5.0 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates that social entrepreneurship constitutes a primary pathway for women in Nairobi to achieve economic and social empowerment. It examines how women transform intent into tangible outcomes, activate and institutionalise agency, and address structural challenges related to control, credibility, and voice. Venture formation is contextualised within lived injustice, resource scarcity, and community obligation, illustrating how empowerment emerges through resource conversion, relational agency, and adaptive strategies. Building on this foundation, the chapter concludes by refining and extending the previously integrated Empowerment–Capability–Social Capital–African Feminist framework.

The first tier of findings (5.1–5.4) demonstrates that women's social enterprises prioritise empowerment over profit, with moral purpose, exclusion, and care serving as primary motivators. Economic empowerment is characterised by control, including decision-making, asset accumulation, and bargaining power, while social empowerment is derived from relationships that establish legitimacy and voice. Psychological empowerment is facilitated by moments of public mastery. Building on these individual and interpersonal forms of empowerment, the second tier (5.5–5.17) highlights how persistent structural barriers, such as patriarchal norms, investor biases, and caregiving burdens, complicate empowerment by acting as negative conversion factors that restrict substantive freedoms.

In response to these impediments, the third tier (5.18–5.20) identifies adaptive and collective strategies as essential mechanisms for overcoming constraints. Training, mentorship, collaborations, and alliances serve to expand capabilities, foster resilience, and institutionalise agency. These strategies create a progressive empowerment cycle in which increased

legitimacy, visibility, and trust further expand agency and reinforce networks and achievements over time.

This chapter's central argument is that social entrepreneurship provides women in Nairobi with a robust pathway to empowerment by enabling control over resources, converting those resources into substantive freedoms, and leveraging social ties to legitimise agency. It employs Empowerment Theory, the Capability Approach, and Social Capital Theory to demonstrate how control, conversion, and relational legitimacy are achieved. African feminist perspectives clarify that empowerment is inherently relational, adaptive, and contextually embedded within patriarchal and communal structures.

5.1 Findings - Motivations for social entrepreneurship

Encounters with harm, scarcity, and communal obligation catalyse women social entrepreneurs to transform personal convictions into public purpose. These formative experiences directly shape their missions, guide initial design decisions, and facilitate economic, social, and psychological empowerment (Findings 5.1–5.3; cross-links to Findings 5.2–5.4).

Finding 5.1: The role of moral urgency and lived injustice as foundational catalysts.

Across the sample, women described venture creation as a moral response to lived injustice, not a pursuit of market opportunity. One respondent explained, “I had to build a path for young people to become agents of change” (WSE1, personal interview, 4 December 2023). Another respondent described creating a livelihood initiative to break the economic incentives sustaining FGM: “We aligned a milk value-chain initiative to address the economic factors driving FGM… providing women with a sustainable source of income” (WSE6, personal interview, 16 January 2024). A third said that engaging with marginalisation shaped her leadership: “Through my work empowering women with disabilities, I found a platform to advocate for inclusivity and grew into a leader who inspires others to push for change” (WSE7,

personal interview, 16 November 2023). These origin stories show agency-first entrepreneurship: ventures launched to resolve moral problems founders face, not to chase commercial opportunities. Here, ventures come from moral problem-solving rooted in community realities, not opportunity scanning. Early mobilisation depends on bonding social capital. Trust networks, kinship ties, chamas, and neighbourhood relationships bring legitimacy, volunteers, and startup capital. Social mission comes first, with purpose carrying the organisation before formalisation.

These motivational arcs are both coherent and gendered. Under Empowerment Theory, women channel available resources and contextual pressures through agency to achieve social outcomes that matter in their communities (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach shows how local assets, cooperatives, informal savings groups, and caregiving roles serve as conversion factors enabling women to transform indignation into practical, opportunity-expanding action (Sen, 1999). An African Feminist lens further clarifies that leadership is relational and negotiated: women act from ethics of care, reciprocity, and community uplift rather than individual competition (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001). To support women social entrepreneurs, selection, incubation, and due diligence processes should explicitly value lived-experience legitimacy and mission clarity alongside revenue logic. For many women-led ventures, social performance precedes commercial maturity, and recognising this pathway ensures that purpose-driven enterprises are not disadvantaged by models that assume opportunity-first entrepreneurial origins.

Finding 5.2: Value-driven objectives in community engagement, environmental stewardship, and policy reform.

Women's motivations include improving livelihoods, promoting community well-being, fostering ecological stewardship, and advancing policy reform. One respondent illustrated this integration: "By providing sanitation services and converting waste into fuel,

we have created income opportunities for residents" (WSE36, personal interview, 28 November 2023). Another described the political side of her work: "Advocacy is… how we push for structural change that benefits more women beyond our networks" (WSE12, personal interview, 24 November 2023). A third respondent linked enterprise credibility to governance: "We started with small initiatives, training women in business skills. Over time, we were invited to forums where we could speak directly to policymakers" (WSE8, personal interview, 15 November 2023). These accounts show how missions join revenue, environmental justice, community, and advocacy. Entrepreneurial practice becomes a platform for civic participation. This enables women to move from local mobilisation to higher-level policy engagement. This broad ambition aligns with scholarship that views social entrepreneurship as societal transformation rather than market optimisation (Dees, 1998; Mair & Martí, 2006). It also matches African logics that prioritise collective responsibility and shared prosperity (Fourie & Rathbone, 2024).

These motivations form an empowerment path. Empowerment Theory holds that mission-driven action expands women's choices at home and in public (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach explains that new technologies, advocacy, and coalitions turn intent into freedoms to organise and influence (Sen, 1999). Social Capital and African feminist views stress that legitimacy comes from solidarity and care. Women gain policy access mainly through collaboration. This is guided by ethics rather than confrontation (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

To keep missions on track as ventures grow, teams must invest in advocacy. They should also use dual-track systems that measure social, environmental, and financial outcomes (Elkington & Rowlands, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Building policy knowledge within founder teams ensures values remain credible and recognised as they expand. This approach underpins the empowerment discussed in later findings.

Finding 5.3: Contextual drivers: constraint as catalyst, networks as springboard

Building on value-driven goals and empowerment, this section focuses on contextual factors that shape women's motivation and organising. In contrast to the prior discussion of mission and empowerment, the following analysis centres on how external contexts, such as barriers and networks, actively influence women's trajectories.

Context sharpens motivation among women in social entrepreneurship. Without formal mentorship, steady financing, or strong institutions, women turn constraint into collaboration. One respondent shared, "I brought girls together… mentorship and collaboration provided the foundation for our growth and sustainability" (WSE5, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Another emphasised the power of networks: "The networks I have built… have been instrumental, not just in getting support, but also in staying motivated" (WSE18, personal interview, 16 January 2024). A third highlighted the challenge of male-dominated spaces: "In rooms full of men… I keep showing up. With time, they see the results of our work" (WSE10, personal interview, 28 November 2023). These accounts show constraint as a catalyst and networks as a springboard. In low-resource situations, women build peer support for trust, learning, and validation. These informal supports circulate ideas, reduce coordination costs, maintain motivation, and lend legitimacy when other validation is lacking.

These dynamics show push factors, structural gaps, few mentors, patriarchal exclusion mixed with pull factors such as shared purpose and encouragement. Empowerment Theory sees constraints as initially limiting. Agency grows through small steps and achievements (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach says that solidarity, trust, and reciprocity change limited assets into freedoms (Sen, 1999). Social Capital theory holds that strong, tight-knit ties confer credibility and coordination. This helps build wider relationships (Putnam, 2000). African feminist work highlights nego-feminist strategies, negotiation, care, and strategic sisterhood. These help women handle scepticism, balance emotional labour, and turn barriers into

opportunities for leadership (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001). Persistence in the face of gendered doubt builds confidence, resilience, and public presence.

To build networks, invest in mentorship, grants, and group learning. Support pilot projects and create spaces to turn informal supports into strong systems. This helps women move into leadership, as covered in the next finding.

5.2 Findings - Pathways to women's empowerment through social entrepreneurship

This section traces three interlocking pathways through which social entrepreneurship advances women's empowerment: economic, social, and psychological. Empowerment Theory (resources → agency → achievements) and the Capability Approach (conversion of assets into real freedoms) guide the analysis. The discussion also considers social capital (bonding → bridging → linking) and African feminist logics of negotiated relational agency. The economic pathway comes first because it anchors the others. Economic control provides the material basis for social recognition. It also provides psychological efficacy to consolidate and endure.

5.2.1 Economic empowerment: framing and level analysis

Economic empowerment in this study emerges not only from income. It also comes from the ability to control income, assets, and strategic life choices. This definition is consistent with established scholarship (Kabeer, 1999; Mayoux, 2000; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Across the sample, women's empowerment unfolded at three interconnected levels: the household, the enterprise, and the community. In households, empowerment was visible in everyday bargaining. This included deciding who approves expenditures, whether to save or borrow, and whose name appears on credit documentation (Agarwal, 1997; Doss, 2013). Within enterprises, empowerment surfaced through reinvestment decisions. These included allocating profits toward inventory, staffing, or tools that expanded capacity (Sen, 1999; Deere & Doss, 2006). Beyond the firm, empowerment diffused through employment creation, supplier networks, and

demonstration effects. This helped women extend influence and agency in their communities (Austin et al., 2012; Haugh, 2007). Crucially, empowerment across these layers was not determined by revenue size but by who controlled the decisions those flows enabled. Participants repeatedly described empowerment as the shift from earning to deciding. As one respondent explained, "I decide when and how to invest… that control has given me real power, a voice" (WSE4, personal interview, 4 December 2023). Another said, "Microcredit paired with skills changes everything… women can support families and make their own financial decisions" (WSE9, personal interview, 20 November 2023). These narratives underscore that empowerment is anchored in authority, ownership of decisions, resources, and outcomes. It is not rooted solely in financial inflows. Indicators such as asset accumulation, savings growth, enterprise formalisation, and the ability to hire or delegate served as tangible evidence. This showed that financial participation had matured into a durable agency.

This trajectory aligns closely with Empowerment Theory's model of resources → agency → achievements (Kabeer, 1999). It also resonates with the Capability Approach. This approach emphasises that financial and institutional resources, literacy, market access, and secure asset holding must be converted into substantive freedoms to produce empowerment (Sen, 1999). Income becomes meaningful only when it is transformed into control through effective conversion factors. As women gained financial literacy and better market channels, they strengthened their ability to plan, negotiate, and reinvest. They turned initial resources into lasting achievements. At the relational level, growing financial autonomy also enhanced women's standing in households and communities. Many became informal lenders, mentors, or employers. These roles redistributed influence and created broader social multipliers of empowerment. Through an African feminist lens, this agency is relational, negotiated, and grounded in norms of care, reciprocity, and moral legitimacy. It is not based on individualised confrontation (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004). Economic control, therefore, did not function

as an isolated act of independence. Instead, it served as a collectively recognised form of leadership, rooted in responsibility and trust.

For income growth to create empowerment, credit must be paired with financial literacy and market access support. These strengthen conversion factors. Evaluation frameworks should assess empowerment using indicators such as decision rights, asset accumulation, and enterprise formalisation not income alone. In this study, empowerment is not reached when women earn. It is reached when they decide. This focus on control as capability leads into the next section. There, business models and resourcing mechanisms are discussed to sustain and expand this autonomy within Kenya's social-enterprise ecosystem.

Finding 5.4: Economic empowerment is defined by control rather than solely by income.

Economic empowerment in this study does not come solely from income. It grows from control over income, assets, and reinvestment decisions. Women described empowerment as the point when financial participation became authority over spending, saving, and resource use. Decision rights include who approves household and enterprise spending, savings, borrowing, and whose name is on contracts. Asset growth marks the build-up of tools, inventory, savings, and ownership. Participants shared: "I decide when and how to invest… that control has given me real power, a voice" (WSE4, personal interview, 4 December 2023). Another said, "Microcredit paired with skills changes everything… women can support families and make their own financial decisions" (WSE9, personal interview, 20 November 2023). A third noted, "Financial autonomy means I can now support others, not just depend on donors or my spouse" (WSE10, personal interview, 28 November 2023). These accounts reveal a shared insight: empowerment matters most when women control the resources they create.

Respondents described empowerment as unfolding in three concentric layers. At the household level, bargaining dynamics shifted as women took authority over spending, saving, and credit decisions. At the enterprise level, empowerment appeared in reinvestment choices. These included putting profits into inventory, staffing, or tools to expand capacity. Beyond the firm, empowerment extended into the community. This happened through job creation, supplier links, and demonstration effects that widened opportunity networks. The centre of gravity moved from cash flow to control: from participating in markets to shaping and owning the outcomes. Interviews, ownership evidence, and organisational artefacts, such as receipts, permits, and asset registers supported these findings. Negative cases reinforced the point: income growth did not lead to empowerment without decision-making authority. Revenue only becomes transformative with autonomy and secure asset ownership. Theoretically, these findings align with Empowerment Theory's sequence: resources → agency → achievements (Kabeer, 1999). They also align with the Capability Approach's focus on conversion factors such as literacy, market access, and asset security. These turn earnings into real freedoms (Sen, 1999). Income is a resource. Empowerment depends on the capabilities to convert it into control, resilience, and lasting choice.

Assessments of empowerment must go beyond revenue. They must track decision rights, asset accumulation, and enterprise formalisation. Financial interventions should bundle credit with financial literacy and market-access supports. This strengthens the conversion of income into sustained control. Additional mechanisms, such as co-financing simple quality-assurance systems, client feedback loops, and periodic audits, can help maintain mission integrity as enterprises grow. Empowerment is not achieved when women earn; it is achieved when they decide. This shift from income to control marks real economic empowerment. It sets the stage for Findings 5.5–5.6, which examine how business models and resourcing strategies scale this autonomy within Kenya's evolving social-enterprise ecosystem.

Finding 5.5: Business models that generate earnings and support autonomy.

Women's social enterprises in Nairobi show that commercial viability and social purpose can coexist. These ventures generate revenue through circular-economy products and paid services. At the same time, they advance environmental stewardship, health equity, and community care. As one respondent put it, "Every stove we sell doesn't just earn revenue. It directly improves the health of families" (WSE23, personal interview, 3 October 2023). Another highlighted the link between income and dignity: "Our reusable sanitary pads keep girls in school. Each sale has a ripple effect on education and dignity" (WSE28, personal interview, 17 January 2024). Others showed how social value is part of business logic: "Affordable 24-hour daycare lets mothers keep their jobs without worrying about childcare" (WSE33, personal interview, 28 November 2023). Another added, "We convert waste into fuel. We earn revenue while cleaning up the city and powering homes" (WSE36, personal interview, 28 November 2023). In these cases, revenues are not just financial inflows. They are tools of empowerment. The products and services, clean-cook stoves, menstrual-health kits, daycare, and waste-to-fuel systems, deliver measurable gains for communities. These include lower energy costs, better health, time savings, and more labour participation. Economic returns reinforce social value. Social legitimacy also strengthens customer trust and market access. This creates a feedback loop in which care generates control, and vice versa.

These ventures operationalise Empowerment Theory by converting earned income into decision rights and bargaining power (Kabeer, 1999). Within the Capability Approach, the technologies and services themselves act as conversion factors. They transform local assets such as labour, waste, and social trust into expanded freedoms: safer homes, stable incomes, and educational continuity (Sen, 1999). Through social-capital and African feminist lenses, these models centre relational agency and care. Locally valued, trust-anchored solutions

deepen reciprocity and legitimacy. This shows that market participation can coexist with communal ethics and collective responsibility (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

Hybrid value creation commercial plus social is viable. Its sustainability depends on mechanisms that preserve mission integrity as revenues scale. Funders and intermediaries should co-finance quality-assurance and impact-verification systems. These systems may include product traceability, customer-feedback loops, and light social-impact dashboards. These practices help financial growth reinforce, not dilute, community outcomes (Doherty et al., 2014). Embedding these accountability routines converts growth into a durable form of empowerment. This ensures Nairobi's women-led social enterprises continue to monetise impact without compromising purpose.

Table 5.1: Example of product-based models and thematic focus

Organisation Vignette	Product Area	Thematic Focus	Relevant SDGs
Vignette B-1 (HarvestBridge Initiative)	Farm produce	Agricultural inputs and value-chain participation	SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)
Vignette B-32 (GreenLoop Recycling)	Eco-friendly biodegradable items (plates, spoons, packaging)	Waste recycling, affordable housing, circular economy	SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)
Vignette B-8 (EqualAccess Consortium)	Charcoal briquettes from agricultural waste; carbon credits	Clean energy, job creation, community education	SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 13 (Climate Action)
Vignette B-25 (ArtisanLink Studio)	Handcrafted leather and textile bags	Cultural preservation, women's employment	SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)
Vignette B-23 (EcoCook Alliance)	Improved cookstoves and carbon credits	Indoor air quality, revenue generation, public health	SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 7 (Clean Energy)
Vignette B-38 (CharBriq Energy)	Eco-friendly charcoal briquettes	Deforestation reduction, green household energy	SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 15 (Life on Land)
Vignette B-28 (DigniPads Trust)	Reusable sanitary products	Menstrual health, girls' education, social inclusion	SDG 3 (Health), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
Vignette B-13 (VitalGlow Naturals)	Health foods and organic cosmetics	Organic farming, local sourcing, health promotion	SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Health), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)
Vignette B-26 (Pristine Hygiene Co.)	Interior and landscape design using indigenous plants	Biodiversity, environmental design, sustainable aesthetics	SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land)

Note: Table 5.1 summarises representative product-based models from the anonymised organisation vignettes (see Table 3.3 Organisation Vignettes). Each example links a venture's core offering to its thematic focus and most relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The range, from agriculture and the circular economy to clean energy, menstrual health, ethical fashion, and ecological design, illustrates how revenue-generating activities embed social and environmental value. The table is illustrative rather than exhaustive, grounding the discussion of how commercial logics translate into SDG-aligned outcomes across sectors.

Table 5.2: Examples of service-based models and thematic focus

Organisation Vignette	Service Area	Thematic Focus	Relevant SDGs
Vignette B-33 (CareCircle 24/7)	24-hour daycare services	Childcare, women's economic participation	SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)
Vignette B-36 (EcoSan Services)	Sanitation & fuel production	Environmental sustainability, clean energy, income generation	SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)
Vignette B-22 (SheCapital Hub)	Consultancy and strategic partnerships	Financial sustainability, service innovation	SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)
Vignette B-14 (HealingPath CBO)	Entrepreneurship and empowerment training	Entrepreneurship development, women's empowerment	SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
Vignette B-31 (AgriCredit Bridge)	Financial-literacy training	Financial inclusion, family security	SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
Vignette B-32 (GreenLoop Recycling)	Environmental education and recycling training	Environmental awareness, community empowerment	SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), SDG 13 (Climate Action)
Vignette B-29 (ReadAfrica Digital)	Adult literacy programs	Education, community leadership	SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)
Vignette B-37 (MilkMat Kiosk Co.)	Nutrition and agroecology training	Food security, health, local enterprise	SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health), SDG 8 (Decent Work)
Vignette B-8 (EqualAccess Consortium)	Disability-inclusion consultancy	Inclusive workspaces, disability rights	SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)
Vignette B-25 (ArtisanLink Studio)	Disability advocacy and empowerment	Equity, long-term empowerment	SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 1 (No Poverty)

Note: Table 5.2 lists service-based revenue models from the anonymised organisation vignettes (see Table 3.3). It connects each venture's main service to its thematic focus and primary SDG contributions. The examples include childcare, sanitation and clean energy, consultancy, entrepreneurship and financial-literacy training, environmental education, adult literacy, nutrition/agroecology, and disability inclusion. These services use fees or contracts to turn participation into capability gains. These gains increase women's economic agency, inclusion, and sustainability. SDG tags reflect the main, not all, alignments.

Finding 5.6: External finance is pivotal, yet women encounter elevated proof requirements.

External finance is a critical enabler of growth for women-led social enterprises. However, access to such funding remains uneven and often brings disproportionately high expectations. Respondents identified grants (non-repayable financial awards), catalytic partnerships (collaborations that enable new opportunities or scale), impact capital (investments made with the intention to generate social and financial returns), and crowdfunding (raising small amounts of money from many people, typically via online platforms) as essential. These forms of support help with piloting innovations, hiring initial staff, and testing business models. One founder observed that an initial grant transformed her organisation's trajectory: "Seed funding… helped us pilot, hire initial staff, and attract paying clients" (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). Other participants highlighted structural inequities within fundraising processes. As one respondent stated, "Securing funding to develop a proof of concept is challenging, especially for women" (WSE35, personal interview, 12 January 2024). Several participants reported pressure to over-perform: "You must keep proving impact and scaling, but expectations can be unrealistic" (WSE21, personal interview, 20 December 2023). Another summarised the gendered burden: "In pitch rooms… women must work twice as hard to prove they are worth the investment" (WSE10, personal interview, 28 November 2023). These testimonies illustrate what participants termed the "proof-of-concept paradox." This refers to the expectation to demonstrate results before receiving the capital required to achieve them. Early grants or pilot funds often establish credibility. Yet subsequent investment requires disproportionate evidence compared to male-led peers (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Agrawal et al., 2023). This dynamic places women social entrepreneurs in a persistent cycle of over-proofing. The need to demonstrate legitimacy diverts time, energy, and strategic focus from scaling efforts (Kabeer, 1999; Nnaemeka, 2004).

From an empowerment perspective, capital is a core resource that gives people agency and turns innovation into real results (Kabeer, 1999). In the Capability Approach, blended finance and technical assistance help turn emerging ideas into viable, sustainable businesses (Sen, 1999). Through social-capital and African feminist lenses, mentorship, sponsorship, and ally networks shift power away from gatekeepers. These networks replace exclusionary proof demands with collective validation and practical credibility (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004). Trust-based networks provide both ethical and practical foundations for women, helping them gain legitimacy without overcompensating. In practice, these findings show the need for gender-responsive finance that supports all stages of innovation. Funding should cover proof-of-concept phases rather than punishing them, allowing social enterprises to test ideas before scaling. Reporting should be simple and gradual, using outcome-based templates to track mission results, such as reach, inclusion, well-being, and financial performance. Evaluation should also recognise early social achievements as signs of future commercial success (Doherty et al., 2014). These steps lower validation risk, expand access to patient capital, and strengthen the base for broader portfolios and partnerships mentioned in Finding 5.7.

Finding 5.7: Resourcing as a portfolio - diversification, partnerships, and monetised Impact.

Women-led social enterprises in Nairobi treat resourcing as a carefully managed portfolio, purposefully blending multiple income streams. Participants intentionally combine earned revenue from product sales, paid services, and training fees with funding from grants, corporate partnerships, and membership contributions. Some ventures expand further, monetising impact through instruments such as carbon credits or fee-for-service, especially in collaborative projects. One respondent summed up this approach: “Income diversification has been key to maintaining steady operations” (WSE23, personal interview, 3 October 2023).

Another highlighted its role in resilience: “Multiple revenue streams protect us from external shocks” (WSE8, personal interview, 7 November 2023). Strategic partnerships are central, ensuring financial stability, technical expertise, market reach, shared visibility, and operational continuity. “Strategic partnerships let us pool resources, share expertise, and amplify impact,” explained one programme manager (WSE3, personal interview, 11 November 2023). Another described the security stemming from such collaborations: “Multi-year grants allow us to plan ahead and invest in capacity” (WSE5, personal interview, 16 November 2023). These accounts show intentional balancing of income types to buffer volatility, sustain impact, and strengthen credibility (Agrawal et al., 2023; Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Partnerships anchor this system, while monetising outcomes transforms mission delivery into predictable revenue (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Mayoux, 2000).

Portfolio resourcing signals empowerment through diversification and control. In Empowerment Theory, managing multiple funding sources expands autonomy and supports strategic resource allocation rather than reactive measures (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach similarly views diversification as broadening options for growth and risk (Sen, 1999). Collaboration, through social-capital and African feminist lenses, is strategic sisterhood: bonding links turn into bridging and linking capital. This process unlocks markets, strengthens legitimacy, and builds resilience via reciprocity (Putnam, 2000; Nnaemeka, 2004). Interdependence emerges as a structural asset for venture sustainability rather than a weakness.

To embed resilience, ecosystem actors should develop blended-finance playbooks mapping enterprise growth from seed to scale, with clear, staged evidence expectations. Phased reporting templates tailored to enterprise size can reduce administrative burden while preserving accountability. Aligning donor, corporate, and investor frameworks around shared mission-linked financing standards further supports the sustainability of hybrid ventures (Doherty et al., 2014). These mechanisms stabilise hybrid ventures and transform partnerships

into lasting empowerment structures. They also bridge to Finding 5.8, where portfolio strength integrates with internal systems to uphold mission during growth.

Table 5.3: Resource management strategies

Strategy	Description & Examples
Diversified Revenue Streams	Combining product sales, service fees, grants, partnerships, and training income. For example, Vignette B-32 (GreenLoop Recycling) sells eco-products, offers paid workshops, and secures grants; Vignette B-33 (CareCircle 24/7) blends service fees, grants, and educational programmes.
Social-Impact-Driven Sales Models	Monetising goods or services with embedded social and environmental value, often reinvesting profits. For example, Vignette B-23 (EcoCook Alliance) sells clean cookstoves and carbon credits; Vignette B-28 (DigniPads Trust) markets reusable sanitary pads to advance menstrual health and girls' education.
Donor & Grant Funding	Leveraging philanthropic grants, government subsidies, and international donor support to launch or scale. For example, Vignette B-6 (GirlSpark Collective) combines grants with crowdfunding; Vignette B-9 (BioFuel FarmTech) accessed government grants to expand production.
CSR & Strategic Partnerships	Collaborating with private-sector actors for CSR funding, technical expertise, or joint initiatives. For example, Vignette B-18 (MenaFinance Trust) partners with banks for microfinance outreach; Vignette B-16 (TechLift Academy) works with technology firms for mentorship and training.
Community-Based Financing	Mobilising alumni networks, M-Changa, and local fundraising. For example, Vignette B-16 (TechLift Academy) and Vignette B-6 (GirlSpark Collective) leverage alumni contributions; B-16 used M-Changa proceeds to purchase training equipment.
Service-Based Models	Generating income via consultancy, training, or professional services. For example, Vignette B-3 (Agrifin Hub) and Vignette B-22 (SheCapital Hub) deliver entrepreneurship training; Vignette B-8 (EqualAccess Consortium) provides disability-inclusion consultancy.
Reinvestment in Community	Redirecting profits toward community capacity-building, artisan support, or social causes. For example, Vignette B-25 (ArtisanLink Studio) reinvests in producer groups; Vignette B-26 (Pristine Hygiene Co.) funds women's training and medical support.
Sustainability through Innovation	Applying new technologies or environmental solutions to enhance efficiency and impact. For example, Vignette B-32 (GreenLoop Recycling) invests in advanced recycling technology; Vignette B-39 (BioCycle Feeds) converts organic waste into animal-feed protein.
Scalability & Monitoring	Using M&E systems, digital tools, and community feedback loops to scale responsibly. For example, Vignette B-31 (AgriCredit Bridge) integrates innovation, technology, and rigorous M&E to expand financial-inclusion services.

Strategy	Description & Examples
Membership & Subscription Models	Building recurring income through fees or subscriptions. For example, Vignette B-18 (MenaFinance Trust) and Vignette B-37 (MilkMat Kiosk Co.) use membership fees alongside service revenue.

Finding 5.8: Sustainability strategies underpin organisational continuity and preserve mission integrity.

Sustainability in Nairobi's women-led social enterprises is a steady, ongoing effort, not a fixed goal. Participants pointed to four main routines that help organisations last and grow: close work with the community, constant new ideas, skill-building, and long-term thinking with regular tracking. One founder said, "When the community sees the benefits, they become long-term allies, not just beneficiaries" (WSE32, personal interview, 20 December 2023). Another discussed the need to adjust and improve: "Each year we evaluate what works and adapt. That's how we grow without losing focus" (WSE27, personal interview, 3 October 2023). Building skills was called a strategy for lasting impact: "Training is how we build the next generation of women leaders" (WSE20, personal interview, 15 March 2024). Others stressed the value of structured tracking: "We implement quarterly M&E sprints reviewing uptake, satisfaction, and unit economics. Red flags trigger design tweaks before scale" (WSE14, personal interview, 2 November 2023). Together, these accounts show that women social entrepreneurs work closely with communities, improve their work through feedback, build skills, and establish regular monitoring. These actions help prevent loss of purpose and support careful growth. Sustainability is seen as an ongoing process based on strong relationships, learning, and the use of evidence to adjust.

From a theoretical perspective, feedback-driven monitoring and evaluation reinforce agency and public legitimacy, the core concepts of Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). In the Capability Approach, innovation and training serve as

conversion factors, expanding the capability sets of women social entrepreneurs, employees, and beneficiaries (Sen, 1999). Ongoing co-creation with communities, central to social-capital and African feminist frameworks, strengthens trust and shared stewardship, thus demonstrating negotiated, context-specific agency (Tamale, 2020; Nnaemeka, 2004). Relational ethics, such as care, reciprocity, and mutual accountability are operationalised as foundational norms rather than secondary moral considerations, directly linking theory to practice.

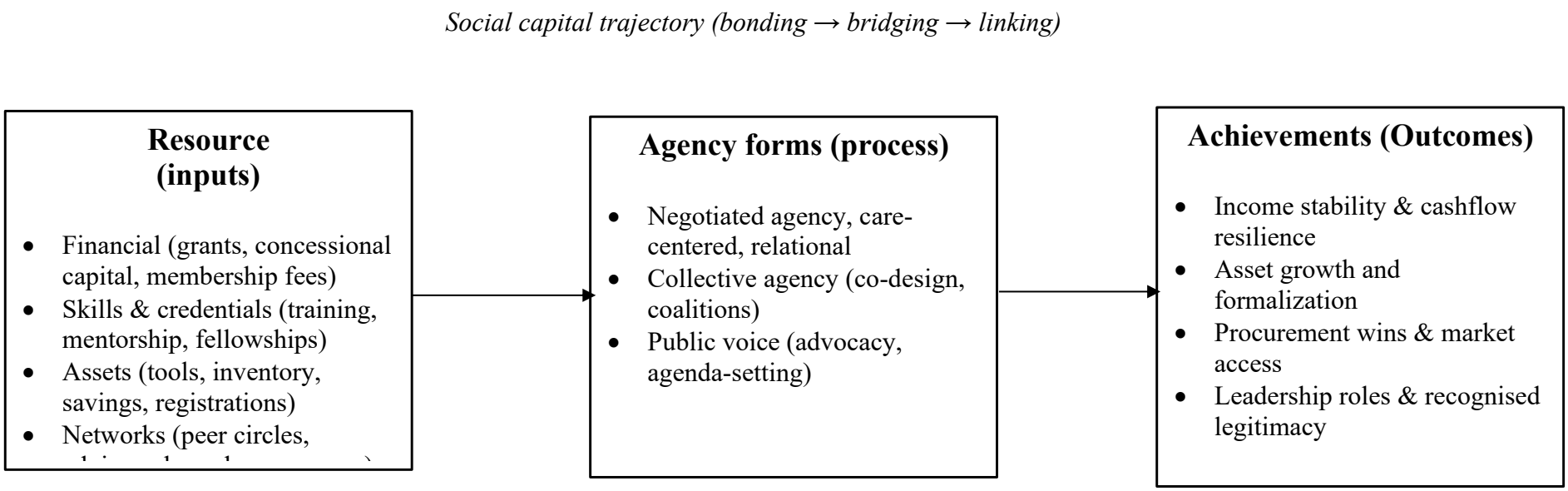
In practice, sustainability requires joining growth capital with systems for tracking impact and quality. This aligns financial expansion with mission-integrity metrics such as beneficiary reach, satisfaction, and retention. Donors and intermediaries are encouraged to support adaptive management frameworks. These frameworks institutionalise short learning cycles before scaling, allowing ventures to make timely adjustments while maintaining mission coherence. Organisational disciplines; feedback, innovation, capacity building, and co-creation form the base of long-term resilience. They underpin the network-to-leadership and mastery-to-agency transitions discussed in Findings 5.9-5.11.

Table 5.4: Sustainability strategies

Strategy	Examples
Diversified Revenue Streams	Vignette B-31 (AgriCredit Bridge), Vignette B-32 (GreenLoop Recycling), and Vignette B-33 (CareCircle 24/7), combine product sales, consultancy, educational programmes, and partnerships to stabilise income.
Community Engagement	Vignette B-12 (TransitSafe Trust), Vignette B-13 (VitalGlow Naturals), Vignette B-26 (Pristine Hygiene Co.), Vignette B-37 (MilkMat Kiosk Co.), emphasise local sourcing, reinvestment in artisans, community outreach, and health education.
Innovation and Adaptation	Vignette B-32 (GreenLoop Recycling), Vignette B-33 (CareCircle 24/7), Vignette B-36 (EcoSan Services), Vignette B-38 (CharBriq Energy), pursue continuous innovation in recycling, childcare, and clean-energy models with flexibility to market and social needs.
Strategic Partnerships	Vignette B-4 (SoftCap Studio), Vignette B-24 (WEE Policy Lab), Vignette B-30 (JusticeReentry Trust), rely on collaborations with donors, corporates, and policy institutions to pool resources and scale impact.

Training and Capacity Building	Vignette B-14 (HealingPath CBO), Vignette B-16 (TechLift Academy), Vignette B-20 (ConstructHer Academy), Vignette B-22 (SheCapital Hub), Vignette B-29 (ReadAfrica Digital), deliver contracted training, literacy programmes, and women's-empowerment workshops.
Product and Service Sales	Vignette B-9 (BioFuel FarmTech), Vignette B-10 (PlayWorks Initiative), Vignette B-25 (ArtisanLink Studio), generate direct revenue from biodigesters, sports goods, and artisanal crafts.
Grant and Donor Dependency	Vignette B-7 (UpliftCycle), Vignette B-21 (Safeguard Girls Initiative), Vignette B-28 (DigniPads Trust), draw on grants, sponsorships, and alumni-network fundraising for programme continuity.
Environmental Sustainability	Vignette B-36 (EcoSan Services) and Vignette B-38 (CharBriq Energy), convert waste into clean-energy products, addressing pollution and energy poverty simultaneously.
Technology Integration	Vignette B-16 (TechLift Academy) and Vignette B-34 (TechGirls Kenya Trust), use digital literacy, coding, and tech partnerships to expand training reach and operational efficiency.

Figure 5.1: Pathways Map: From Resources – Agency - Achievements



Lens mapping: Empowerment Theory, resources → agency → achievements (Kabeer, 1999); Capability Approach, conversion factors enabling this flow (Sen, 1999); Social capital, bonding → bridging → linking (above arrows; Putnam, 2000); African feminist perspectives, negotiated, care-centred agency (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

5.2.2 Findings - Social pathways to empowerment

Women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi experience empowerment as a process that expands from personal motivation to collective influence and systemic change. Three interlinked social pathways recur across the data: network building, leadership roles, and public voice, each reinforcing the others and fusing economic independence with social recognition and authority.

Findings 5.9: Network building from bonding to bridging and linking.

Women's networks in Nairobi often start in small, trusted groups and grow into collaborative structures that provide support, legitimacy, and institutional access. Many women social entrepreneurs say their efforts began with personal encounters with community challenges and collective care. "My journey began when I saw the struggles of women in my community… giving them hope and opportunities" (WSE29, personal interview, 9 October 2023). Others shared how they experimented in familiar and relational settings: "After church, I would bring neighbours together to test ideas in real time and iterate solutions with those who would use them" (WSE5, personal interview, 16 November 2023). One respondent described moving from solidarity to structured influence: "We began as ten women sharing stories under a mango tree… now we collaborate with legal-aid clinics and national campaigns. We bargain, we nurture, we hold each other up" (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). These stories show how bonding ties, grounded in shared experience and mutual trust, reduce coordination costs and foster deeper relationships. Ongoing collaboration and practice turn these bonds into bridging and linking capital that opens doors to expertise, buyers, financiers, and policy platforms. As a result, networks become both outcomes and catalysts for empowerment, serving as social structures that build capacity and legitimacy over time.

This dynamic is consistent with Empowerment Theory's progression from resources to agency to achievements (Kabeer, 1999) and with the Capability Approach, in which trust and local norms act as conversion factors that transform informal gatherings into viable, opportunity-generating structures (Sen, 1999). Together, these theoretical perspectives contextualise the network-building narrative described above. Additionally, this reflects the social capital trajectory from bonding to bridging and linking (Bourdieu, 2011; Coleman, 2009; Putnam, 2000) and aligns with African feminist frameworks that emphasise strategic sisterhood, reciprocity, and care-based collaboration (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Within these relational ethics, empowerment is conceptualized as a collective process in which shared success confers moral legitimacy and grounds further network evolution.

Stakeholders should prioritise local convenings, mentorship circles, neighbourhood forums, and thematic cohorts to reinforce bonding ties and foster future bridging opportunities. Individuals serving as boundary-spanners can convert local trust into formal partnerships and recognition, while "scale-deep" collaboration maintains relational intimacy as it grows. Minimal documentation, such as rosters, maps, or peer testimonies, demonstrates network reach and legitimacy, introducing excessive bureaucracy. These robust, trust-based foundations establish the necessary architecture for visibility, thereby preparing for the subsequent stage in which relational networks evolve into platforms for public voice and institutional influence.

Findings 5.10: Leadership roles and credibility derived from lived expertise.

Trust-based networks and proven mastery let women social entrepreneurs move from local organisers to recognised leaders. Their authority becomes visible. One participant described how a single event changed her public image: "After organising the first women's disability tournament, people stopped seeing me only as a service provider… they were asking me to speak" (WSE7, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Many said leadership grows from

lived experience and practice. “I understand the barriers… because I faced them first” (WSE14, personal interview, 2 November 2023). For others, leadership expanded from small, trusted circles to broader alliances. “Each year the circle widened, but the centre held, my voice grew with every new ally” (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). These stories show credibility at the intersection of competence and relational accountability. Leadership is not imposed or self-declared. It is earned through consistent performance, mutual care, and visible engagement in trust-based networks. Over time, reliability and reciprocity consolidate authority and turn social legitimacy into agenda-setting influence. Lived experience becomes a credential that anchors expertise in empathy and authenticity, not just formal position or technical qualifications.

Analytically, this process aligns with Empowerment Theory’s sequence from resources to agency to achievements, where leadership embodies both agency (decision-making authority and initiative) and achievement (recognition and influence) (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach highlights how leadership broadens opportunities for coordination, advocacy, and resource allocation (Sen, 1999). Within social capital theory, network trust confers legitimacy, illustrating the evolution of credibility into authority (Putnam, 2000). The nego-feminist perspective (Nnaemeka, 2004) conceptualises leadership as relational stewardship rather than adversarial dominance, with authority derived from service, mediation, and moral responsibility. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) further demonstrates that cycles of competence, autonomy, and relatedness enhance motivation and resilience, thereby sustaining women’s leadership under challenging conditions. Growth or seed grants with leadership-development labs and structured peer-coaching programmes that strengthen confidence, strategic communication, and collective voice. Funders and ecosystem partners should provide stipends for community representatives and institutionalise advisory boards to safeguard accountability and preserve the legitimacy of agenda-setting as public visibility

increases. These consolidated leadership dynamics, rooted in mastery, empathy, and relational accountability, form the launchpad for Finding 5.11, where individual credibility extends into collective advocacy and policy influence.

Findings 5.11: Community voice and the impact of increasing legitimacy for women.

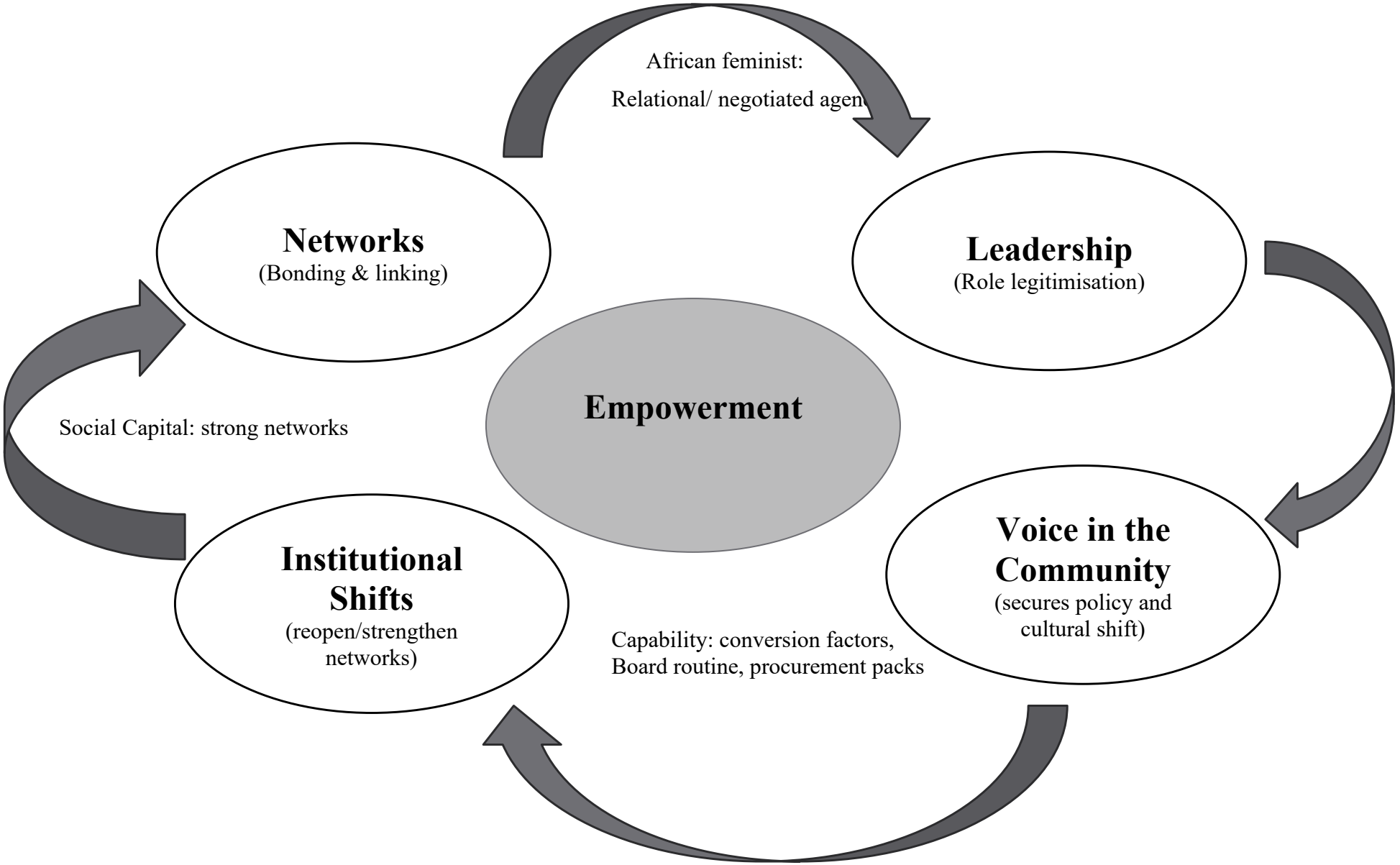
social entrepreneurs transform lived experience into public voice, influencing community discourse and, increasingly, policy. One participant described how increased visibility altered her role: “People like me were never invited to policy spaces. Now, I speak for those still silenced” (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). Another highlighted the authority inherent in women’s everyday roles: “Women, with their natural caregiving disposition, are well-positioned to contribute meaningfully” (WSE26, personal interview, 12 February 2024). For some, public recognition followed tangible action: “After our first disability-sports event, I was invited to speak on disability rights and women’s health” (WSE7, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Voice emerges from the combination of credibility established through consistent action and the platforms' networks. Women leverage mastery to attain narrative authority, challenging prevailing definitions of leadership and valued work. Through storytelling, advocacy, and active presence, they reshape expectations and contribute to policy development. Public participation thus becomes both a personal objective and a collective endeavour, with lived experience serving as political capital. becomes political currency.

At this stage, psychological and political empowerment merge. The agency is shown as a real influence (Kabeer, 1999; Mayoux, 2000). The Capability Approach holds that civic engagement enables women to participate in governance at all levels (Sen, 1999). In social capital theory, bridging and linking ties guide care-based agency into institutions. Strategic reframing disrupts gender roles that once limited women (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Eagly

& Wood, 2012; Tamale, 2020). From an African feminist view, voice is collective, rooted in care, accountability, and moral legitimacy.

Funders and allies should invest in advocacy skills. Train women in storytelling, evidence use, and safe participation. These protect women's dignity in public. Micro-grants can fund community hearings, audits, and dashboards to show impact. Treat voice-work as a funded activity. "Mastery moments" and public recognition boost motivation and agency. With these steps, women's enterprises turn experience into presence. This completes the empowerment arc where care, credibility, and voice shape outcomes and norms.

Figure 5.2: Social pathway to empowerment



5.2.3 Findings - Psychological pathways to empowerment

Belief in the ability to lead often starts with one clear success that shifts self-perception. Bandura (2019) calls this a mastery performance. He sees it as key to building self-confidence and motivation (Bandura & Evans, 2006).

Finding 5.12: Self-efficacy: from mastery to public validation

In this study, self-efficacy usually begins with a concrete achievement. It grows with public validation. Participants described early accomplishments that broadened their sense of possibility. For example, one said, "After organising the first disability tournament for women, I realised I could hold my own in any room, boardrooms, policy forums, you name it" (WSE7, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Another linked her confidence to a financial milestone: "When our savings group repaid its first KSh 20,000 loan on time, I thought: if I can organise this, I can organise anything" (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Social visibility reinforced these achievements. "I posted about our success…Within days, I was not invisible" (WSE7, personal interview, 16 November 2023). For some, regular public sharing built confidence: "My weekly progress posts give me the guts to knock on doors on Monday" (WSE12, personal interview, 24 November 2023). These early successes, community events, repayment cycles, and digital milestones anchor self-efficacy. Public recognition changes private confidence into social validation. Each success creates feedback loops of mastery and affirmation. These loops expand ambition, reinforce persistence, and normalise women's visibility in leadership and advocacy. Over time, these achievements build a psychological infrastructure of empowerment. Self-belief becomes self-reinforcing and is validated by others. This progression shapes further advances in agency and leadership, discussed in the next section.

This progression matches Empowerment Theory's continuum from mastery to agency to achievement (Kabeer, 1999). It also aligns with the Capability Approach. Enabling tools, such as social media, dashboards, and exhibitions, expand women's action sets (Sen, 1999). Public co-validation, seen through social-capital and African feminist perspectives, roots success in networks of care and accountability. This ensures recognition stays collective, not competitive (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Bandura's (2019) self-efficacy model, based on mastery, vicarious reinforcement, social persuasion, and affective feedback, shows how repeated affirmation keeps agency going despite barriers. Building on this foundation, the next paragraphs discuss practical implications and organisational recommendations for strengthening mastery-to-legitimacy pathways.

It is essential to design mastery-to-legitimacy pipelines that provide resources and recognition for early successes. This could mean micro-grants for pilot achievements, paired with communication kits. These kits help women social entrepreneurs document and share milestones. Data dashboards can visualise impact. Such tools accelerate the conversion of mastery into credibility, supporting the transitions in Findings 5.10 and 5.11. Through this process, self-efficacy drives empowerment. Achievements become lasting legitimacy and sustain women's agency. The next section explores the shift from credibility to agency, focusing on agenda-setting and influence.

Finding 5.13: Agency: setting one's own agenda

As self-efficacy becomes established, women social entrepreneurs transform personal insight into authority. They challenge gendered norms and broaden what counts as legitimate leadership. For instance, one participant stated, "People like me were never invited to policy spaces. Now, I speak for those still silenced" (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). Another described how mastery led to more visibility: "Delivering the first women's disability tournament triggered invitations to speak on disability rights and women's health" (WSE7,

personal interview, 16 November 2023). A third emphasised the gendered ethos within this leadership: “Women, with their natural caregiving disposition, are well-positioned to contribute meaningfully” (WSE26, personal interview, 12 February 2024). This stage moves from self-belief to social transformation. After showing competence in their ventures, women social entrepreneurs begin to define issues, frame solutions, and push for systemic change. Their authority is not derived from elite credentials but from lived experience translated into public legitimacy. By reframing care, service, and community stewardship as strategic capital, these women challenge previous limits in participation. Voice becomes both an outcome and a tool. It asserts presence and changes how leadership, knowledge, and influence are valued and exercised. The next findings explore how resilience sustains this influence.

These dynamics demonstrate norm entrepreneurship: credibility from results enables women to set agendas and change recognition systems (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Eagly & Wood, 2012). This progression aligns with Empowerment Theory’s shift from resources to agency to political influence (Kabeer, 1999; Mayoux, 2000) and parallels the Capability Approach’s focus on substantive freedoms (Sen, 1999). As care-based authority spreads institutionally, women model nego-feminist agency; negotiated, relational, and built on mutual responsibility (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). In practice, pairing financial capital with advocacy training sharpens framing and representation; at the same time, community stipends and safe-participation rules protect new leaders. Voice work must be planned and budgeted for in grants and accelerators to ensure lasting influence. Ultimately, the durability of public agency depends on resilience, as detailed in Finding 5.14.

Finding 5.14: Resilience: persistence, self-acceptance, and co-creation

Resilience stabilises agency amid adversity. One participant said, “Changing community attitudes takes time; focusing on gradual impact… is essential.” Another defined resilience as self-acceptance: “If I embrace who I am… that’s what helps me reshape

perceptions, especially online." A third spoke about shared ownership: "Co-creating programmes with community members leads to higher trust and cooperation." Women social entrepreneurs approach progress step by step. They prioritise consistency, authenticity, and co-creation. Embracing identity strengthens leadership and turns vulnerability into credibility. Participatory design builds trust and accountability, encouraging resilience. These practices define leadership as the ability to endure and adapt without losing purpose.

Iterative, public achievements reinforce perceived control and legitimacy. These are core parts of Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999). Reflective pacing and authenticity expand the range of actions under constraint. This fits the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) and research on psychological resilience (Masten, 2018). Co-creation strengthens bonding ties and builds bridging and linking ties. It embeds mutual accountability in care-centred practice (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Chambers, 1994; Ely & Meyerson, 2010). From an African feminist view, these routines show negotiated, relational agency. They prioritise endurance, reciprocity, and collective thriving over individual achievement (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

Resilience needs both time and relational support. Programmes should offer multi-year micro-grants to support continued engagement, as well as founder well-being and anti-burnout interventions to build identity-based confidence. Participatory budgeting with feedback loops can institutionalise co-creation and transparency. These resilience routines maintain the confidence and visibility covered in Finding 5.12 (Self-Efficacy) and Finding 5.13 (Agency) and support the sustained policy influence and community trust described in Finding 5.11 (Public Voice).

While previous findings show how economic, social, and psychological pathways enable empowerment, it is important to note that these paths unfold in uneven, often resistant environments. Women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi face patriarchal institutions, resource-limited markets, and embedded social hierarchies. The next section examines these structural

and cultural barriers, analysing how gendered expectations, intersectional vulnerabilities, and fragile community trust affect the sustainability of empowerment outcomes.

5.3 Findings - Structural and cultural barriers to empowerment

While the preceding sections traced how economic, social, and psychological pathways advance women's empowerment through social entrepreneurship, these trajectories unfold within uneven and often resistant environments. Women social entrepreneurs in Kenya, especially in Nairobi, face structural constraints, cultural expectations, and institutional asymmetries. These factors test their agency. They encounter obstacles that reveal deep societal barriers and systemic biases in the social-enterprise ecosystem. Women face limited access to finance and markets and endure gendered scrutiny in formal institutions. These challenges mirror persistent patriarchal norms and socio-economic hierarchies, which shape opportunity and recognition. An African feminist perspective underscores the fluid interplay of culture, communal obligations, and individual agency (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004).

These barriers are best understood within Kenya's broader socio-cultural context. Empowerment is not exercised in isolation. It is negotiated within webs of kinship, community, and identity. Despite these constraints, the women interviewed for this study demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and creative problem-solving. They navigate exclusionary systems by turning constraints into innovation. They leverage social capital, redefine norms, and gain legitimacy through lived expertise. The findings that follow (5.15–5.17) unpack these structural and cultural barriers. They show how patriarchal mindsets, intersectional vulnerabilities, and fragile community trust shape both the boundaries and possibilities of women's empowerment in Kenya's evolving social-enterprise landscape.

Finding 5.15: Patriarchal mindset and gender bias.

Across the interviews, women described how patriarchal norms and gendered investor heuristics directly raise the proof threshold for women social entrepreneurs. These biases force

a constant “double burden” on their time, labour, and recognition. Constraints span administrative, domestic, and financial spheres. One respondent called resistance from county officials an “entrenched patriarchal mindset,” which complicates even routine engagement (WSE6, personal interview, 16 January 2024). Another cited gendered frictions “even in basic tasks like registering a social enterprise” (WSE13, personal interview, 18 January 2024). Others highlighted the weight of kinship obligations. One said her earnings must stretch “to sustain… an entire extended network” (WSE1, personal interview, 4 December 2023). In investment spaces, bias means heightened scepticism: “Even with a proof of concept, you must over-explain; the doubt lingers” (WSE28, personal interview, 17 January 2024).

Analytically, patriarchal norms limit resources and agency, delaying empowerment (Kabeer, 1999). Caregiving expectations and investor bias shrink women’s options, acting as negative conversion factors (Sen, 1999). African feminist interpretations explain this: "layered patriarchy" and nego-feminist responses to communal obligations show why women must provide more proof to gain legitimacy (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004; Oyěwùmí, 1997; Tamale, 2020). This mirrors findings in entrepreneurship and finance on gendered heuristics and scrutiny (Ahl, 2006; Brush et al., 2019; Hechavarría et al., 2017). These barriers, funders and policymakers should: 1) explicitly underwrite proof-of-concept development within gender-responsive grantmaking; 2) streamline registration and reporting requirements to lower administrative friction; and 3) de-bias investment screening through mixed evaluation panels and gender-aware due diligence. For accelerators and incubators, key steps include: providing caregiver stipends and flexible scheduling and expanding women-led mentorship and investor coalitions to normalise trust-based financing. Together, these actions directly address the proof-of-concept paradox highlighted in Finding 5.6 and reinforce the leadership and voice trajectories identified in Findings 5.10–5.11.

Finding 5.16: Intersectional constraints (age, disability, poverty, gender-based violence).

Intersecting identities: gender with age, disability, poverty, and violence compound exclusion. These factors reshape participation and empowerment. Practitioners described barriers that reinforce each other. “Domestic violence and poverty routinely surface in my projects aimed at empowering women and girls” (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Others stressed that fragmented support is not enough. “We can’t keep relying on short-term fixes… sustainability is crucial, especially for marginalised communities” (WSE4, personal interview, 4 December 2023). Stigma increases vulnerability. “Disability is seen as a curse… it’s a huge challenge to change such mindsets” (WSE7, personal interview, 16 November 2023). Ageism questions the legitimacy of young women entrepreneurs. “Some people don’t take me seriously because I’m young” (WSE13, personal interview, 18 January 2024). These intersecting disadvantages create steeper barriers to entry and retention. Stigma suppresses demand. Ventures must invest in safety, access, and trust-building, raising costs. Short grant cycles worsen the problem by disrupting crucial relationships. Empowerment here needs more than inclusion. It demands persistence and protection across many vulnerabilities.

Analytically, overlapping deprivations depress both resources and agency. This lowers the probability of durable achievements along the empowerment pathway (Kabeer, 1999). Within the Capability Approach, stigma, inaccessible infrastructure, and GBV risk function as negative conversion factors. These conditions prevent available resources from becoming real freedoms. Tailored safeguards, accessible infrastructure, and income-smoothing supports can reverse these conversion losses. They enable women to convert opportunity into tangible capability (Sen, 1999; Gibbs & Pellicano, 2023). From social-capital and African feminist perspectives, the countermove is collective. “Strategic sisterhood,” peer mentorship, and community-led design help rebuild legitimacy and protective networks. They maintain relational ethics and communal care (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020; Mancini

& Bello, 2016; Adi, 2019). These approaches turn vulnerability into relational strength, ensuring care and solidarity are structural, not incidental, to empowerment.

The main recommendations are: 1) establish intersectional financing windows, such as disability-inclusive grants and GBV-safe access funds; 2) require universal design and safeguarding mandates; 3) fund multi-year, cohort-based programmes with peer mentors, caregiver stipends, and trauma-informed facilitation; and 4) update evaluation frameworks to track disaggregated outcomes (age, disability, GBV status) and reward continuity and retention alongside reach. Implementing these strategies will reinforce the network-to-voice mechanisms in Findings 5.9–5.11 and the resilience routines in Finding 5.14, ensuring that those most structurally constrained are included and benefited.

Finding 5.17: Community engagement challenges (trust deficits & heterogeneity).

Community engagement is challenging due to historical mistrust. Gendered scepticism toward women's authority and local group differences increases the challenge. One respondent said, "It's a trust issue… when it's a woman leading, they wonder if she really has authority in our patriarchal setup" (WSE11, personal interview, 4 November 2023). The collective memory of unmet promises undermines credibility. Legitimacy comes from consistently showing up and following through, not from your role alone. In community groups, diverse expectations add to the workload. "Working with a chama means managing a lot of different people… you must keep communicating, keep them updated, or they'll drift off," said one participant (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Ongoing participation relies on steady contact, transparency, and frequent feedback. Another respondent stressed how slow and relational this work is. "Changing attitudes takes time… you must continuously share information and encourage participation" (WSE36, personal interview, 28 November 2023). These reflections show that trust and inclusion are results, not starting points, of ongoing effort.

Through Empowerment Theory, trust and recognition are enabling resources. They activate agency, co-production, and joint decision-making. These processes lead to durable achievements such as adoption, stewardship, and shared ownership (Kabeer, 1999). In the Capability Approach, trust, accessible information, predictable touchpoints, and accountability are conversion factors. These transform outreach into real opportunities for collective choice (Sen, 1999). Social capital and African feminist views clarify why care-centred reciprocity and "strategic sisterhood" matter in patriarchal settings. Bonding ties require intentional and patient cultivation. Only then can women's leadership become legitimate (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020).

Here are the key practical recommendations. First, set up community compacts, simple charters or memoranda defining mutual roles and benefits. Second, fund boundary-spanner roles (paid local liaisons) to build trust and translate across groups. Third, hold monthly forums and send short updates (WhatsApp or SMS) with visible action logs. Fourth, run co-design sprints and participatory budgeting to turn community input into clear results, and set up accessible grievance channels. Fifth, use public dashboards to track activities, realised benefits, and resolved complaints for accountability. All these practices require multi-year budgets and disbursements aligned with continuity, such as attendance retention or co-created outputs. Together, these engagement systems implement the network-formation dynamics described in Finding 5.9, uphold leadership legitimacy in Finding 5.10, depend on the resilience routines described in Finding 5.14, and strengthen the sustainability disciplines described in Finding 5.8.

Despite these persistent constraints, the women in this study shown remarkable adaptability. They convert exclusion into innovation, using collectively patterned strategies to build agency. Their responses are neither accidental nor purely individual. The next section traces their adaptive strategies, including targeted training, mentorship, and fellowship

programmes that expand skill sets. It also details local and transnational collaborations that pool resources, multiply learning, and enhance credibility across Kenya's social-enterprise ecosystem.

5.4 Findings - Key strategies for navigating barriers

Women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi advance most effectively when two levers move together. First, targeted training and fellowship programmes expand skills, confidence, and credibility. Second, strategic collaborations pool resources, distribute risk, and open institutional doors. These levers serve as both buffers and accelerators. They counter patriarchal and intersectional frictions described in Section 5.3. They also reinforce the empowerment pathways in Section 5.2. The following findings examine how structured learning opportunities and collaborative ecosystems help women turn constraints into capacity. They also show how capacity turns into collective influence. These findings reveal the mechanisms through which empowerment survives adversity. Empowerment scales through knowledge, networks, and shared legitimacy.

Finding 5.18: Targeted training, fellowships, and mentorship expand capability sets and accelerate agency

Targeted training, fellowships, and mentored practice are pivotal mechanisms. They transform intent into recognised leadership. Participants regularly described a qualitative leap in confidence and capability after entering structured programmes. Examples include Ashoka, VC4A, or regional fellowship initiatives. "These training opportunities completely changed my approach. It is not just about having a passion; it is about learning the skills to run a sustainable social enterprise," explained one respondent (WSE22, personal interview, 7 January 2024). Exposure within these ecosystems compounds through peer and institutional linkages. These linkages broaden visibility and sharpen strategic thinking. As another participant reflected, "This experience led me to connect with Ashoka in East Africa and take

part in one of their social entrepreneurship courses" (WSE1, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Mentorship deepens this learning through iterative guidance and reciprocal knowledge exchange. The same respondent noted, "I have played a role as a mentor and trainer, guiding and supporting both young and upcoming social entrepreneurs" (WSE1, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Over time, these structured pathways have exponential effects. Cohort environments create networks of mutual reinforcement. This increases women's confidence to pursue partnerships, pitch ideas, and engage in policy conversations. As one founder put it, "Meeting like-minded people opened countless doors" (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). These accounts reveal that fellowships, accelerators, and mentored practice act as catalysts. They help women transition from early experimentation to strategic, recognised leadership within Nairobi's social-enterprise ecosystem.

Analytically, capability-building initiatives expand decision power, self-efficacy, and leadership scope. This aligns with Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Fellowships and structured mentorship serve as conversion factors in the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999). They translate resources and aspirations into fundable plans, procurement readiness, and credible institutional visibility. From social capital and African feminist perspectives, cohort-based learning and mentorship networks convert bonding trust into bridging and linking ties. This legitimises women's expertise in patriarchal arenas and reinforces negotiated, relational agency (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020). Practical implications suggest several high-yield design features. Offer paid stipends and transport/data support to eliminate access barriers. Match participants with relevant mentors who localise global tools. Require capstone deliverables such as buyer pitches or procurement dossiers with brokered introductions to anchor buyers. Issue micro-credentials recognised by lenders and procurement offices. Post-programme tracking, loan approvals, contracts won, and hires created ensure capability gains translate into measurable agency and revenue. These

mechanisms directly counter patriarchal and intersectional frictions identified in Findings 5.15–5.16. They reinforce the leadership, voice, and self-efficacy pathways outlined in Findings 5.10–5.12. Structured training and mentorship are accelerators. They scaffold empowerment processes that might otherwise take years of informal trial and error to achieve.

Finding 5.19: Collaboration at both local and global levels increases resources, learning opportunities, and organizational legitimacy.

Collaboration, both lateral among peers and vertical across sectors and borders, emerges in this study as a powerful accelerator of capacity, market access, and policy reach. "Meeting like-minded people opened countless doors," recalled one participant, highlighting how peer networks dissolve isolation and create pathways to shared learning and opportunity (WSE2, personal interview, 4 October 2023). Co-creation with communities and neighbouring organisations amplifies this effect by deepening trust and operational bandwidth. As another founder explained, "Co-creating programmes with community members leads to higher levels of trust and cooperation, they feel part of the process, not just beneficiaries" (WSE15, personal interview, 3 December 2023). Digital and transnational ties extend this collaborative dividend even further. Social platforms allow women to bypass traditional gatekeepers, expanding visibility and accelerating connection with partners, funders, and supporters. "Social media allows us to reach a broader audience, share our stories, and connect with funders or partners, it has changed how we raise awareness," noted one respondent (WSE17, personal interview, 9 October 2023). Participation in international networks also enhances legitimacy and unlocks new learning spaces. As another reflected, "This experience led me to connect with Ashoka in East Africa and take part in one of their social entrepreneurship courses" (WSE1, personal interview, 4 October 2023). These accounts demonstrate how collaboration multiplies resources, learning, and legitimacy. Locally, coalitions share venues, distribution networks, and reputational capital; globally, partnerships transmit technical expertise, open advocacy

platforms, and attract investment. Cross-sector partnerships blend complementary strengths, community reach, technical expertise, and donor credibility, creating value that no single actor could achieve alone.

Viewed through Empowerment Theory, partnerships convert social and intellectual capital into joint achievements, shared programmes, pooled procurement, and policy access (Kabeer, 1999). The Capability Approach clarifies how these alliances expand the feasible set by connecting enterprises to suppliers, funders, and advocacy spaces (Sen, 1999). From Social-capital and African feminist perspectives, collaboration institutionalises reciprocity, trust, and care across communities and borders, turning solidarity into a governance asset (Putnam, 2000; Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Practical implications include funding coalition-building and brokerage infrastructure, offering standard MOU templates, intellectual property and brand guardrails, and joint-monitoring dashboards to support shared accountability. Boundary-spanner roles (dedicated partnership officers or community liaisons) can translate goals across institutions and maintain trust during growth. Tranche-based disbursement tied to co-created outputs, shared curricula, pooled procurement, or joint advocacy briefs, anchors partnerships in measurable collaboration rather than episodic alignment. Such strategies reinforce portfolio resourcing (Finding 5.7), operationalise network-building dynamics (Finding 5.9), and strengthen community engagement systems (Finding 5.17). In practice, collaboration converts fragmentation into coherence, enabling women-led ventures to move from local relevance to institutional recognition, rooted in care, solidarity, and shared purpose.

Finding 5.20: Collaboration (local and global) multiplies resources, learning, and legitimacy

For many women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi, cross-sector and transnational alliances serve as essential bridges between local credibility and wider system-level influence. Partnerships with corporations, development agencies, and international networks provide more than just financial or technical support, they also offer validation in policy and investment spaces that are often otherwise inaccessible. As one participant explained, “Through our collaboration with UN Women, we gained the credibility to influence county-level gender policies” (WSE6, personal interview, 16 January 2024). Another noted that regional alliances can expand both reach and influence: “Working with regional partners allows us to scale clean-energy solutions while also participating in sustainability forums where decisions are made” (WSE8, personal interview, 7 November 2023). International recognition also acts as a form of protection and leverage. One founder observed, “Being part of a global platform shields us from local politics; we are harder to dismiss” (WSE21, personal interview, 20 December 2023). Collectively, these experiences show how transnational collaboration amplifies voice, credibility, and negotiating power. Local models can gain global attention, and international endorsements open policy and financing opportunities that have historically been out of reach for women social entrepreneurs.

From an analytical perspective, these alliances reflect the upper tiers of Empowerment Theory, where achievements go beyond the enterprise to reshape institutional norms and decision-making spaces (Kabeer, 1999). Within the Capability Approach, global and corporate connections act as advanced conversion factors, expanding capability sets through access to capital, policy dialogue, and knowledge exchange (Sen, 1999). In the context of social capital and African feminist theories, these cross-level partnerships represent relational power, using care and reciprocity across differences to negotiate influence rather than impose it (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

In practical terms, there is a need to institutionalise infrastructure for cross-sector partnerships. This could include a national registry or platform for verified women-led social enterprises to connect with investors, philanthropies, and policy coalitions; transparent co-branding and intellectual property guidelines to protect smaller ventures in unequal partnerships; and structured joint-learning labs to translate global frameworks into locally actionable models. Development partners should provide catalytic sub-grants for Kenyan women-led consortia to attend or host regional summits, ensuring their representation in key forums that shape funding and regulation.

Cross-sector and transnational alliances thus act as accelerators of both scale and legitimacy, positioning Nairobi's women-led ventures as recognised actors within regional and global social innovation ecosystems. By grounding these relationships in reciprocity and shared purpose, women social entrepreneurs not only attract resources but also help to rewrite the norms governing inclusion, sustainability, and collective growth.

5.5 Summary and integration of findings

This chapter has traced how social entrepreneurship advances women's empowerment in Nairobi across economic, social, and psychological dimensions, revealing a process that is agency-led, network-enabled, and structurally negotiated. The findings show that empowerment takes shape not through resource abundance but through women's capacity to act with conviction, mobilise community-centred purpose, and convert limited means into meaningful enterprise. Across respondents, women social entrepreneurs draw on moral commitment, proximity to community need, and collective responsibility to initiate action long before significant capital becomes available. Economic empowerment deepens when income is translated into control, decision-making rights, asset accumulation, and bargaining power, rather than being measured solely by financial inflows. This shift from earning to deciding reflects a broader relational and structural transformation in which networks evolve into

leadership, and leadership consolidates into public voice. Early mastery, once publicly validated, expands women's access to partnerships, opportunities, and agenda-setting spaces, creating a reinforcing cycle in which action generates recognition and recognition unlocks further action.

Interpreted through the Capability Approach, empowerment becomes a process of expanding women's feasible sets by strengthening the conversion factors that allow them to turn resources into real freedoms. Clean technologies, childcare and sanitation services, financial literacy, digital storytelling, mentorship, and coalition infrastructures emerge as enabling mechanisms that widen opportunity. At the same time, patriarchal gatekeeping, unpaid care burdens, stigma, gender-based violence, and high evidentiary thresholds for investment function as restrictive conversion factors that narrow these possibilities. Hybrid value coupling, linking commercial revenue with measurable social impact, together with blended finance and brokerage portfolios, helps counteract these constraints, stabilising hybrid ventures and preserving mission integrity as they grow. Social capital and African feminist perspectives illuminate the cultural and relational negotiations through which empowerment becomes durable. Strategic sisterhood, reciprocity, and care ethics enable women to transform intimate, trust-based relationships into bridging and linking forms of legitimacy, granting access to institutional spaces historically closed to them. In settings where community trust has been eroded by extractive interventions or patriarchal histories, participatory design and consistent presence become essential for repairing legitimacy. In this sense, "care" and lived experience function as strategic leadership assets rather than private virtues, affirming African feminist claims that agency is relational, contextually negotiated, and embedded within community obligations.

Synthesising these insights reveals that empowerment typically begins with agency, women acting decisively despite constraint, and is sustained through hybrid business models,

diversified resourcing strategies, and boundary-spanning coalitions that convert individual mastery into collective and policy-level influence. Measuring empowerment purely through income obscures this deeper architecture; what matters is women's control over assets, decisions, and strategic choices. Programmes therefore need to invest explicitly in proof-of-concept development, build monitoring and quality-assurance systems into scale-up phases, and strengthen the social-infrastructure supports, childcare, safety, mentorship, and coalition-building, which allow women to translate personal initiative into durable institutional change.

The evidence demonstrates that social entrepreneurship in Nairobi operates simultaneously as an economic mechanism and as a social movement. Women social entrepreneurs turn constraints into innovation, transforming patriarchal limitations into platforms for leadership, solidarity, and voice. Through training, mentorship, diversification of resources, and cross-sector collaboration, they build enterprises that fuse profitability with purpose. In doing so, they reshape social roles, deepen community agency, and embed inclusive development within Kenya's evolving socio-economic fabric. These integrated findings lay the empirical and theoretical groundwork for the explanatory models and policy propositions developed in Chapters Six and Seven, which examine how institutional design, financing architecture, and social-infrastructure investment can translate women's entrepreneurial agency into system-wide empowerment and equitable growth.

Figure 5.3 summarises the chapter's findings by positioning empowerment as a cyclical, relational process rather than a linear journey. At its centre is agency, understood as the capacity to make and act on strategic choices. From this point, women navigate three interlinked pathways. Economically, they move from mobilising resources to expanding assets and exercising financial control. Socially, they transition from reliance on close networks to cultivating bridging and linking ties that open access to markets, partnerships, and policy

spaces. Psychologically, early successes, such as a pilot result or public recognition, strengthen self-efficacy and generate momentum through confidence and adaptive learning.

These pathways reinforce one another: financial control builds confidence and visibility; social capital unlocks new resources and influence; psychological resilience sustains participation despite constraints. Enablers such as mentorship, targeted training, blended finance, childcare, digital tools, and coalition support act as conversion factors that help women translate resources into achievements. Surrounding this process is a structural context shaped by gendered norms and scarcity but counterbalanced by collective agency and hybrid innovation. The model depicts empowerment as cumulative and practice-driven: women continuously expand their agency by navigating economic, social, and psychological dimensions, turning constraints into capabilities and gradually reshaping the systems around them.

Figure 5.3.: Interlocking Empowerment Trajectories among Nairobi's Women Social Entrepreneurs

EMPOWERMENT (Anchor Theory)
Resources → Agency → Achievements

ECONOMIC TRAJECTOR (Control & Resources)	**SOCIAL TRAJECTORY (Networks & Voice)**	**PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAJECTORY (Mastery & Self-Efficacy)**
• Agency-first activation • Decision rights & asset growth • Hybrid value coupling • Portfolio resourcing	• Bonding → Bridging → Linking networks build legitimacy • Leadership through lived expertise • Voice in community & policy	• Mastery → Validation → Opportunity loop • Public recognition builds confidence & visibility • Resilience & co-creation
Conversion Factors: - Access to finance - Childcare & mobility aids - Marketing linkages	**Conversion Factors:** - Mentorship & alliances - Trust infrastructure - Coalition platforms	**Conversion Factors:** - Training & feedback loops - Safe participation spaces - Digital storytelling
CROSS-CUTTING LENSES: Capability (Sen, 1999) – expands real freedoms; Social Capital (Putnam, 2000) – networks enable legitimacy; African Feminism (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004) – agency is relational and negotiated.		

Chapter Six: Factors contributing to social and economic empowerment of women social entrepreneurs in Kenya

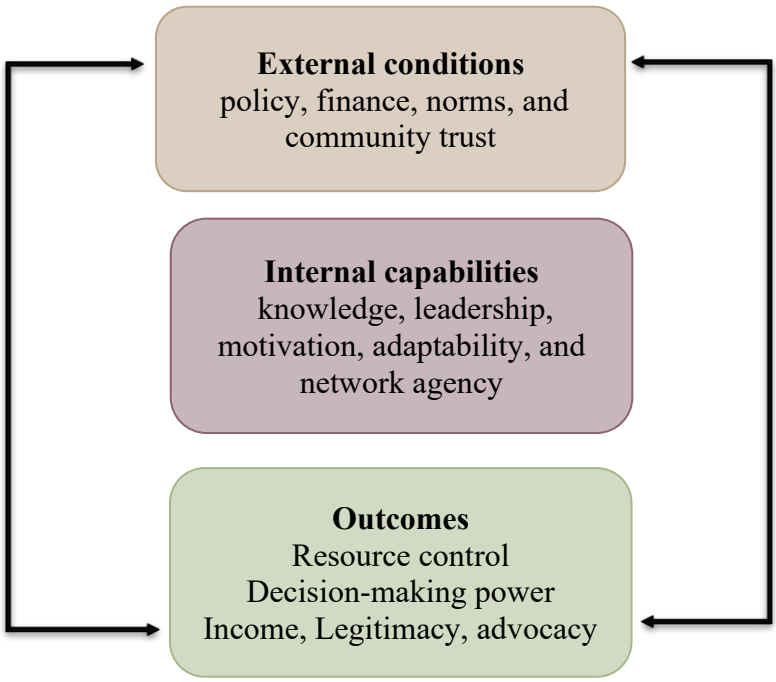
6.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the structural and relational conditions that shape how women social entrepreneurs in Kenya create, sustain, and scale empowerment. It shifts focus from individual venture narratives to the external and internal mechanisms that enable or constrain women's agency in founding and financing social enterprises. Empowerment here is treated not as a fixed endpoint but as a dynamic process arising at the intersection of institutional design and personal capability. Externally, policy and legal ambiguity, credit architecture, and socio-cultural norms determine the boundaries of possibility. Ambiguous registration systems, tax misfits, and the absence of a distinct legal category for social enterprises raise the entry threshold and constrain growth. Collateral-based lending and gendered risk heuristics exclude many women from formal finance, while community trust must often be earned through consistent, participatory engagement in contexts marked by fatigue or past extraction.

Internally, empowerment is sustained through adaptive capabilities, knowledge, leadership, motivation, and relational skill. Women social entrepreneurs cultivate context-specific expertise that de-risks execution, link purpose to advocacy, and institutionalise learning and adaptability as resistance strategies in volatile environments. Their moral and justice-oriented motivation fuels persistence beyond commercial logic, transforming entrepreneurship into an instrument of collective wellbeing and social repair. Empirical findings are organised in three layers. Section 6.1 analyses external conditions, policy, finance, norms, and trust, that structure women's room for manoeuvre. Section 6.2 examines internal capabilities, knowledge, leadership, adaptability, motivation, and networks, which mediate structural constraints. Section 6.3 synthesises outcomes, showing how empowerment

materialises through growth in resources, agency, and achievements, yet remains stratified by class, geography, and identity. Although the study primarily focuses on economic and social empowerment, the analysis also reveals political dimensions that emerged organically through women's engagement in advocacy, leadership, and public voice. These are discussed under Findings 6.12. Section 6.4 integrates these findings, refining the theoretical framework by demonstrating how empowerment emerges where enabling systems and adaptive capabilities align. Figure 6.1 illustrates this integrated mechanism: empowerment unfolds through the interaction of external conditions (policy, finance, norms, and community trust), internal capabilities (knowledge, leadership, motivation, adaptability, and network agency), and tangible outcomes (resources, agency, achievements). Vertical flows depict empowerment as cumulative, while feedback loops show how outcomes, credibility, income, and advocacy, feed back into systemic transformation, reinforcing the empowerment cycle.

Figure 6.1: Integrated Empowerment Mechanism: External × Internal × Outcome Dynamics



6.1 Findings - External conditions impacting women social entrepreneurs in Kenya

Women's social entrepreneurship in Kenya unfolds within a layered external environment where formal rules, financial systems, socio-cultural norms, market practices, and community-trust dynamics collectively expand, or compress, women's room for manoeuvre. Consistent with Moriggi's (2020) observation that policy frameworks, economic systems, and local norms can both enable and constrain, this study finds that these forces rarely act in isolation. Instead, they interact dynamically, generating cumulative frictions or compounding advantages depending on women's positionality, resources, and networks of access. Policy and legal architecture. Ambiguity around legal identity and fragmented administrative procedures, spanning registration, taxation, and county–national coordination, raise both entry and growth costs for women-led social enterprises (Finding 6.1). Where regulatory frameworks obscure rights and responsibilities, women's decision power and public voice are muted, producing an empowerment loss (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Conversely, clear, and predictable legal status, coupled with streamlined procedures, broadens feasible sets for contracting, hiring, and investment, consistent with the Capability Approach's emphasis on real freedoms (Sen, 1999).

Finance architecture. Collateral-heavy lending, gendered risk stereotyping, and weak last-mile outreach continue to exclude capable borrowers from formal credit (Finding 6.2). While mobile-money systems and *chama* networks enhance liquidity and transactional autonomy, they rarely finance asset accumulation or enterprise scale-up. Without control over financial resources, agency remains throttled (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). In contrast, cash-flow-based products, guarantee schemes, and blended-finance instruments would expand women's choice sets by recognising repayment discipline and social-performance credibility (Sen, 1999). Socio-cultural norms and intersectionality. Patriarchal and ableist norms, intersecting with class, age, and ethnicity, erode women's legitimacy in banks, registries, and markets, depressing bargaining power, and price realisation (Finding 6.3). Social-capital and

African feminist lenses illuminate how recognition, relational accountability, and community standing operate as preconditions for agency and inclusion (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020). Market and administrative practice. Routine interactions within financial institutions and public registries often redirect recognition away from women decision-makers, constraining access to procurement, licensing, and supplier networks (Finding 6.4). Such biases are not marginal irritants but systemic distortions. Embedding anti-bias standards, gender-responsive procurement scoring, and inclusive service design represents a crucial structural lever for reform.

Community trust and infrastructure. In communities fatigued by extractive or short-term interventions, legitimacy follows demonstration and participation rather than rhetoric. Cadence, transparency, and co-production thus "buy" the right to operate and scale (Finding 6.5). Moreover, access infrastructure, transport, data, disability-friendly facilities, and translation, determines who can reach training, markets, and networks, thereby shaping capability formation at the neighbourhood level (Findings 6.3, 6.5). External conditions constitute not a passive backdrop but an active field of power that structures women's opportunities to found, finance, and legitimise social enterprises. The subsections that follow unpack these dynamics through Findings 6.1–6.5, integrating Empowerment Theory as the anchor, the Capability Approach as the explanatory frame, and Social-capital and African feminist perspectives as nested lenses to specify how policy and practice can convert friction into momentum (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020; Moriggi, 2020).

Table 6.1: External enablers and constraints for women social entrepreneurs in Kenya

Dimension	Constraint Mechanism	Enabling Levers / Capability Expansion
Policy & Legal Architecture	Fragmented registration, tax misfit, absence of legal identity for SEs	Streamlined registration, social-purpose tax incentives, and legal recognition expand decision rights and legitimacy
Finance Architecture	Collateral-heavy lending, gendered risk heuristics, weak outreach to public funds	Cash-flow–based credit, guarantee schemes, and integration of *chama* repayment histories widen access and choice
Socio-Cultural Norms & Intersectionality	Patriarchal and ableist norms depress legitimacy and bargaining power	Recognition, relational accountability, and peer validation restore agency and price fairness
Market & Administrative Practice	Procedural bias and gendered misrecognition in procurement and registries	Anti-bias standards, inclusive service design, and gender-responsive procurement open formal markets
Community Trust & Infrastructure	Mistrust, project fatigue, and limited physical/digital access	Co-creation, participatory feedback loops, and proximity-based design build sustained legitimacy and adoption

Finding 6.1: Policy and legal ambiguity enable selective gains but systematically constrain women-led social enterprises.

Policy and legal ambiguity creates a dual reality for women-led social enterprises in Nairobi, offering occasional flexibility while more consistently imposing structural frictions that slow enterprise growth. Participants described an initiation landscape marked by procedural opacity, fragmented institutional responsibilities, and inconsistent guidance. What should be a straightforward administrative sequence instead becomes a test of stamina and social connections. As one founder explained, “You walk into Huduma Centre… then County, then KRA, it feels like a maze” (WSE17, personal interview, 9 October 2023). This bureaucratic labyrinth privileges those with insider knowledge or relational capital, enabling a minority to glide through the process while most women social entrepreneurs experience delays and fatigue at the very point when momentum is most fragile. These inconsistencies persist

long after registration. Women social entrepreneurs repeatedly noted that regulatory frameworks do not account for hybrid organisational forms, forcing social enterprises into misaligned categories. “We get taxed like a profit-making business, yet most of our services are subsidised,” observed WSE5 (personal interview, 16 November 2023). Others highlighted the absence of an appropriate legal identity altogether: “There’s no legal category for what we do… that uncertainty makes it hard to grow” (WSE16, personal interview, 2 November 2023). Without a recognised policy home, social enterprises operate in a grey zone, subject to commercial tax enforcement yet excluded from nonprofit benefits or procurement pathways designed to support public-good providers. In response, some women social entrepreneurs rely on relational brokerage to navigate this ambiguity, engaging local administrators, ward leaders, and informal networks to secure clarity or discretionary accommodations. As WSE36 explained, “We actively engage local leaders, so policies reflect our realities” (personal interview, 28 November 2023). While such strategies occasionally mitigate friction, they rely on social capital and negotiation skills that are unevenly distributed. The result is a system in which adaptive capacity, not the merits of an enterprise, determines access to clarity, compliance, and growth.

Analytically, fragmented administrative procedures and the absence of a clear legal identity depress empowerment by constraining women’s decision authority and limiting their ability to claim institutional legitimacy (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, opaque governance systems shrink feasible action sets by embedding uncertainty into daily operations and planning (Sen, 1999). Conversely, the establishment of a distinct, predictable legal status would expand real opportunities for contracting, hiring, and investment, transforming compliance from a burden into a capability. Viewed through social-capital and African feminist lenses, relational brokerage operates as a compensatory mechanism. Women mobilise personal ties with chiefs, ward administrators, and county

officers to navigate exclusionary bureaucracies (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020). This relational labour, though adaptive and often effective, reveals a deeper structural deficit: women must continuously negotiate recognition instead of being institutionally acknowledged as legitimate actors within rule-based systems.

Implications for practice. Establish a dedicated legal category for social enterprises to clarify registration, taxation, and reporting obligations; align tax policy with social-purpose reinvestment to prevent double burdening; and operationalise single-window registration through county–national compacts that include women social-enterprise coalitions in oversight structures. Such reforms would reduce entry friction, stabilise compliance, and embed legitimacy within predictable governance systems, key enablers of sustained empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Finding 6.2: Credit design and collateral norms exclude women; informal finance and mobile tools only partially close the gap.

Formal credit systems in Kenya remain structurally exclusionary, shaped by lending practices and risk heuristics that implicitly privilege asset ownership and male-coded credibility. Women social entrepreneurs repeatedly described commercial banks as spaces where eligibility is assessed through criteria few women can meet. “Banks still ask for title deeds… things many women don’t have,” noted WSE12 (personal interview, 24 November 2023). Even when documentation exists, perception barriers persist. As WSE27 explained, “Access to credit is a major obstacle… we’re seen as high-risk” (personal interview, 10 October 2023). Public credit programmes, such as Uwezo Fund and the Women Enterprise Fund, are highly visible in policy discourse yet largely inaccessible in practice. Many respondents characterised them as symbolic rather than substantive. “We hear about them, but no one in our network has actually accessed the funds,” remarked WSE9 (personal interview, 20 November 2023). This gap between policy design and lived experience reinforces a two-tier

system in which formal capital exists in theory but remains functionally out of reach for most women-led enterprises. In this vacuum, women turn to collective finance systems, *chamas*, rotating savings groups, and informal lending circles, which operate on trust, reciprocity, and shared obligation. "*Chamas* provide credit and mutual support," explained WSE2 (personal interview, 4 October 2023). These mechanisms, often supplemented by mobile-money platforms, enable liquidity, support daily operations, and cushion short-term shocks. Yet their scale is inherently limited. They rarely provide the capital required for machinery, formal staffing, product development, or regional expansion.

Restricted access to affordable and appropriate credit throttles empowerment by limiting women's control over strategic financial decisions and investment trajectories (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, collateral-heavy lending, and gendered risk stereotyping function as negative conversion factors, shrinking feasible action sets and perpetuating dependency (Sen, 1999). In contrast, *chamas* and peer-based lending systems exemplify social capital as compensatory infrastructure, mobilising trust, reciprocity, and informal enforcement to offset institutional exclusion (Putnam, 2000). Through the African feminist lenses, these adaptive finance systems illustrate relational accountability and communal survival logics within structurally biased markets (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Introduce cash-flow–based lending and gender-responsive guarantee schemes to broaden eligibility; integrate *chama* savings and repayment histories into digital credit scoring systems; and institutionalise county-level women's enterprise hubs to onboard women into public finance schemes. These measures would transform relational finance into verifiable credit histories, converting social proof into institutional creditworthiness. Doing so bridges to Finding 6.3, which examines how human and social

capital reinforce enterprise momentum and sustain empowerment once financial access improves.

Finding 6.3: Human and social capital, especially cohorts and *chamas*, convert intent into organisational momentum, but access is uneven.

Human and social capital, expressed through training programmes, fellowships, mentorship, and *chamas*, play a decisive role in translating entrepreneurial intent into organisational capability and public legitimacy. Many women social entrepreneurs traced their turning points to structured exposure or guided learning. “These training opportunities completely changed my approach. It’s not just about having a passion; it’s about learning the skills to run a sustainable social enterprise,” explained WSE22 (personal interview, 7 January 2024). Peer-based ecosystems and fellowship networks further accelerate this trajectory by widening access to ideas, collaborators, and institutional gatekeepers. “Meeting like-minded people opened countless doors,” affirmed WSE2 (personal interview, 4 October 2023). Through such environments, women acquire not only technical competencies but also symbolic capital, credibility, visibility, and recognition, which strengthens their position when engaging funders, policymakers, or community stakeholders. Yet access to these learning and mentorship infrastructures remains uneven. Geography, class, and digital divides mediate who benefits. “Most trainings are in town or online, women without fare or smartphones are left out,” observed WSE19 (personal interview, 10 February 2024). These disparities reproduce centre–periphery hierarchies, concentrating exposure, mentorship, and partnership opportunities among Nairobi-based or digitally connected women social entrepreneurs while marginalising rural and peri-urban women.

Human and social capital function as capability multipliers. Training and mentorship expand women’s decision scope and organisational authority, core elements of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000), while dense networks of trust reduce transaction costs and

uncertainty, widening feasible action sets (Sen, 1999). Cohorts and *chamas* embody social capital in motion: through trust, reciprocity, and shared learning, they transform isolation into relational infrastructure that sustains motivation and accountability (Putnam, 2000). Through African feminist perspectives, these networks revalue care, mutual recognition, and interdependence as structural preconditions for capability formation, particularly where formal systems neglect or devalue women's contributions (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Fund neighbourhood-proximate training cohorts with transport and data stipends to bridge digital and spatial divides; pair graduates with anchor-buyer or donor linkages to convert capability into contracts; and institutionalise peer-mentorship ladders that preserve learning continuity and belonging. These interventions localise capability formation, democratise access to growth pathways, and build inclusive talent pipelines. They also set the stage for Finding 6.4, which examines how patriarchal and intersectional biases continue to mediate legitimacy and market access for women social entrepreneurs.

Finding 6.4: Patriarchal norms and intersectional bias corrode legitimacy and market power; credibility must be earned repeatedly

Patriarchal norms and intersectional bias persist as invisible taxes on women's legitimacy within markets, financial institutions, and administrative systems. Women social entrepreneurs described recurring disbelief and dismissal in routine professional encounters. "Kenya is a patriarchal society… gender issues still come into play," noted WSE13 (personal interview, 7 November 2023). For many, recognition is routinely redirected to male counterparts. As WSE32 explained, "The bank officer spoke to my husband instead of me" (personal interview, 20 December 2023). Others recounted more explicit institutional gatekeeping: "I was asked if I had permission from my husband to register the business," recalled WSE24 (personal interview, 4 January 2024). These gendered frictions rarely operate

alone; they intersect with class, age, disability, and ethnicity to produce compounded exclusion. “People assume I can’t run a business because I use a wheelchair,” shared WSE7 (personal interview, 16 November 2023). Such layered biases function cumulatively across the ecosystem, banks, registration offices, procurement desks, and local administrations, depressing bargaining power, raising transaction costs, and forcing women to repeatedly justify their legitimacy even when their credentials and track records are clear.

Recognition itself functions as an enabling resource within Empowerment Theory; when withheld, women’s agency and decision authority contract, limiting both voice and achievement (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, patriarchal scripts and ableist assumptions operate as negative conversion factors, determining who is perceived as credible or contract-worthy and thus shrinking feasible action sets (Sen, 1999). Social-capital and African feminist lenses reveal how counter-publics, peer solidarity, and “strategic sisterhood” rebuild legitimacy through reciprocal accountability rather than external validation, transforming care, mutual recognition, and lived experience into instruments of resistance (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Mandate anti-bias protocols and transparent audit trails in banks, registries, and procurement offices; invest in disability-inclusive infrastructure and service design; and establish preferential procurement pipelines for women-led social enterprises. Institutionalising recognition safeguards and bias audits would raise baseline legitimacy, reduce credibility fatigue, and position women’s ventures as credible market actors. These measures directly lay the foundation for Finding 6.5, which explores how community trust and participatory legitimacy further influence women’s capacity to sustain empowerment gains.

Findings 6.5: Community trust is path dependent; consistent, participatory engagement is the price of entry and scale.

In communities marked by development fatigue and unfulfilled project promises, legitimacy cannot be claimed, it must be earned. Women social entrepreneurs repeatedly stressed that trust is the gateway to participation, uptake, and long-term engagement. "We must keep reminding them our organisation is different," explained WSE36 (personal interview, 28 November 2023). Demonstration precedes adoption, particularly in settings where communities have been over-surveyed and under-served. As WSE21 observed, "Changing attitudes takes time… gradual impact through engagement is essential" (personal interview, 20 December 2023). Gendered expectations further complicate these dynamics, shaping how women's expertise is valued and negotiated. "Some clients think because I'm a woman, I should charge less," noted WSE8 (personal interview, 7 November 2023). Such assumptions heighten the relational labour required of women social entrepreneurs. To secure credibility that male peers often inherit by default, women routinely invest in extensive trust-building practices, attending community barazas, making home visits, demonstrating product reliability, and co-designing solutions with users.

Participatory engagement enhances both individual and collective decision power, reinforcing women's ability to negotiate influence and shared control (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, trust operates as a conversion factor that transforms resources, products, and services into community-valued outcomes (Sen, 1999). Social-capital theory explains this process as the gradual transformation of bonding ties (local familiarity) into bridging and linking trust, which in turn underpins legitimacy and scale (Putnam, 2000). From an African feminist perspective, relational accountability, transparency, and care are not ancillary to leadership but constitutive of it, redefining what authority and legitimacy look like within gendered social orders (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Institutionalise participatory governance through community advisory boards, periodic feedback loops, and transparent progress dashboards. Publish clear service standards and pricing policies to counter gendered undervaluation and allocate explicit time and budget for demonstration phases prior to scaling operations. These measures convert trust into institutional infrastructure, transforming credibility from a fragile personal asset into a shared, system-level capability. They also bridge directly to Section 6.2, which examines the internal capabilities that sustain empowerment once such external trust foundations are in place.

6.2 Findings - Internal factors influencing women's empowerment

Women social entrepreneurs mobilise a constellation of internal capabilities, knowledge, purpose, leadership, adaptability, motivation, resilience, and network-building, which determine how effectively they navigate, and often reshape, external constraints. These are not innate traits but cultivated competences, developed through experience, community engagement, and deliberate reflection. In line with African feminist thought, such capabilities are relational and negotiated rather than purely individual endowments (Amadiume, 2017; Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020). Anchored in Empowerment Theory, these internal factors expand women's control over decisions, resources, and narratives (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Through the Capability Approach, they function as conversion enablers that transform resources into achievements, translating opportunity into agency and agency into outcomes (Sen, 1999). The Social Capital and African feminist lenses clarify that these capabilities are sustained through relational labour, trust, reciprocity, and care, which bind individual resilience to collective wellbeing (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020). The data reveal five interlocking internal drivers of empowerment among women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi. Knowledge and context-specific expertise, blending formal education, experiential learning, and indigenous understanding, de-risk implementation and

improve cultural alignment. Purpose and advocacy orientation integrate social mission with institutional change, translating lived injustice into influence and voice. Leadership and adaptability transform volatility into capability through reflexive governance and continuous learning. Motivation and resilience, grounded in care and justice, sustain persistence beyond commercial incentives. Finally, network-building agency enables the strategic activation of peer, buyer, and institutional ties, converting intent into organisational momentum and legitimacy.

These internal drivers mediate the relationship between structure and agency. They magnify or mitigate external frictions: knowledge and purpose heighten efficacy; leadership and adaptability sustain viability under uncertainty; motivation and networks preserve legitimacy and continuity. Empowerment thus emerges where internal capabilities intersect with enabling systems, a synthesis explored in Findings 6.6–6.9, which trace how these internal levers interact to generate durable empowerment gains.

Findings 6.6: Context-specific knowledge (formal, experiential, indigenous) is a core production asset that de-risks execution.

Context-specific knowledge, combining formal education, lived experience, and indigenous insight, emerges as a primary productive asset that de-risks design, implementation, and scale. Women social entrepreneurs consistently described how formal training sharpens managerial discipline and strategic planning. “With my postgraduate degree in organisational development, I’ve been able to manage agricultural logistics effectively,” explained WSE1 (personal interview, 4 December 2023). Experiential proximity, by contrast, grounds interventions in the social and cultural realities of the communities they serve. As WSE5 noted, “My proximity to the community allowed me to identify gaps that external interventions often overlook” (personal interview, 16 November 2023). This embeddedness also enhances cultural legitimacy and ease of adoption: “Being part of the community made interventions culturally

accepted," added WSE17 (personal interview, 9 October 2023). These layers of knowledge shorten feedback loops, align interventions with cultural and institutional logics, and raise adoption and success rates. They transform uncertainty into competence, allowing women-led ventures to adapt nimbly to shifting markets and regulatory environments while maintaining community legitimacy.

From the perspective of Empowerment Theory, context-specific knowledge enlarges women's decision authority and strategic control, key dimensions of agency and self-determination (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, it functions as a positive conversion factor, translating abstract skills into situated problem-solving and thereby expanding feasible action sets (Sen, 1999). Social Capital and African feminist interpretations further reveal how embedded, relational knowledge resists epistemic marginalisation by validating women's experiential and community-based expertise as legitimate sources of authority in policy and practice arenas (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Fund practice-led research and development that centres indigenous and experiential knowledge; create procurement preferences for locally grounded innovations; and institutionalise community advisory boards for iterative field testing and design refinement. These measures codify tacit insight into organisational learning routines, strengthen implementation fidelity, and prepare women-led enterprises for the advocacy interface explored in Finding 6.7.

Finding 6.7: Entrepreneurial purpose blends operations with advocacy, translating lived injustice into institutional change agendas.

For many women social entrepreneurs in this study, entrepreneurship and advocacy are inseparable. Running a social enterprise is simultaneously an act of service delivery and a sustained challenge to unjust systems. As one participant explained, "Overseeing operations and advocating for better policies… is a balancing act" (WSE12, personal interview, 24

November 2023). Others described establishing their ventures precisely to address institutional voids that conventional actors had overlooked. “I began this organisation to fill a policy and capacity gap for grassroots women,” noted WSE24 (personal interview, 9 December 2023). Immersion in the day-to-day realities of enterprise work becomes a form of continuous civic education, shaping women social entrepreneurs’ understanding of structural constraints and informing their advocacy. As WSE13 put it, “Being immersed… is an ongoing education” (personal interview, 18 January 2024). This fusion of enterprise and advocacy transforms social entrepreneurship from a vehicle of service provision into an instrument of institutional reform. Women social entrepreneurs convert operational frictions, procurement bottlenecks, regulatory blind spots, or gendered bias, into actionable policy evidence. Their ventures become living laboratories through which women gather data, articulate systemic constraints, and engage decision-makers with grounded insight. In doing so, personal, and organisational experiences are reframed as policy intelligence, turning local struggles into catalysts for broader reform.

Viewed through Empowerment Theory, this represents an upward movement from agency within institutions to agency over institutions, expanding women’s decision power, agenda-setting authority, and political voice (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, advocacy widens collective choice sets by altering the institutional parameters that define what communities can access and achieve (Sen, 1999). Social Capital provides the connective tissue: bonding ties within *chamas* and peer cohorts consolidate experience into shared data, while bridging and linking ties transmit this intelligence to policy and market arenas (Putnam, 2000). African feminist interpretations illuminate the transformative dimension, this is counter-hegemonic labour, reclaiming space for women’s lived expertise and asserting recognition, care, and accountability in decision-making structures historically closed to them (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Embed policy-literacy and advocacy training in accelerator curricula to prepare women social entrepreneurs for the dual operational-advocacy role. Create formal seats for women's social-enterprise coalitions in county and national consultative forums. Resource "practice-to-policy" pipelines, rapid-learning memos, participatory dashboards, and evidence briefs, that systematically channel on-the-ground insights into institutional change. These measures strengthen the capacity of women-led ventures to influence systemic design and set the stage for Finding 6.8, which explores how leadership and adaptability sustain this dual mandate amid volatility and reform fatigue.

Finding 6.8: Leadership and adaptability operate as resistance strategies that keep ventures viable under volatility

Leadership and adaptability emerge as intertwined resistance strategies that enable women-led social enterprises to withstand policy ambiguity, market volatility, and fluctuating donor or regulatory environments. Women social entrepreneurs consistently described leadership as a catalyst for both competence and collective confidence. "I mentor and train young and upcoming social entrepreneurs," explained WSE1 (personal interview, 4 December 2023), framing leadership as an ethic of guidance and reciprocity rather than a hierarchical position. Adaptability, meanwhile, is understood as a core survival capability, an organisational reflex shaped by uncertainty. As WSE17 observed, "You must think on your feet… the rules change constantly" (personal interview, 9 October 2023). These practices convert volatility into learning and safeguard legitimacy when formal systems falter. Iterative governance routines, after-action reviews, mentorship ladders, and shared decision rules, allow women social entrepreneurs to absorb shocks without mission drift. By redistributing authority and embedding reflection into their operational DNA, they transform leadership from a personal trait into an organisational infrastructure. Adaptability, in turn, becomes both an economic and psychological buffer, allowing ventures to pivot without abandoning their social purpose.

Viewed through Empowerment Theory, distributed leadership expands decision power and collective agency, reinforcing women's capacity to co-govern and sustain participation in strategic choices (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, adaptability functions as a dynamic conversion factor that transforms external shocks into redesigned opportunities, widening feasible choice sets under uncertainty (Sen, 1999). The Social Capital lens clarifies how trust, reciprocity, and shared norms within teams and peer networks translate into coordinated resilience and continuity (Putnam, 2000). From African feminist perspectives, these adaptive routines mirror long-standing survival practices rooted in care, cooperation, and relational accountability, strategies that ensure continuity in environments marked by structural neglect and volatility (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Institutionalise lightweight learning systems, after-action reviews, scenario drills, and premortems, to turn adaptation into routine learning rather than reactive crisis management. Embed mentorship ladders within women's social enterprise networks to secure leadership succession and peer accountability. Develop decision guardrails, clear delegation maps, and rapid-response protocols, to make adaptation both swift and principled. These organisational capacities underpin the motivational engines detailed in Finding 6.9, where purpose, care, and justice sustain agency amid slow feedback cycles and social discounting.

Finding 6.9: Personal motivations rooted in care and justice fuel persistence beyond commercial incentives

Across participants, women social entrepreneurs anchor their persistence in moral purpose rather than commercial reward. Ventures are consistently framed as extensions of ethical commitments to care, justice, and equity, work animated by a sense of obligation to community rather than the pursuit of profit. As WSE3 explained, "It's not just about selling a product, it's about changing how communities value women's voices" (personal interview, 11 November

2023). For others, motivation is explicitly autobiographical, rooted in familial histories and lived injustice. “I started this because women like my mother were overlooked,” reflected WSE27 (personal interview, 3 October 2023), illustrating how personal memory becomes institutional mission. Catalytic experiences further reinforce this moral compass. Exposure to programmes such as Youth AWAKE or the Ashoka East Africa Fellowship deepens direction, legitimacy, and conviction. “These experiences gave me direction and conviction to keep going,” noted WSE1 (personal interview, 4 December 2023). Across interviews, persistence is sustained not by market incentives but by a values-driven determination to redress inequity, transforming individual purpose into collective empowerment. These convictions sustain commitment through slow feedback cycles, scarce funding, and social undervaluation. They convert adversity into moral stamina and legitimacy, allowing women social entrepreneurs to maintain direction when commercial incentives wane. Purpose coherence not only sustains the individual but also attracts allies, mentors, and funders who identify with shared values, anchoring credibility in moral rather than financial capital.

Viewed through Empowerment Theory, meaning reinforces self-efficacy and perseverance, expanding women’s decision power, resilience, and role scope within their enterprises and communities (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). The Capability Approach interprets moral motivation as the alignment between enterprise objectives and “valued beings and doings,” thereby enlarging the feasible set of actions women find intrinsically worthwhile (Sen, 1999). From Social Capital and African feminist perspectives, an ethic of care transforms social ties into mutual support systems: cooperation, mentorship, and reciprocity reproduce collective endurance and reaffirm dignity as a shared achievement (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Integrate mission–model fit diagnostics into incubation and coaching programmes to ensure coherence between social purpose and revenue logic. Within

funding due diligence, account for care-work externalities by embedding flexible milestones and extended outcome windows that match the gradual tempo of social adoption. Codify founder-purpose narratives in coalition briefs to translate personal motivation into institutional partnerships and advocacy legitimacy. These moral and motivational engines anchor the multidimensional empowerment outcomes elaborated in Finding 6.10.

6.3 Findings - Outcomes of women's social entrepreneurship

This section synthesises the multidimensional outcomes generated by women-led social enterprises in Nairobi, tracing how economic, social, and psychological gains materialise, and why they remain uneven across social groups. Empowerment manifests through three interlinked domains: resources (capital, skills, and networks), agency (decision power, leadership scope, and civic voice), and achievements (income stability, employment creation, and community reinvestment).

Analysed through Empowerment Theory, these outcomes represent measurable expansions in women's control over assets and strategic choices (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, they mark the widening of real opportunity sets, showing how resources translate into valued functionings and freedoms (Sen, 1999). Social capital and African feminist perspectives reveal the relational infrastructure, trust, reciprocity, and negotiated agency, through which these outcomes are sustained and made socially legitimate (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020). Yet the data also underscore persistent stratification. Gains cluster among women social entrepreneurs with prior education, urban proximity, and digital access, while rural, disabled, and younger women face thinner opportunity pathways. The analysis that follows, developed through Findings 6.10–6.12, maps these differentiated outcomes, identifies the mechanisms through which empowerment is realised or stalled, and outlines policy and measurement implications for equitable scaling.

Finding 6.10: Outcomes are real, resources, agency, and income grow, but remain stratified; intersectional gaps persist.

Women-led social enterprises in Nairobi generate tangible empowerment outcomes that span economic, social, and psychological domains. Participants described gains that were not merely financial but relational and strategic centring on greater control over resources, expanded decision-making authority, and enhanced community influence. “Once I could show impact, local investors began to trust my work,” explained WSE28 (personal interview, 17 January 2024), highlighting how demonstrated value converts into credibility and market access. For others, empowerment took the form of autonomy and values-aligned agency. “Now I make decisions aligned with my values,” reflected WSE21 (personal interview, 20 December 2023), signalling a shift from constrained participation to self-directed leadership. Economic stability further reinforced this trajectory. “I now earn a stable income and have hired four women,” noted WSE16 (personal interview, 14 December 2023), illustrating how personal empowerment cascades into job creation and broader community benefit. However, these outcomes are stratified. Women with higher education, urban residence, or prior institutional networks translate social entrepreneurship into legitimacy, policy access, and credit faster than those without. Structural asymmetries, patriarchal norms, ableism, geographic isolation, and class hierarchy, continue to determine who scales, who stabilises, and who stalls. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2013) illuminates how overlapping identities such as gender, age, disability, and class interact to shape women’s access to opportunity and their experience of empowerment.

From an Empowerment Theory perspective, these results confirm measurable gains in control over assets and decision authority, yet they also expose fragility where enabling systems remain uneven (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, women’s feasible sets expand where resources are paired with recognition and institutional

support but remain constrained where negative conversion factors, such as bias, distance, or digital exclusion, persist (Sen, 1999). Social capital and African feminist lenses explain why empowerment diffuses unevenly: trust, reciprocity, and collective legitimacy must be institutionalised, not assumed (Putnam, 2000; Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

a) Enhanced access to resources

A central outcome of social entrepreneurship in Nairobi is the expansion of women's access to financial, human, and social capital. Women social entrepreneurs who previously faced structural exclusion now secure funding, training, and strategic networks that were once inaccessible. As WSE28 reflected, "When I first started, getting a loan was impossible… Now I have local investors who trust my work" (personal interview, 17 January 2024). Training programmes similarly strengthen women's human capital, with WSE22 noting that "These training opportunities completely changed my approach. It's not just about passion, it's about learning the skills to run a sustainable enterprise" (personal interview, 7 January 2024). Such experiences highlight how capability expansion becomes an early and enduring outcome of social entrepreneurship. Yet access is far from uniform. Rural and low-income women continue to face barriers to training and mentorship due to transport costs, digital exclusion, and the urban concentration of support programmes. "Most of the trainings are in town or online, women with no fare or smartphones are left out," explained WSE19 (personal interview, 10 February 2024). WSE28, based in Kangemi, echoed this inequity: "I learned through trial and error. Government officers don't come here unless it's election time" (personal interview, 17 January 2024). These narratives reflect ongoing centre–periphery divides, reinforcing African feminist critiques that empowerment opportunities often track existing hierarchies of class, location, and visibility.

Social capital provides partial mitigation. Peer networks and mentorship circles allow some women to offset institutional gaps and build alternative pathways into opportunity.

"Meeting like-minded people opened countless doors," recalled WSE2 (personal interview, 4 October 2023). However, even these networks are stratified: women social entrepreneurs with urban proximity, digital access, or elite affiliations more easily tap into donor and fellowship ecosystems than those in informal settlements or rural areas. The resulting uneven landscape underscores that while social entrepreneurship expands resource access, it simultaneously reveals the structural inequities that shape who participates, who benefits, and who remains on the margins.

b) Expansion of agency

Agency, the capacity to make strategic choices and act upon them, emerges as both outcome and enabler of empowerment. "Before, I felt like I had little say in the way things were run… Now, I make decisions aligned with my values and aspirations," said WSE21 (personal interview, 20 December 2023). Social entrepreneurship transforms women from passive participants to decision-makers, shifting control over resources and direction of change. Still, agency is not uniform. African feminist theorists caution that structural hierarchies continue to mediate who can exercise voice and autonomy (Mama, 2001). As WSE18 reflected, "Through my enterprise, my voice suddenly counted in policy discussions… People listened differently when I spoke not just for myself but for my community." This relational agency aligns with the Capability Approach, where empowerment expands freedoms to achieve what one values (Sen, 1999), and with intersectionality theory, which recognises that agency is layered and context-specific (Crenshaw, 2013).

c) Tangible achievements in income and community development

Financial independence and community reinvestment represent visible outcomes of women's social entrepreneurship. "Before founding my enterprise, I struggled to support my family. Now I earn a stable income and have hired four other women," stated WSE16 (personal interview, 14 December 2023). Economic stability fosters social dividends: families gain

security, and communities benefit from local employment and reinvestment. These achievements, however, remain uneven. Women with disabilities, older entrepreneurs, and those in rural regions face limited access to digital tools, credit, and markets. As WSE6 explained, “For me, it’s not just about profit, it’s about sustainable income that lets me reinvest in my community. That is real financial independence.” This sentiment reflects African feminist calls for collective empowerment models that prioritise shared prosperity over individual success (Amadiume, 2017; Nnaemeka, 2003). Empirical evidence affirms that women’s social entrepreneurship in Kenya expands access to capital, skills, and networks; strengthens agency and leadership; and produces tangible economic and community benefits. Yet, these outcomes remain stratified by intersecting social hierarchies. Empowerment Theory and the Capability Approach converge on the principle that control, and freedom must co-evolve resources are insufficient without recognition, and achievements remain fragile without structural inclusion. African feminist insights reinforce that empowerment must be collective, contextually negotiated, and relationally sustained.

Implications for practice. Convert uneven gains into shared empowerment through intersectional inclusion frameworks. Target rural wards, women with disabilities, and younger or older women social entrepreneurs with tailored finance, training, and procurement incentives. Publish gender- and intersectionality-disaggregated dashboards to track who benefits and how. Integrate cash-flow–based lending, guarantee facilities, and procurement bonuses for verified social impact. These interventions would transform local empowerment into systemic equity, bridging directly to Finding 6.11, which examines how networks and collective action translate individual gains into community-wide empowerment.

Finding 6.11: Networks and collective action translate individual empowerment into systemic change

As individual confidence and capability consolidate, women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi increasingly channel personal empowerment into collective action, transforming isolated gains into institutional and policy influence. “After our organisation joined a coalition, we stopped working in silos and started shaping the conversation with government,” explained WSE24 (personal interview, 9 December 2023). Others described similar shifts from project-focused work to coordinated advocacy: “We formed a network of sanitation entrepreneurs to advocate for inclusive procurement, alone we were ignored, but as a group, we got a seat at the table” (WSE36, personal interview, 28 November 2023). Participation in associations, networks, and accelerator programmes amplifies this effect by widening visibility, creating structured learning exchanges, and enhancing bargaining power. As WSE1 reflected, “Collaborating with others through the Social Enterprise Network opened up learning exchanges, mentorship, and funding leads I could never access alone” (personal interview, 4 December 2023). Through these alliance, collective structures convert private legitimacy into public leverage. Through joint advocacy briefs, shared training programmes, and co-branded events, these networks articulate a unified agenda that legitimises women as credible economic and civic actors. They also serve as safety nets, sharing knowledge, pooling resources, and redistributing opportunities within the ecosystem. Over time, coalitions reconfigure how credibility and voice are distributed, embedding women’s leadership into the architecture of Kenya’s social-enterprise landscape.

Viewed through Empowerment Theory, collective action represents the final stage in the resource–agency–achievement sequence: it scales individual decision power into institutional influence and collective control (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Within the Capability Approach, coalitions expand the feasible set not only for individuals but for communities, turning scattered capacities into coordinated freedoms (Sen, 1999). The Social-capital lens clarifies this mechanism: bonding trust within cohorts evolves into bridging and

linking ties that open policy and funding arenas (Putnam, 2000). African feminist perspectives further recast collaboration as relational agency in motion, strategic sisterhood that transforms care and reciprocity into political and economic capital (Mama, 2001; Tamale, 2020).

Implications for practice. Institutionalise women-SE networks at county and national levels with formal consultative status in policymaking; fund coalition grants and peer-to-peer mentorship exchanges; and create pooled procurement and co-financing mechanisms that operationalise trust as infrastructure. Recognising and resourcing these collective architectures ensures that empowerment moves beyond individual enterprise success toward structural transformation, laying the empirical and conceptual foundation for the synthesis presented in Section 6.4 and Chapter 7.

Finding 6.12: Political empowerment and public voice

This section examines the political dimensions of empowerment that emerged through women's engagement in social entrepreneurship. While the study's core focus was on economic and social outcomes, the narratives of several participants revealed an expanded form of agency that extended into the civic and policy arenas. Political empowerment, in this context, refers to women's enhanced capacity to participate in collective decision-making, influence public processes, and engage in advocacy beyond the enterprise sphere. Participants described experiences in which entrepreneurial legitimacy translated into public recognition and confidence to engage with governance structures. "We began to speak at county meetings, not just listen," explained WSE12 (personal interview, 24 November 2023), signalling a shift from passive attendance to active participation in local decision-making spaces. This evolution from presence to influence was echoed by others who leveraged organisational formalisation to exercise civic agency. "After registering the cooperative, we lobbied the MCA to table our proposal," recalled WSE7 (personal interview, 16 November 2023), illustrating how business organisation became a platform for political engagement. For some, enterprise management

itself became a catalyst for institutional critique and policy-oriented action. As WSE21 reflected, “Running the enterprise taught me to challenge policy barriers, not just work around them” (personal interview, 20 December 2023). These accounts collectively demonstrate how operational legitimacy, built through service delivery, community trust, and organisational stability, can translate into public authority, enabling women entrepreneurs to enter governance spaces with confidence and shape the institutional environments that once constrained them.

These accounts underscore that economic participation can evolve into political presence. As women gain resources and legitimacy through enterprise leadership, they acquire the voice and confidence necessary to challenge restrictive norms and advocate for inclusive policies. Such processes align with Kabeer’s (1999) framing of empowerment as the ability to make strategic life choices, and with Mayoux’s (2000) emphasis on collective action as a pathway to gender transformation. In Nairobi’s context, where formal politics often marginalise women’s participation, social entrepreneurship becomes a vehicle for negotiated agency, linking household-level empowerment to broader community and policy influence.

6.5 Summary and integration of findings

This chapter synthesises how external enablers and internal capabilities jointly generate women’s social and economic empowerment in Kenya. It refines the integrated empowerment–capability framework by demonstrating that empowerment is not a spontaneous consequence of enterprise activity but a negotiated equilibrium between enabling structures and adaptive agency. First, the findings reconceptualise context as an active determinant. Policy and legal ambiguity, collateral-heavy finance, and gendered administrative routines are not neutral backdrops; they shape women’s capability sets by expanding or constraining feasible choices (Sen, 1999). When institutions recognise social enterprises and simplify compliance, empowerment becomes structurally enabled rather than individually improvised (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000).

Second, empowerment emerges as relational and co-produced. Social capital, manifested in *chamas*, cohorts, and mentorship networks, functions as infrastructure that manufactures trust, legitimacy, and collective voice (Putnam, 2000). Through African feminist perspectives, these ties represent "relational agency" (Nnaemeka, 2004; Tamale, 2020): they transform care and reciprocity into coordination power, showing that women's leadership grows through connection, not competition. Third, recognition operates as a decisive conversion factor. Across finance counters, procurement desks, and community forums, legitimacy determines whether resources translate into agency. Where women's expertise is acknowledged, capability expands; where it is discounted, empowerment collapses despite access to capital or training. Recognition, therefore, is both psychological and institutional, the hinge between potential and real empowerment. Fourth, adaptability and moral purpose function as dynamic assets. Learning systems, mentorship ladders, and value coherence convert volatility into learning rather than loss. Motivation anchored in care and justice sustains persistence through uncertainty, binding economic logic to social value and embedding resilience into enterprise culture. These findings demonstrate that empowerment becomes durable when external rules, internal capabilities, and relational infrastructures align. Women achieve sustained control and voice not through isolated effort but through the convergence of system design, recognition, and adaptive agency.

This chapter advances the integrated framework by showing that (i) empowerment is activated where inclusive rules intersect with adaptive capacities; (ii) social capital and recognition mediate the translation of capability inputs into outcomes; and (iii) advocacy and rule-change are productive functions of entrepreneurship, expanding collective freedoms rather than existing outside economic logic. Structural investments, legal recognition of social enterprises, gender-responsive credit design, community-based training, and coalition brokerage, are essential to convert relational agency into durable empowerment. These insights

lay the empirical and theoretical foundation for Chapter 7, which translates the integrated findings into actionable policy, institutional, and programmatic recommendations for advancing women's social entrepreneurship in Kenya.

Figure 6.2: Integrated Empowerment Mechanism: External × Internal × Outcome Dynamics

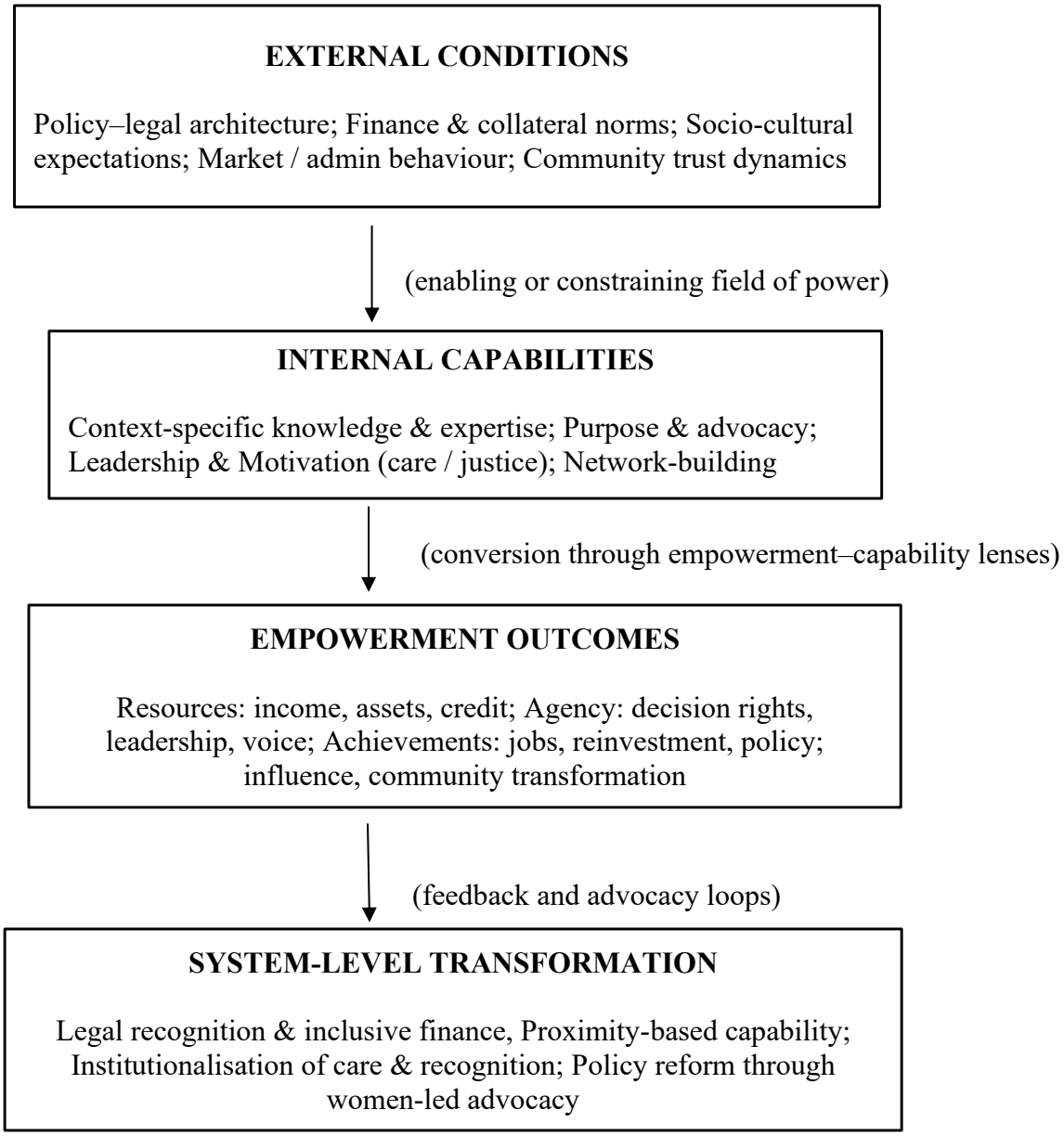


Figure 6.1 depicts empowerment as a dynamic and cyclical process shaped by the interaction between structural conditions, women's adaptive capabilities, and the outcomes of their entrepreneurial practice. Structural elements such as policy frameworks, financial systems, social norms, and administrative procedures form the context within which women act, expanding or constraining their scope depending on how enabling they are. Within this context, women draw on capabilities, including leadership, knowledge, adaptability, and social networks to navigate constraints and translate opportunities into action. These capabilities drive both enterprise practice and personal agency. Outcomes become visible at individual and community levels through enhanced control over resources, stable income, reinvestment capacity, decision-making power, and growing influence in public and policy spaces. As these outcomes accumulate, they reinforce legitimacy, expand networks, and increase women's capacity to act, creating a recursive strengthening cycle. The process aligns with the study's theoretical framework: Empowerment Theory foregrounds agency; the Capability Approach clarifies how enabling conditions expand freedoms; Social Capital Theory explains the role of relationships in transmitting opportunity; and African feminist perspectives emphasise the relational, negotiated nature of empowerment. The figure presents empowerment as cumulative, relational, and context-dependent rather than linear.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and recommendations

7.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter showed that empowerment among women social entrepreneurs in Kenya does not arise from any single factor but is shaped through the interplay of multiple forces. Structural conditions, such as policy and financial architectures, mobility, and safety constraints, and gendered socio-cultural expectations, intersect with women's own adaptive capacities, skills, and relational strategies. These dynamics influence how resources are accessed, how agency is enacted, and the extent to which these can be translated into durable achievements. Empowerment therefore unfolds as a cumulative, relational, and context-sensitive process rather than a straightforward progression. This final chapter brings these insights together and draws the thesis to a close. It does so by returning to the central and subsidiary research questions and responding to them through a synthesis of the empirical narratives and theoretical framework. The chapter then offers evidence-informed recommendations for key actors within Kenya's social entrepreneurial and policy ecosystem, followed by a reflection on the study's theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. It also identifies areas where further research is needed, particularly where the findings reveal emerging questions or unanticipated pathways. The chapter ends with an overall conclusion that situates the study's relevance within broader debates on gender, entrepreneurship, and development.

In weaving together these elements, the chapter advances the thesis's central argument: that women's social entrepreneurship in Kenya constitutes a relational and capability-driven pathway to empowerment. Across the narratives, income generation, enhanced legitimacy, expanding networks, and opportunities for collective agency appear not as isolated outcomes but as mutually reinforcing processes. These gains accumulate over time, shaped by women's

ability to navigate constraints, mobilise support, and negotiate their roles within households, markets, and communities. It is within this interdependence, between structure and agency, between individual initiative and collective practice, that empowerment becomes both possible and sustainable.

7.1 Conclusions in relation to the research questions

Primary research question:

How does social entrepreneurship advance the economic and social empowerment of women in Kenya?

The findings show that women-led social enterprises contribute to empowerment by combining mission-driven market activity with practical conversion factors, fit-for-purpose finance, digital tools, market access, mentorship, and supportive networks. These elements work together to turn income into something more durable: enhanced decision-making power, recognised public voice, and expanded participation in community and economic life. Drawing on Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999), the women in this study mobilise resources collectively and convert them into agency and achievements. The Capability Approach helps clarify how these bundles of support act as conversion factors that enable women to transform opportunities into real freedoms (Sen, 1999). Social capital operates as the relational glue that makes these mechanisms possible: bonding ties provide trust and early legitimacy, bridging ties open routes to markets and suppliers, and linking ties enable visibility and recognition among institutions and public officials. These pathways align closely with African feminist perspectives, which highlight negotiated, relational, and collective agency within patriarchal contexts (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2004). In practice, social entrepreneurship becomes not only an income-generating strategy but also a catalyst for reshaping women's social position, legitimacy, and voice.

Subsidiary question 1 - How do women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi conceptualise and engage with social entrepreneurship?

Findings indicate that many women practise social entrepreneurship long before they name it as such. Their ventures span a fluid continuum, from service-first initiatives driven by community need to more balanced hybrids in which governance, pricing, and measurement gradually formalise as the enterprises mature. This "practice-before-label" pattern reflects Kenya's institutional realities, where hybrid organising emerges organically from social obligations, communal trust, and relational norms embedded in *chamas*, mentorship networks, and neighbourhood associations. Consistent with global evidence, women blend social purpose with earned income in ways that respond to lived realities rather than theoretical models (Dees, 1998; Nicholls, 2010). In Nairobi, hybridity is performed rather than prescribed. It adapts to institutional gaps, such as the absence of a social enterprise legal form, and to moral economies that prioritise reciprocity, dignity, and care. These findings reinforce scholarship showing that in African contexts, entrepreneurship is often relational, embedded, and socially anchored (Mair & Martí, 2006; Maseno & Wanyoike, 2020).

Subsidiary question 2 - What are the pathways through which social entrepreneurship fosters women's economic and social empowerment?

The study identifies a sequenced set of pathways through which empowerment unfolds, organised around a progressive arc of bonding, bridging, and linking ties. Bonding ties, family networks, *chamas*, and neighbourhood relationships, serve as the point of entry by providing small start-up capital, early customers, emotional support, and legitimacy. Bridging ties, alliances with peers, suppliers, anchor buyers, and intermediaries, facilitate stability and growth by lowering transaction costs, expanding distribution channels, and strengthening market positioning. Linking ties, relationships with state actors, donors, procurement offices, and formal institutions, enable policy voice, institutional recognition, and participation in

decision-making spaces. Across these pathways, cross-cutting enablers amplify women's capabilities. Digital tools streamline payments, widen market reach, and lower mobility constraints. Staged finance, ranging from grants to working-capital loans, absorbs risk at critical moments. Market access, particularly through anchor-buyer relationships, stabilises revenues and improves bargaining power. As women progress along these pathways, empowerment becomes visible through income smoothing and asset accumulation, and later through expanded household decision-making power, leadership roles, community trust, and public voice.

Subsidiary question 3 - What factors influence the social and economic empowerment of women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi?

The study shows that empowerment depends on the alignment of enabling and constraining factors. Enablers include bundled support that integrates finance, digital literacy, market access, and mentorship; cohesive coalitions that share knowledge and risk; boundary-spanning actors who connect women to institutions; and anchor buyers who stabilise cash flows and confer legitimacy. Light measurement systems like simple dashboards, peer-review check-ins, and customer-verification practices, also strengthen accountability and learning. Constraints persist in the form of patriarchal credibility discounts, regulatory ambiguity surrounding hybrid enterprises, collateral-based lending rules, and unequal digital literacy. These factors limit access to finance, visibility, and institutional recognition. Women also face structural barriers such as mobility and safety concerns, unpaid care burdens, and reputational risks related to female entrepreneurship. Outcomes depend on "critical conditioners," the elements that determine whether support translates into sustained empowerment. These include context-fit programme design, simplified procurement rules, embedded forms of digital training tied to real transactions, and institutionalised collaboration agreements that protect intellectual property, brand identity, and partnership terms. When these conditions align,

empowerment is more likely to become durable. Finally, because this study is cross-sectional, it captures empowerment as it is unfolding rather than complete. Longitudinal research is needed to assess whether early gains consolidate into long-term structural change and intergenerational shifts in agency, voice, and opportunity.

7.2 Recommendations for key stakeholders

The findings across Chapters 4–6 show that empowerment emerges when women's social enterprises are supported through relational, context-responsive, and capability-enhancing mechanisms. The recommendations below extend these insights, outlining actions that policy, finance, support organisations, and entrepreneurs themselves can take to strengthen the ecosystem in which women's social entrepreneurship unfolds. These recommendations are intentionally multi-level, recognising that empowerment is co-produced through the interplay of institutions, markets, networks, and women's adaptive agency.

1. Policy and legal architecture

Government and regulatory bodies can play a catalytic role by reshaping Kenya's institutional environment to reflect the hybrid realities of social enterprise. The study shows that many women operate in organisational "in-between spaces," where they balance commercial sustainability with community obligations. A dedicated legal category, or at minimum, a hybrid-friendly registration option, would reduce compliance burdens, signal legitimacy to financiers, and broaden eligibility for procurement. Women in this study consistently identified procurement as a barrier or breakthrough point. Reforming procurement to include women-led social enterprises, through rolling pre-qualification, simplified documentation, joint bidding models, and county-level procurement windows, would help translate linking social capital into predictable revenue streams. Sector-specific regulatory sandboxes (for example, health, education, waste management) would allow innovators to test

cost-recovery and data-governance models before scaling (British Council, 2020; Khalid et al., 2022).

2. Public funds and development partners

Financing should match the actual growth rhythms of women's ventures. The evidence shows that most enterprises move through fragile early phases marked by fluctuating cashflows and high-risk experimentation. Tiered blended finance, sequencing grants, recoverable grants, and concessional loans tied to verifiable milestones such as customer validation, breakeven, or new procurement wins, can bridge this "valley of death" (Datta & Gailey, 2012; Ndung'u, 2023). Coalition grants are especially powerful where women rely on boundary-spanners and collective delivery. Funding that underwrites these roles, supports shared distribution, or strengthens pooled procurement can amplify "borrowed legitimacy," reduce unit costs, and spread risk (Haugh & Talwar, 2014; Littlewood & Holt, 2018). Outcome-linked disbursement structures allow accountability without bureaucratic friction, enabling women to integrate results tracking into their everyday activities (Mervyn et al., 2014).

3. Banks and impact investors

Financial institutions can transform irregular revenue into financeable assets through more adaptive lending models. Receivables-based lending and movable-collateral registries would open credit to women excluded by traditional collateral requirements (British Council, 2020). First-loss guarantees can further de-risk lending portfolios. The findings also point to the value of recognising *chama* histories, mobile-money footprints, and platform transaction data as credible indicators of creditworthiness. Gender-smart underwriting that incorporates these alternative datasets would significantly widen access to working-capital loans. Outcome-linked pricing, interest rate step-downs tied to verified impact, can encourage socially oriented growth without imposing unrealistic reporting burdens.

4. NGOs, incubators, and civil society organisations

Support organisations often determine whether resources convert into real capabilities. The women in this study benefited most from practice-embedded support, short, hands-on digital sessions linked to real transactions, simplified toolkits for CRM and WhatsApp-based sales, and iterative coaching tied to live business challenges. Because trust deficits can derail partnerships, intermediaries should maintain frequent feedback loops, co-design pilot initiatives with women, and display early wins to families, communities, and suppliers. Cohort-based peer circles are especially valuable: when resourced with small joint grants or learning stipends, they accelerate diffusion of working practices, lower emotional risk, and build solidarity (Mayoux, 2000; Haugh & Talwar, 2014).

5. Corporates and anchor buyers

Corporates can translate purpose into scale through supplier-development pipelines pairing framework contracts with coaching, batch scheduling, and receivables finance. Such mechanisms stabilise cashflows and reduce unit costs, the bridging ties identified as catalytic for growth in Chapters 4–5. Local-content targets should be matched with technical assistance and clear graduation criteria from probation to preferred-supplier status (Littlewood & Holt, 2018).

6. Higher education and research partners

Universities can serve as enabling infrastructure by bridging knowledge, measurement, and practice. Shared measurement labs, where academics and practitioners co-design lean dashboards, train entrepreneurs in data ethics, and produce anonymised learning briefs, can help shift the field from anecdotal evidence to evidence-based decision-making (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Field-embedded student projects (for example, process mapping, marketing analytics, digital system setup, or financial modelling) offer cost-effective managerial support

for women entrepreneurs while deepening institutional understanding of social-enterprise challenges in Kenya.

7. Women social entrepreneurs

At the enterprise level, the findings highlight three levers that consistently support durable empowerment:

- Networks as strategy: Women benefit when they map bonding, bridging, and linking ties deliberately; identify a boundary-spanning member of the team; and schedule regular joint-delivery or co-marketing activities.
- Bundling conversion factors: Every growth step, new client, product line, or operational shift, should be paired with an appropriate financial tool, a digital system, a buyer connection, and a mentor. This bundling ensures that resources translate into functionings and freedoms (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999).
- Measure and share: Tracking cost-to-serve, repeat use, and inclusion metrics strengthens legitimacy and helps women negotiate with suppliers, buyers, and financiers. Sharing these insights within coalitions reinforces collective learning and recognition.).

8. Cross-cutting imperative: intersectional equity

The study shows that empowerment is uneven and shaped by differences in age, disability, class, neighbourhood security, care responsibilities, and digital access. All actors, governments, funders, intermediaries, buyers, and entrepreneurs, should design interventions that explicitly account for these differences. Dashboards and monitoring frameworks should disaggregate outcomes by gender, age, ability, and locality to ensure that ecosystem benefits extend beyond women who already hold relative privilege (Njenga et al., 2021; Mama, 2001).

7.3 Key contribution to the literature

This thesis contributes to the growing field of gendered social entrepreneurship by offering a contextually grounded, practice-centred account of how women in Nairobi mobilise social enterprise as a pathway to economic and social empowerment. The contributions extend existing literature theoretically, empirically, and methodologically, particularly by foregrounding the relational infrastructures, capability bundles, and coalitional practices that shape women's trajectories within Kenya's urban ecosystem. First, the study advances a practice-led understanding of hybridity. Existing debates often focus on whether social enterprises fit legal labels or organisational models. The findings in this thesis challenge such categorisations. Women social entrepreneurs frequently "do" social entrepreneurship long before they name it, balancing earned revenue and social purpose in fluid, iterative ways that respond to everyday constraints, resource scarcity, and community obligations. Governance and measurement practices evolve only when practical demands emerge. This insight positions hybridity not as a fixed organisational identity but as an adaptive, ongoing process enacted within patriarchal and economic constraints (Dees, 1998; Mair & Martí, 2006; Nicholls, 2010; Battilana & Lee, 2014).

Second, the thesis refines existing theories of empowerment by specifying a relational empowerment loop. Women's empowerment does not progress in linear, individualistic terms. Instead, the study shows a sequenced arc of bonding → bridging → linking ties through which women move from local trust and liquidity (often sourced through *chamas*) to market access and institutional recognition. This finding deepens Empowerment Theory (Kabeer, 1999) and Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), illustrating how social ties transform isolated entrepreneurial efforts into pooled capacities, shared risk, and "borrowed legitimacy" (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). The model advances the literature by showing not just that networks matter, but how specific relational configurations produce different empowerment outcomes. Third,

the study introduces the concept of capability conversion bundles. From a Capability Approach perspective (Sen, 1999), the research shows that empowerment arises not from individual inputs, finance, training, or digital tools, considered separately, but from integrated bundles that women assemble and mobilise in context. Finance paired with simple digital tools, market linkages, and continuous mentorship becomes far more consequential than any single component. This framework helps explain why women with similar resource levels experience divergent outcomes and sheds light on long-standing puzzles in the literature regarding the uneven effects of microfinance or training (Datta & Gailey, 2012).

Fourth, the thesis foregrounds coalitional mechanisms as a distinctive pathway to empowerment, extending African feminist interpretations of negotiated, relational agency (Nnaemeka, 2004; Mama, 2001). By tracing boundary-spanner roles, pooled procurement, shared dashboards, and joint learning platforms, the study demonstrates how coalitions institutionalise reciprocity and accelerate capability development. These collective arrangements amplify visibility, stabilise demand, reduce transaction costs, and open access to procurement and policy fora. Such insights move beyond firm-centric analyses of social entrepreneurship and offer an original, relational account of how collective action reshapes power and opportunity structures. Fifth, the study strengthens an intersectional and place-based understanding of women's empowerment in African urban contexts. It documents how patriarchal credibility discounts, ambiguous regulation of hybrid enterprises, and unequal digital literacy shape entrepreneurial strategies and outcomes. At the same time, it reveals how peer mentorship, *chama*-based financing, and local networks help women navigate and partially neutralise these structural frictions.

The findings challenge Western-centric models that treat empowerment primarily as an individual attribute, showing instead that relational infrastructures, not individual traits, are the strongest predictors of progression from income gains to expanded household bargaining

power, public leadership, and emerging norm change (Rowlands, 1995; Maseno & Wanyoike, 2020). Finally, the study contributes a multi-level outcomes framework that links economic, social, and institutional shifts in a coherent way. By connecting income and asset growth to household decision-making, community voice, and coalition-level agenda-setting, the framework offers measurable, context-sensitive proxies such as receivables velocity, repeat-customer rates, procurement eligibility, and participation in public forums. This integrative model bridges qualitative insight and evaluative practice, offering scholars, policymakers, and practitioners a structured way to track the immediate, intermediate, and systemic effects of women's social entrepreneurship (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Haugh & Talwar, 2014). These contributions position women's social entrepreneurship in Nairobi as a relational, adaptive, and capability-driven pathway to empowerment, one shaped as much by social infrastructures and coalitions as by markets or individual entrepreneurial effort.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

This study offers a grounded and context-rich account of how women's social entrepreneurship unfolds in Nairobi, yet it also reveals several frontiers where cumulative research is needed to deepen theoretical and practical understanding. Because the present study relied on a cross-sectional design, future work would benefit from longitudinal approaches that follow women-led social ventures through different stages; early start-up, formalisation, and scaling. Tracking the same social entrepreneurs over time would allow researchers to observe whether initial gains in income, legitimacy, and voice translate into sustained structural change within households, markets, and community institutions. A mixed panel that includes women social entrepreneurs, household members, and key market or community actors would offer an especially textured understanding of empowerment trajectories. Such designs would also enable scholars to examine whether the transition from bonding to bridging and then to linking

social capital consistently characterises women's empowerment pathways, and to determine the conditions under which this progression may reverse, stagnate, or accelerate.

Future research should extend beyond Nairobi to capture how place and local context shape empowerment. The capital city's density of intermediaries, anchor buyers, and digital infrastructure differs significantly from rural counties and emerging secondary cities. Comparative studies that pair Nairobi with counties of varying development profiles could illuminate how infrastructure, market thickness, social norms, and local gender regimes mediate empowerment outcomes. Cross-border research across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda would further help isolate cultural influences from regulatory or market-structure effects. A second frontier lies in making intersectionality empirically visible. This study highlighted heterogeneity among women social entrepreneurs, but future research should systematically measure it. Disaggregating outcomes by age, disability, ethnicity, educational background, or settlement type, and modelling their interactions, would offer sharper insight into who benefits, who is excluded, and why. Such evidence would allow interventions to be tailored to the women who face the steepest constraints rather than relying on averaged impacts that may mask important disparities.

Methodologically, future work should integrate mixed and quantitative approaches that complement qualitative depth with causal inference. Promising avenues include quasi-experimental evaluations of procurement reforms or hybrid legal forms (using designs such as difference-in-differences or event studies), network-analytic studies that quantify bonding, bridging, and linking structures and relate them to revenue stability or leadership outcomes, and pre-registered impact pilots that test whether "capability conversion bundles", finance combined with digital tools, anchor buyers, and mentorship, produce larger and more durable empowerment effects than single-instrument interventions. Researchers should, where possible, link administrative or financial traces (such as mobile-money flows, receivables

ledgers, or procurement records) to verified social outcomes while upholding strong data-ethics protocols. Future work should also move beyond treating social entrepreneurship generically by comparing sector-specific pathways. Women operating in health, childcare, education, waste management, or digital services face distinct regulatory regimes, cost structures, and buyer behaviours. Multi-county, sector-specific case series could identify which capability bundles matter most in each domain and clarify the limits of transferring successful models across sectors.

Finally, building on Empowerment Theory, the Capability Approach, and Social Capital Theory, subsequent studies should work toward operationalising the mechanisms identified in this thesis with lean, standardised indicators. Potential measures include receivables velocity, repeat-customer ratios, procurement eligibility scores, household decision-making indices, and markers of public voice such as committee roles or participation in policy fora. Embedding shared measurement laboratories within coalitions of women entrepreneurs and ecosystem intermediaries would support indicator harmonisation, enable replication, and create a foundation for meta-analysis. These future directions point toward a research agenda that is more temporal, spatially comparative, intersectionally attentive, methodologically diverse, and sector specific. Advancing research along these lines will deepen understanding of how to scale, sustain, and institutionalise the empowerment potential of women's social entrepreneurship in Kenya and across similar African urban contexts.

7.5 Conclusion to the study

This study set out to examine how women's social entrepreneurship advances economic and social empowerment in Kenya, using Nairobi as a dense, networked, and institutionally hybrid urban setting. Drawing on rich qualitative evidence, the research demonstrates that empowerment does not arise from isolated programmes or discrete instruments. Instead, it emerges through practice-led hybridity: women building revenue-generating ventures

anchored in social purpose and held together by relational infrastructures, capability conversion bundles, and negotiated forms of agency. These mechanisms work in concert, rather than in isolation, to propel progression from income stability and asset growth to increased household decision-making power, visible public leadership, and, for some, participation in coalition-level agenda setting.

Across the subsidiary research questions, three core syntheses become clear. First, women in Nairobi enact social entrepreneurship before they name it. Their models grow out of concrete community needs, whether in childcare, food systems, health, or education, and organisational formalisation follows only once operations demand clearer governance, record-keeping, or pricing discipline. This finding challenges literature that centres labels or legal forms and instead positions hybridity as a lived, adaptive practice shaped by scarcity, obligation, and opportunity. Second, empowerment unfolds through a sequenced social-capital arc. Bonding ties offer trust, liquidity, and early legitimacy; bridging ties expand markets and lower costs; linking ties confer credibility with institutions such as buyers, financiers, and government procurement systems. These ties function as relational mechanisms that move women from micro-level survival to organisational resilience and, in some cases, to sectoral visibility and public voice. Third, the conditions that enable or stall empowerment are institutional as much as individual. Empowerment consolidates where women access conversion bundles, finance paired with digital tools, market access, and mentorship, and where coalitions reinforce learning, legitimacy, and risk-sharing. It stalls where patriarchal credibility discounts, regulatory ambiguity, thin early-stage capital, and uneven digital fluency persist. These findings underscore that empowerment is shaped by the alignment (or misalignment) of rules, resources, and relational support, not by entrepreneurial effort alone.

Theoretically, the thesis brings together Empowerment Theory (resources → agency → achievements), the Capability Approach (conversion factors), Social Capital Theory

(bonding–bridging–linking architectures), and African feminist perspectives (negotiated and collective agency). These frameworks reframe empowerment as cumulative, relational, and place-made, a process embedded in Nairobi's socio-economic and cultural fabric rather than a purely individual or technical achievement. Methodologically, the study contributes a multi-level outcomes framework that pairs operational metrics, such as receivables velocity, repeat-customer rates, and procurement eligibility, with social indicators like household bargaining shifts and participation in public forums. This helps bridge qualitative insight with evaluative practice, offering a pathway for more coherent impact measurement. Practically, the findings translate into a targeted action agenda. Align regulatory forms with the hybrid realities of social enterprises; expand procurement pathways for women-led ventures; de-risk capital through receivables-backed lending and outcome-linked finance; invest in boundary-spanning roles and shared measurement dashboards; and deliver digital and managerial training embedded in real transaction environments. To ensure equity, each intervention must be designed and reported with intersectional disaggregation so that benefits extend beyond advantaged women to those facing compounded barriers.

While the study's scope is necessarily bounded, cross-sectional, urban, and qualitative, it identifies clear avenues for future work. Longitudinal and panel research can test the durability of empowerment gains; comparative studies across counties and sectors can reveal how place and regulation shape outcomes; and mixed-methods designs can quantify the mechanisms identified here. Despite these limitations, the central implication of the study is unequivocal: when governance, finance, markets, and measurement align with how women build, collaborate, and negotiate power, social entrepreneurship becomes a credible vehicle for structural transformation. It normalises women's leadership, widens opportunity structures, and strengthens community stewardship. In Nairobi and other resource-constrained urban

settings, scaling these relational and capability-driven supports represents the most promising pathway from small, promising pilots to durable, inclusive development.

References

Adi, H. (2019). Women and pan-Africanism. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. Oxford University Press.

Agrawal A, Gandhi P, Khare P (2023), "Women empowerment through entrepreneurship: case study of a social entrepreneurial intervention in rural India". *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, Vol. 31 No. 4 pp. 1122–1142. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-03-2021-2659.

Ahl, H. (2006). Why Research on Women Entrepreneurs Needs New Directions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *30*(5), 595-621. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2006.00138.x (Original work published 2006).

Ahl, H., & Marlow, S. (2012). Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: advancing debate to escape a dead end? *Organization*, *19*(5), 543-562. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508412448695 (Original work published 2012).

Alter, S. K. (2006). Social enterprise models and their mission and money relationships. *Social entrepreneurship: New models of sustainable social change*, 205-232.

Alvord, S. H., Brown, L. D., & Letts, C. W. (2004). Social entrepreneurship and societal transformation: An exploratory study. *The journal of applied behavioral science*, *40*(3), 260-282. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886304266847

Amadiume, I. (2017). Family and culture in Africa. *A companion to gender studies*, 355-369. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165419.ch25

Anderson, A., & Lent, M. (2017). Enterprising the rural: Creating a social value chain. *Journal of Rural Studies, 55*, 141–152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.08.020

Ashoka. (2020). *Women social entrepreneurs: Catalysts for change*. Retrieved from https://www.ashoka.org/en/story/women-social-entrepreneurs-catalysts-for-change (Accessed 26 November 2025).

Ashoka. (2023). *Fellowship Network Impact Report*. Retrieved from https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/impact (Accessed 26 November 2025).

Austin, J., Stevenson, H., & Wei-Skillern, J. (2012). Social and commercial entrepreneurship: Same, different, or both? *Revista de Administração, 47*(3), 370–384. https://doi.org/10.5700/rausp1055

Austin, J. E., & Seitanidi, M. M. (2012). Collaborative value creation: A review of partnering between nonprofits and businesses: Part I. Value creation spectrum and collaboration stages. *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, *41*(5), 726-758.

Bacq, S., & Janssen, F. (2011). The multiple faces of social entrepreneurship: A review of definitional issues based on geographical and thematic criteria. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 23*(5–6), 373–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2011.577242

Baker, T., & Nelson, R. E. (2005). Creating something from nothing: Resource construction through entrepreneurial bricolage. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 50*(3), 329–366. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2005.50.3.329

Bandura, A. (2019). Applying Theory for Human Betterment. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *14*(1), 12-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691618815165 (Original work published 2019).

Bandura, A., & Evans, R. I. (2006). *Albert Bandura: The man and his ideas - a dialogue*. Insight Media.

Battilana, J., & Dorado, S. (2010). Building sustainable hybrid organizations: The case of commercial microfinance organizations. *Academy of Management Journal, 53*(6), 1419–1440. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.57318391

Battilana, J., & Lee, M. (2014). Advancing research on hybrid organizing–Insights from the study of social enterprises. *Academy of Management Annals*, *8*(1), 397-441. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2014.893615.

Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2013, August 29–September 1). *Turning observations into evidence: Using Bayesian logic to evaluate empirical material* [Conference paper]. American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, United States.

Mancini, L., & Bello, B. G. (2016). Intersectionality, law and sociey. *Sociologia del diritto*, *2016*(2), 161–168.

Besharov, M. L., & Smith, W. K. (2014). Multiple institutional logics in organizations: Explaining their varied nature and implications. *Academy of Management Review, 39*(3), 364–381. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0431

Bhatti, Y. A., & Ventresca, M. (2013). How can 'frugal innovation' be conceptualized? *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2203552

Bloom, P. N., & Chatterji, A. K. (2009). Scaling social entrepreneurial impact. *California Management Review, 51*(3), 114–133. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166422

Bornstein, D. (2007). *How to change the world: Social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas* (Updated ed.). Oxford University Press.

Borzaga, C., & Defourny, J. (2001). *The emergence of social enterprise* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203164679

Boschee, J. (1998). *Merging mission and money: A board member's guide to social entrepreneurship*. National Center for Nonprofit Boards. Retrieved from

https://web.archive.org/web/20180722015052id_/http://www.socialent.org/pdfs/MergingMission.pdf.

Boschee, J., & McClurg, J. (2003). Toward a better understanding of social entrepreneurship: Some important distinctions. *Social Enterprise Alliance*. https://scholar.archive.org/work/6lf5hwqv7nhoxi7cjgnw5yyvre/access/wayback/http://www.socialent.org/pdfs/MergingMission.pdf

Bosma, N., Schøtt, T., Terjesen, S., & Kew, P. (2016). *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2015/16: Special report on social entrepreneurship*. Global Entrepreneurship Research Association. https://www.gemconsortium.org/report/49480

Bourdieu, P. (2011). The forms of capital. In M. Granovetter & R. Swedberg (Eds.), *The sociology of economic life* (3rd ed., pp. 78–92). Westview Press.

Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 137–152. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107085301

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Branzei, O. (2012). Social change agency under adversity: How relational processes (re)produce hope in hopeless settings. In K. Golden-Biddle & J. Dutton (Eds.), *Using a positive lens to explore social change in organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 21–47). Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology: Vol. 2. Research designs* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004

British Council. (2020). *Accelerating women's employability through social entrepreneurship: The case of Mombasa*. https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/accelerating-womens-employability-mombasa

British Council. (2018). *The state of social enterprise in Kenya*. https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/state-social-enterprise-kenya

Brush, C., Edelman, L. F., Manolova, T., & Welter, F. (2019). A gendered look at entrepreneurship ecosystems. *Small Business Economics, 53*, 393–408. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-018-9992-9

Brush, C. G., De Bruin, A., & Welter, F. (2009). A gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, 1*(1), 8–24. https://doi.org/10.1108/17566260910942318.

Bruton, G. D., Ahlstrom, D., & Li, H. L. (2010). Institutional theory and entrepreneurship: Where are we now and where do we need to move in the future? *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 34*(3), 421–440. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00390.x

Cajaiba-Santana, G. (2014). Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 82*, 42–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2013.05.009

Calás, M. B., Smircich, L., & Bourne, K. A. (2009). Extending the boundaries: Reframing "entrepreneurship as social change" through feminist perspectives. *Academy of Management Review, 34*(3), 552–569. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.40633597

Chambers, R. (1994). Participatory rural appraisal (PRA): Analysis of experience. *World Development, 22*(9), 1253–1268. https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(94)90003-5

Chebii, P. A., & Ogada, J. O. (2022). Women entrepreneurs in Kenya. In T. Ramoglou, C. Peruffo, & M. T. Gómez (Eds.), *Women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa: Historical framework, ecosystem, and future perspectives for the region* (pp. 83–106). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92504-0_5

Chell, E. (2016). Social enterprise and entrepreneurship. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship, 34*(6), 619–639. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242607071779

Ciambotti, G., Littlewood, D., Sottini, A., & M'ithiria, E. N. (2020). Building and scaling social enterprise business models for BOP markets in Kenya. In J. N. Muthuri, M. G. Arnold, S. Gold, & X. Rueda (Eds.), *Base of the pyramid markets in Africa* (pp. 199–227). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429293567-14

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, S95–S120. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

Coleman, J. S. (2009). Social capital in the creation of human capital. In D. J. Smith & J. A. Smith (Eds.), *Knowledge and social capital* (pp. 17–41). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

Collins, P. H. (2000). Gender, Black feminism, and Black political economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 568*(1), 41–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271620056800l004

Cornwall, A., & Edwards, J. (2010). Introduction: Negotiating empowerment. *IDS Bulletin, 41*(2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00120.x

Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A.-M. (2015). From 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' to global justice: Reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development. *Third World Quarterly, 36*(2), 396–415. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1013341

Crenshaw, K. (2013). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In K. Bartlett & R. Kennedy (Eds.), *Feminist legal theories* (pp. 23–51). Routledge.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Daru, M. U., & Gaur, A. (2013). Social entrepreneurship-a way to bring social change. *Innovative Journal of Business and Management*, *2*(1), 26-29.

Datta, P. B., & Gailey, R. (2012). Empowering women through social entrepreneurship: Case study of a women's cooperative in India. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 36(3), 569–587. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2012.00505.x

Davister, C., Defourny, J., & Gregoire, O. (2004). *Work integration social enterprises in the European Union: An overview of existing models* (EMES Working Paper No. 04/04). EMES European Research Network.

Dees, J. G. (1998a). Enterprising nonprofits: What do you do when traditional sources of funding fall short? *Harvard Business Review, 76*(1), 55–67.

Dees, J. G. (1998b). *The meaning of social entrepreneurship*. Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership. Retrieved from https://cases.som.yale.edu/sites/default/files/cases/teach_for_all/dees_sedef.pdf

Dees, J. G., & Anderson, B. B. (2006). Framing a theory of social entrepreneurship: Building on two schools of practice and thought. In R. Mosher-Williams (Ed.), *ARNOVA occasional paper series: Vol. 1. Social entrepreneurship* (pp. 39–66). The Aspen Institute.

Defourny, J., & Nyssens, M. (2010). Conceptions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in Europe and the United States: Convergences and divergences. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, 1*(1), 32–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/19420670903442053

Delecourt, S., & Fitzpatrick, A. (2021). Childcare matters: Female business owners and the baby-profit gap. *Management Science, 67*(7), 4455–4474. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2020.3763

Denzin, N. K. (2017). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Doherty, B., Haugh, H., & Lyon, F. (2014). Social enterprises as hybrid organizations: A review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 16*(4), 417–436. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12028

Down, S., & Warren, L. (2008). Constructing narratives of enterprise: Clichés and entrepreneurial self-identity. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research, 14*(1), 4–23. https://doi.org/10.1108/13552550810852802

Drayton, W. (2002). The citizen sector: Becoming as entrepreneurial and competitive as business. *California Management Review, 44*(3), 120–132. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166140

Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 458–476). Sage Publications.

Ebrahim, A., Battilana, J., & Mair, J. (2014). The governance of social enterprises: Mission drift and accountability challenges in hybrid organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 34*, 81–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2014.09.001

Ebrahim, A., & Rangan, V. K. (2014). What impact? A framework for measuring the scale and scope of social performance. *California Management Review, 56*(3), 118–141. https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2014.56.3.118

Eikenberry, A. M., & Kluver, J. D. (2004). The marketization of the nonprofit sector: Civil society at risk? *Public Administration Review, 64*(2), 132–140. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00355.x

El Ebrashi, R. (2013). Social entrepreneurship theory and sustainable social impact. *Social Responsibility Journal, 9*(2), 188–209. https://doi.org/10.1108/srj-07-2011-0013

Elkington, J., & Rowlands, I. H. (1999). Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business. *Alternatives Journal, 25*(4), 42–46.

FinAccess Household Survey. (2024). *Key insights into Kenya's financial landscape*. FSD Kenya. https://www.fsdkenya.org/blogs-publications/2024-finaccess-household-survey-key-insights-into-kenyas-financial-landscape/.

Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (1998). International norm dynamics and political change. *International Organization, 52*(4), 887–917. https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789

Fourie, D., & Rathbone, M. (2024). Capabilities, Development, and Communitarianism in the African Context. *Philosophies*, *9*(5), 132.

Fraser, N. (2014). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the "postsocialist" condition*. Routledge.

George, G., McGahan, A. M., & Prabhu, J. (2012). Innovation for inclusive growth: Towards a theoretical framework and a research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies, 49*(4), 661–683. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2012.01048.x

Gephart, R. P., Jr. (2004). Qualitative research and the Academy of Management Journal. *Academy of Management Journal, 47*(4), 454–462. https://doi.org/10.5465/20159596

Ghisellini, P., Cialani, C., & Ulgiati, S. (2016). A review on circular economy: the expected transition to a balanced interplay of environmental and economic systems. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *114*, 11-32.

Gibbs, V., & Pellicano, E. (2023). 'Maybe we just seem like easy targets': A qualitative analysis of autistic adults' experiences of interpersonal violence. *Autism, 27*(7), 2021–2034. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231162043

Government of Kenya. (2015). *Uwezo Fund*. Retrieved from http://www.uwezo.go.ke

Golubovic, D., & Bullain, N. (2006). Perspective on regulatory issues for social enterprise development in Central and Eastern Europe. In *Proceedings of the International Seminar on Emerging Models of Social Entrepreneurship* (pp. 1–15). Zagreb, Croatia.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PloS one*, *15*(5), e0232076.

Hacker, J. S. (2004). Privatizing risk without privatizing the welfare state: The hidden politics of social policy retrenchment in the United States. *American Political Science Review, 98*(2), 243–260. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404001121

Haigh, N., & Hoffman, A. J. (2012). Hybrid organizations: The next chapter of sustainable business. *Organizational Dynamics*, *41*(2), 126-134.

Hammond, A. L., Kramer, W. J., Katz, R. S., Tran, J. T., & Walker, C. (2007). *The next 4 billion: Market size and business strategy at the base of the pyramid*. World Resources Institute and International Finance Corporation. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12488.78089

Hassan, K. M., & Sakwa, M. (2021). Effect of social enterprise on women empowerment in Mandera County. *Journal of Public Policy & Governance, 5*(2), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t2001

Haugh, H. (2007). New strategies for a sustainable society: The growing contribution of social entrepreneurship. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 17*(4), 743–749. https://doi.org/10.5840/beq200717437

Haugh, H. M., & Talwar, A. (2014). Linking social entrepreneurship and social change: The mediating role of empowerment. *Journal of Business Ethics, 133*(4), 643–658. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2449-4

Hechavarría, D. M., Terjesen, S. A., Ingram, A. E., Renko, M., Justo, R., & Elam, A. (2017). Taking care of business: The impact of culture and gender on entrepreneurs' blended value creation goals. *Small Business Economics, 48*(1), 225–257. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-016-9774-2

Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence - from domestic abuse to political terror* (2nd ed.). Hachette UK.

Heuër, A., Kloibhofer, M., & Marquard, H. (2015). *Solar Sister: Empowering women in Africa through clean energy solutions*. SEED Initiative. https://seed.uno/articles/reports/solar-sister-empowering-women-in-africa

Jamal, M. A., Raihana, A. K. A., & Sultana, H. Y. (2016). Empowerment of Muslim women through microfinance and self-help groups: A case study of Chennai City. *Asian Business Review, 6*(2), 117–124. https://doi.org/10.18034/abr.v6i2.110

James, E., & Rose-Ackerman, S. (2013). *The non-profit enterprise in market economics*. Taylor & Francis.

Jennings, J. E., Jennings, P. D., & Sharifian, M. (2016). Living the dream? Assessing the "entrepreneurship as emancipation" perspective in a developed region. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 40*(1), 81–110. https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12109

Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change, 30*(3), 435–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125

Kabeer, N. (2001). Conflicts over credit: Re-evaluating the empowerment potential of loans to women in rural Bangladesh. *World Development, 29*(1), 63–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(00)00081-4

Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & development*, *13*(1), 13-24.

Katre, A., Salipante, P., & Zhang, L. (2018). Stirring up the fire: The emergence of social entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Business Ethics, 152*, 317–335. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3290-7

Keller, B., & Mbewe, D. C. (1991). Policy and Planning for the Empowerment of Zambia's Women Farmers. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement*, *12*(1), 75–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.1991.9669421

Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF). (2022). *Women economic empowerment programme review*. https://kcdf.or.ke/knowledge-center/

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2020). *Kenya Women's Empowerment Index*. https://www.knbs.or.ke

Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Women and men in Kenya: Facts and figures 2022*. https://new.knbs.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Women-and-Men-in-Kenya-Facts-and-Figures-2022.pdf

Kerlin, J. A. (2006). Social enterprise in the United States and Europe: Understanding and learning from the differences. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 17*(3), 246–262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-006-9016-2

Kerlin, J. A. (2009). *Social enterprise: A global comparison*. University Press of New England.

Kerlin, J. A. (2010). A comparative analysis of the global emergence of social enterprise. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 21*(2), 162–179. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-010-9126-8

Khalid, S., Dixon, S., & Vijayasingham, L. (2022). The gender responsiveness of social entrepreneurship in health: A review of initiatives by Ashoka fellows. *Social Science & Medicine, 293*, 114665. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114665

Kimmitt, J., & Muñoz, P. (2018). Sensemaking the 'social' in social entrepreneurship. *International Small Business Journal, 36*(8), 859–886. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242618789230

Kiraka, R., Kobia, M., & Katwalo, A. M. (2015). *Micro, small and medium enterprise growth and innovation in Kenya: A case study on the Women Enterprise Fund* (Research Report). International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Kumar, R. S., Hossain, M. S., & Nasreen, M. (2020). Sample size estimation and saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 23*(4), 409–431. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2019.1691811

Littlewood, D., & Holt, D. (2018). Social entrepreneurship in South Africa: Exploring the influence of environment. *Business & Society, 57*(3), 525–561. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650315613293

Maathai, W. (2004). *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the approach and the experience*. Lantern Books.

Magutu, J. M. (2023). Civil society organisations' policy entrepreneurship roles in Kenya and Uganda's housing policies. In *State politics and public policy in Eastern Africa: A comparative perspective* (pp. 305–324). Springer.

Mair, J. (2010). Social entrepreneurship: Taking stock and looking ahead. In A. Fayolle & H. Matlay (Eds.), *Handbook of research on social entrepreneurship* (pp. 15–30). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Mair, J., & Marti, I. (2006). Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction, and delight. *Journal of World Business, 41*(1), 36–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2005.09.002

Mair, J., Marti, I., & Ventresca, M. J. (2012). Building inclusive markets in rural Bangladesh: How intermediaries work institutional voids. *Academy of Management Journal, 55*(4), 819–850. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0627

Mama, A. (2001). Challenging subjects: Gender and power in African contexts. *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 5(2), 63–73.

Maseno, M., & Wanyoike, C. (2020). Social entrepreneurship as mechanisms for social transformation and social impact in East Africa: An exploratory case study perspective. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, 13*(1), 92–117. https://doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2020.1755348

Maseno, M., Kitonga, D. M., & Ndiga, B. A. (2025). Navigating the Future: Reframing the Policy Roadmap for Social Enterprises in Kenya. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2025.2502929

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428

Masten, A. S. (2018). Resilience theory and research on children and families: Past, present, and promise. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 10*(1), 12–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12255

Mati, J. M. (2020). Civil society in 'politics' and 'development' in African hybrid regimes: The Kenyan case. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 31*(4), 674–687. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00211-y

Maxwell, S. (1996). Food security: A post-modern perspective. *Food Policy, 21*(2), 155–170. https://doi.org/10.1016/0306-9192(95)00074-7

Mayoux, L. (2000). *Micro-finance and the empowerment of women: A review of the key issues* (ILO Working Paper No. 993441343402676). International Labour Organization.

Moriggi, A. (2020). Exploring enabling resources for place-based social entrepreneurship: A participatory study of Green Care practices in Finland. *Sustainability Science, 15*(2), 437–453. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00733-0

Mulgan, G. (2006). The process of social innovation. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization, 1*(2), 145–162. https://doi.org/10.1162/itgg.2006.1.2.145

Muli, J. M., & Arasa, R. (2019). Social entrepreneurship: Sustainability and social impact by not-for-profits: Theory and evidence. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce, and Management, 7*(2), 198–215.

Muthuri, J. N., & Gilbert, V. (2015). Institutional context and social entrepreneurship in Kenya. *Business & Society, 54*(3), 324–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650312475123

Mwobobia, F. (2016). Contribution of table banking in the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Kenya: A case of Eldoret Town. *Journal of Business Theory and Practice, 4*(2), 168–176. https://doi.org/10.22158/jbtp.v4n2p168

United Nations. (2024). *Sustainable development goals*. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Ndemo, B., Mkalama, B., & Aiko, D. M. (2020). Entrepreneurial habits in the Kenya Red Cross Society. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies, 10*(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1108/EEMCS-02-2019-0044

Nieuwenhuizen, C. (2022). Female social entrepreneurs in Africa creating social value through innovation. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, *9*(4), 225-242.

Nicholls, A. (2006). Playing the field: A new approach to the meaning of social entrepreneurship. *Social Enterprise Journal, 2*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1108/17508610680000712

Nicholls, A. (2008). *Social entrepreneurship: New models of sustainable social change*. Oxford University Press.

Nicholls, A. (2010). The legitimacy of social entrepreneurship: Reflexive isomorphism in a pre–paradigmatic field. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 34*(4), 611–633. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00397.x

Njenga, F. K., Kitonga, D. M., & Gatumo, F. M. (2021). The moderating effect of gender on the contribution of social enterprises to social transformation in Kiambu County, Kenya. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science, 10*(8), 257–265. https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v10i8.1425

Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 29*(2), 357–385. https://doi.org/10.1086/378553

Nussbaum, M. (2000a). Women's capabilities and social justice. *Journal of Human Development, 1*(2), 219–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880050008709

Nussbaum, M. (2000b). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Harvard University Press.

Nyssens, M. (2007). Social enterprise at the crossroads of market, public policy and civil society. In C. Borzaga & J. Defourny (Eds.), *Social enterprise: At the crossroads of market, public policy and civil society* (pp. 329–344). Routledge.

OECD. (2022). *Empowering women entrepreneurs: Policy measures for inclusive growth in Kenya*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264287935-en

Okech, A. (2020). *Gender, protests and political change in Africa*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53377-3

Owiti, J. (2014). Political drivers of inequality in Kenya. *Development, 57*(3), 547–558. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2015.38

Oyěwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.

Ozkazanc-Pan, B. (2018). Bowen and Hisrich (1986) on the female entrepreneur: 30 years of research and new directions for gender and entrepreneurship scholarship. In A. Fayolle & D. T. Redford (Eds.), *Foundational research in entrepreneurship studies: Insightful contributions and future pathways* (pp. 103–126). Palgrave Macmillan.

Panum K, Hansen MW, Davy E (2018), "The illusive nature of social enterprise at the base of the pyramid: Case studies of six Kenyan social enterprises". *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, Vol. 10 No. 2 pp. 249–276, doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-11-2016-0051

Panum, K., Hansen, M. W., & Davy, E. (2018b). The illusive nature of social enterprise at the base of the pyramid: Case studies of six Kenyan social enterprises. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies, 10*(2), 249–276. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-11-2016-0051

Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Peredo, A. M., & Chrisman, J. J. (2017). Conceptual foundations: Community-based enterprise and community development. In C. Mason & R. Simmons (Eds.), *Entrepreneurial neighbourhoods: Towards an understanding of the economies of neighbourhoods and*

communities (pp. 151–178). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785367243.00017

Peredo, A. M., & McLean, M. (2006). Social entrepreneurship: A critical review of the concept. *Journal of World Business, 41*(1), 56–65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2005.10.007

Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*(5), 569–579. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506982

Pomeda, J. R. (2002). Baumol, WJ (2002): THE FREE-MARKET INNOVATION MACHINE. ANALYZING THE GROWTH MIRACLE OF CAPITALISM. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 318 pp. *Revista madri+ d. Monografía: revista de investigación en gestión de la innovación y tecnología*, (5), 159-160.

Pulido, D. U., Jiménez, E. F., & i Noguera, M. N. (2014). Female social entrepreneurship and socio-cultural context: An international analysis. *Revista de Estudios Empresariales. Segunda Época*, 2, 26–40.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Rapley, T. (2018). *Doing conversation, discourse and document analysis* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Richardson, M., Tsui, J., Nazir, A., Ahmed, V., Umer, K., & Shah, A. (2017). Activist to entrepreneur: The role of social enterprise in supporting women empowerment in Pakistan. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, 9*(4), 338–353. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-06-2017-0037

Rindova, V., Barry, D., & Ketchen, D. J. (2009). Entrepreneuring as emancipation. *Academy of Management Review, 34*(3), 477–491. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.40632647

Rivera-Santos, M., Holt, D., Littlewood, D., & Kolk, A. (2015). Social entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 29*(1), 72–91. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0128

Rose-Ackerman, S., & Palifka, B. J. (2016). *Corruption and government: Causes, consequences, and reform* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316163245

Rowlands, J. (1995). Empowerment examined. *Development in Practice, 5*(2), 101–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452951000157074

Roy, A. (2010). Gender, poverty, and transportation in the developing world. *Transportation Research Board Conference Proceedings, 2*(45), 17–29. Irvine California, United States.

Sachs, J. D. (2015). *The age of sustainable development*. Columbia University Press.

Saebi, T., Foss, N. J., & Linder, S. (2019). Social entrepreneurship research: Past achievements and future promises. *Journal of Management, 45*(1), 70–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318793196

Samantarai, M., & Dutta, S. (2024). Katherine Lucey and Solar Sister: Empowering women in Sub-Saharan Africa to create clean energy businesses. *The CASE Journal, 20*(6), 1368–1397. https://doi.org/10.1108/TCJ-07-2023-0136

Santos, F. M. (2012). A positive theory of social entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Ethics, 111*(3), 335–351. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1413-4

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Schumpeter, J. A. (1934). *The theory of economic development: An inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle*. Harvard University Press.

Schumpeter, J. A. (1939). *Business cycles: A theoretical, historical, and statistical analysis of the capitalist process* (Vol. 1). McGraw-Hill.

Seelos, C., Ganly, K., & Mair, J. (2006). Social entrepreneurs directly contribute to global development goals. In A. Nicholls (Ed.), *Social entrepreneurship: New models of sustainable social change* (pp. 235–275). Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Shakespeare, T. (2013). *Disability rights and wrongs revisited* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Smith, B. R., Cronley, M. L., & Barr, T. F. (2012). Funding implications of social enterprise: The role of mission consistency, entrepreneurial competence, and attitude toward social enterprise on donor behavior. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 31*(1), 142–157. https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.09.031

Smith, W. K., Gonin, M., & Besharov, M. L. (2013). Managing social-business tensions: A review and research agenda for social enterprise. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 23*(3), 407–442. https://doi.org/10.5840/beq201323327

Social Enterprise Kenya. (2021). *Policy brief: Toward a Social Enterprise Act*. SEK.

Sovacool, B. K. (2012). The political economy of energy poverty: A review of key challenges. *Energy for Sustainable Development, 16*(3), 272–282. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esd.2012.05.006

Spear, R., Cornforth, C., & Aiken, M. (2009). The governance challenges of social enterprises: Evidence from a UK empirical study. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics, 80*(2), 247–273. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8292.2009.00386.x

Spicer, J., Kay, T., & Ganz, M. (2019). Social entrepreneurship as field encroachment: How a neoliberal social movement constructed a new field. *Socio-Economic Review, 17*(1), 195–227. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwz014

Stebbins, R. A. (2001). *Exploratory research in the social sciences* (Vol. 48). Sage.

Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonization and Afro-feminism*. Daraja Press.

Tomashevska, A., & Hryhoruk, I. (2022). Entrepreneurship with Social Responsibility as an Innovative Tool for Solving Social Needs. *Journal of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University*, *9*(3), 18-27. https://doi.org/10.15330/jpnu.9.3.18-27

Tracey, P., & Phillips, N. (2007). The distinctive challenge of educating social entrepreneurs: A postscript and rejoinder to the special issue on entrepreneurship education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 6*(2), 264–271. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2007.25223465

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1). https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *How innovation hubs are driving the start-up ecosystem in Kenya* [Newsletter]. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-03/Innovation%20Newsletter-%20Hubs-DRAFT%201.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *The role of Sustainable Development Goals in gender-inclusive entrepreneurship: A Kenya case study*. https://www.undp.org/kenya/publications/role-sdgs-gender-inclusive-entrepreneurship-kenya-case-study

United Nations Foundation. (2022). *Gender discrimination is enshrined in law. That needs to change*. https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/gender-discrimination-is-enshrined-in-law-that-needs-to-change/

Wachira, N. N. (2012). *The role of micro and small enterprises on women empowerment in Muthurwa market in Nairobi* [Master's thesis, University of Nairobi]. University of Nairobi Repository. http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/63048

Walby, S. (1989). Theorising patriarchy. *Sociology, 23*(2), 213–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038589023002004

Weerawardena, J., & Mort, G. S. (2006). Investigating social entrepreneurship: A multidimensional model. *Journal of World Business, 41*(1), 21–35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2005.09.001

Willis, J. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Capital social: Implicaciones para la teoría, la investigación y las políticas sobre desarrollo. *World Bank Research Observer*, *15*(2), 225-249.

World Economic Forum. (2019). *Empowering communities: The role of social entrepreneurship in advancing inclusive growth*. https://www.weforum.org/reports/empowering-communities-social-entrepreneurship

World Economic Forum. (2023, January 19). Social entrepreneurs can drive an inclusive 'Africa's century'. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/01/davos23-social-entrepreneurs-inclusive-africa/

World Bank. (2019). *Profiting from parity: Unlocking the potential of women's businesses in Africa*. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31421

World Bank. (2023). *Women, business and the law 2023*. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/39062

World Bank. (2024). *The World Bank's work in Kenya supports the government's Vision 2030 development strategy, which aims to accelerate sustainable growth, reduce inequality, and manage resource scarcity*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kenya/overview

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Yunus, M., Moingeon, B., & Lehmann-Ortega, L. (2010). Building social business models: Lessons from the Grameen experience. *Long Range Planning, 43*(2–3), 308–325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2009.12.005

Zahra, S. A., Gedajlovic, E., Neubaum, D. O., & Shulman, J. M. (2009). A typology of social entrepreneurs: Motives, search processes and ethical challenges. *Journal of Business Venturing, 24*(5), 519–532. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2008.04.007

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Self-efficacy: An essential motive to learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 82–91. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1016

Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Psychological empowerment: Issues and illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*(5), 581–599. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506983

Appendix A: Interview Guide/ Schedule

This interview schedule is designed to capture rich, contextual data from women social entrepreneurs in Nairobi. Questions align with the study's research questions and objectives, encompassing the interplay between social entrepreneurship and women's empowerment within the local context.

PARTICIPANT BIO-DATA

- Name (optional):
- Age:
- Educational background:
- Professional background:
- Present job title:
- Organisation:
- Field: (for example, Education, Health, Environment, Technology):

ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION

- When was your organisation formed?
- What is the primary purpose/mission of your organisation?
- How is your organisation structured (for example, registration type) and governed?
- What motivates you to identify your organisation as a Social Enterprise (or a business with a strong social mission)?
- How does your organisation generate revenue?
- What strategies do you employ to ensure your organisation's financial sustainability?

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN KENYA (Addressing Research Question 1)

1. What does "social entrepreneurship" mean to you in the context of your work?
2. How do you see the role and impact of social enterprises in addressing social and economic challenges in Kenya?
3. In what ways has the specific social and economic setting of Kenya, including cultural norms and gender dynamics, influenced the way you approach social entrepreneurship?
4. How do you perceive the impact of government policies (both national and local) on women-led social enterprises in Kenya?
5. What are your hopes and expectations for the future of women's social entrepreneurship in Kenya?

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP PATHWAYS TO WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (Addressing Research Question 2)

1. What inspired you to become involved in social entrepreneurship?
2. Describe your role in the design, planning, and implementation of your social enterprise's initiatives. How has this involvement influenced your sense of agency or personal growth?
3. Have you participated in any specific training or support programs related to social entrepreneurship? If so, how did these programs contribute to your skills, knowledge, or confidence?
4. Can you share examples of how you have collaborated with other women or women-led organisations? How has this collaboration contributed to your empowerment or the empowerment of others? (Probe for network building, resource sharing).
5. What are some of the significant challenges you have faced as a woman social entrepreneur? How have you navigated these challenges? (Probe for resilience strategies).
6. In your experience, how does your involvement in this social enterprise contribute to your economic independence and financial decision-making (at home and within the organisation)?
7. Have you experienced any changes in how your family or community perceives you because of your entrepreneurial activities? (Probe for social recognition, shifting gender norms).
8. Can you describe a specific instance where your participation in social entrepreneurship challenged existing gender norms or stereotypes in your community? What was the reaction?
9. How has your entrepreneurial journey influenced your self-confidence, leadership skills, and decision-making capacity? Can you recall a specific moment of significant growth?
10. How has your social enterprise provided resources or services that have benefited you or other women in your community? (Probe for tangible outcomes, access to resources).
11. Have you been involved in any efforts to advocate for policies or initiatives that support women social entrepreneurs in Kenya? If so, please describe.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (Addressing Research Question 3)

1. How do current government policies or legal frameworks (or lack thereof) enable or hinder your ability to launch and scale your social enterprise?
2. What resources (financial, mentorship, technology, etc.) have been critical to your enterprise's development? How accessible were these resources, and what barriers did you encounter?
3. In what ways have cultural expectations or community norms (both positive and negative) specifically affected your journey and role as a woman social entrepreneur? (Probe for patriarchal mindsets, intersectional challenges, community engagement).
4. What personal skills, knowledge, or experiences have been most critical to your success as a social entrepreneur? How have you leveraged these internal resources to navigate challenges?

5. Can you describe a particularly challenging moment in your entrepreneurial journey? What internal strengths or resilience strategies helped you to persevere?
6. How has your involvement in social entrepreneurship enhanced your sense of economic independence and personal agency?
7. Do you believe your personal growth (skills, resilience, motivation) has increased your influence within your community or broader social circles? If so, how?

CONCLUSION

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a woman social entrepreneur in Nairobi?
- What are your final thoughts on the role of social entrepreneurship in women's empowerment in Kenya?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Participant Information Sheet (PIS) - English

Greetings.

My name is Hanna Ondiek. I am a PhD candidate in Nonprofit Management at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Prof. Jacob Mati. I am conducting a research study about social entrepreneurship. The study title is "Social Entrepreneurship and Women's Economic and Social Empowerment in Kenya".

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about one and a half hours. The interview will take place at a place and time of your choice and convenience. They will be a semi-structured interview using key questions, and the information will be audio recorded with your permission. This data will be stored in a secure cloud and deleted after five years. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the interview, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including your age, educational and professional background. The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would usually have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life /some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or after this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, In that case, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) by telephone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:
Hanna Ondiek

E: 2623122@students.wits.ac.za, T: +254 0722 514 009

Supervisor: Prof. Jacob Mati
E: jacob.mati@wits.ac.za T: +27 11 717 3116

Arifa kwa Washiriki - Kiswahili

Jina langu ni Hanna Ondiek. Mimi ni mwanafunzi wa PhD katika Idara ya Usimamizi wa Mashirika Yasiyo ya Kiserikali katika Chuo Kikuu cha Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Msimamizi wangu ni Profesa Jacob Mati. Ninafanya utafiti kuhusu ujasiriamali wa kijamii. Jina la utafiti ni "Ujasiriamali wa Kijamii na Uwezeshaji wa Kiuchumi na Kijamii wa Wanawake huko Nairobi, Kenya".

Ninakualika kushiriki katika mahojiano. Ikiwa utachagua kushiriki, ushiriki wako katika utafiti huu utachukua takriban saa moja na nusu. Mahojiano yatafanyika mahali na wakati wa uchaguzi na urahisi wako. Haya yatakuwa mahojiano yasiyo na mfumo maalum yatakayotumia maswali muhimu na taarifa itaandikwa kwa sauti kwa idhini yako. Data hii itahifadhiwa katika wingu salama na kufutwa baada ya miaka mitano. Chombo pekee kitakachokuwa na ufikiaji wa data ni mtafiti.

Wakati wa mahojiano, nitahitaji kuuliza taarifa za kibinafsi kuhusu wewe, ikiwa ni pamoja na umri wako, historia yako ya elimu na kitaaluma. Mahojiano yatahifadhiwa kwa usiri na kutokuwa na utambulisho. Ninaposhiriki matokeo ya utafiti huu, sitaingiza jina lako au chochote kingine kinachoweza kukuonyesha. Kwa idhini yako, watafiti wengine wanaweza kutumia data iliyokusanywa kutoka utafiti huu, lakini jina lako na taarifa zako za kibinafsi hazitatumiwa au kupelekwa kwa wengine.

Ikiwa utachagua kushiriki katika utafiti huu, inapaswa kuwa kwa sababu unataka kujitolea. Hauhitajiki kushiriki. Unaweza kuacha kushiriki wakati wowote. Hauhitajiki kujibu maswali yoyote ikiwa hautaki. Hautapata faida moja kwa moja ikiwa utachagua kushiriki katika utafiti huu. Hautapoteza huduma, faida au haki zozote unazopaswa kuwa nazo kawaida ikiwa utachagua kutoshiriki. Kushiriki katika utafiti huu hakitakugharimu chochote. Hutalipwa kwa kushiriki katika utafiti huu.

Hatari za utafiti huu hazizidi zile zinazotokea katika maisha ya kawaida / baadhi ya maswali yaliyoulizwa yanaweza kukufanya uhisi huzuni au kukasirika. Ikiwa hii itatokea, nitakomesha mahojiano na kuendelea wakati mwingine.

Utafiti huu utaandikwa kama ripoti ya utafiti. Ripoti hiyo itapatikana kwenye tovuti ya maktaba ya chuo kikuu. Ikiwa ungependa kupokea muhtasari wa ripoti hii, nitafurahi kukupelekea.

Ikiwa una maswali wakati au baadaye kuhusu utafiti huu, tafadhali wasiliana nami au mtaalamu wangu kupitia maelezo yaliyoorodheshwa hapa chini. Ikiwa una wasiwasi au malalamiko kuhusu taratibu za maadili za utafiti huu, unakaribishwa kuwasiliana na Kamati ya Maadili ya Utafiti wa Binadamu ya Chuo Kikuu (Isiyokuwa ya Tiba), simu +27(0) 11 717 1408, barua pepe hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Kwa heshima,

Mtafiti:
Hanna Ondiek
Barua pepe: 2623122@students.wits.ac.za,
Simu: +254 0722 514 009

Msimamizi:
Profesa Jacob Mati
Barua pepe: jacob.mati@wits.ac.za
Simu: +27 11 717 3116

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Participant Consent Form - English

Title of project: Social Entrepreneurship and Women's Economic and Social Empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya

Name of researcher: Hanna Ondiek
Email: 2623122@students.wits.ac.za
Phone: (254) 722514009

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio-recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained), but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher)
…… (date)

Fomu ya Kibali cha Washiriki - Kiswahili

Jina la Mradi: Ujasiriamali wa Kijamii na Uwezeshaji wa Kiuchumi na Kijamii wa Wanawake mji Nairobi, Kenya
Jina la Mtafiti: Hanna Ondiek
Barua pepe: 2623122@students.wits.ac.za
Simu: (254) 722514009

Mimi, …….., nakubali kushiriki katika mradi huu wa utafiti.

Nakubaliana na yafuatayo:

(Tafadhali piga mstari kwenye chaguo sahihi hapo chini)

Utafiti huu umeelezwa kwangu. Naelewa kuhusu huu utafiti ni nini.	NDIYO	LA
Naelewa kuwa naweza kuchagua kujitolea kushiriki katika utafiti.	NDIYO	LA
Nakubaliana kwamba mahojiano yanaweza kurekodiwa kwa sauti	NDIYO	LA
Nakubaliana kwamba marejeleo moja kwa moja kutoka kwa mahojiano yangu yanaweza kutumika na mtafiti katika ripoti yake ya utafiti	NDIYO	LA
Nakubaliana kwamba ushiriki wangu utaendelea kuwa wa siri (jina langu au taarifa nyingine za kutambulika haitatumika na mtafiti katika ripoti yake ya utafiti)	NDIYO	LA
Nakubaliana kwamba watafiti wengine wanaweza kutumia taarifa nilizotoa katika mahojiano yangu (kulingana na kibali chao cha maadili kikipatikana), lakini jina langu na taarifa yoyote ya kibinafsi haitatumika au kupelekwa kwa wengine	NDIYO	LA

…… (saini)
…… (jina la mshiriki)
…… (tarehe)

…… (saini)
…… (jina la mtafiti)
…… (tarehe)

Appendix D: Ethics Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Ondiek

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H23/07/54**
PROJECT TITLE	Social Entrepreneurship and Women's Economic and Social Empowerment in Nairobi, Kenya
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms H Ondiek
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits Business School/
DATE CONSIDERED	21 July 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE	11 September 2026

DATE 12 September 2023 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Prof J Mati

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **A SIGNED COPY** returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ 13 SEPT 2023
Signature Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix E: Research License

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **951464**

Date of Issue: **16/September/2023**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms.. Hanna Atieno Ondiek of University of the Witwatersrand, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: Social Entrepreneurship and Women's Economic and Social Empowerment in Kenya for the period ending : 16/September/2024.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/23/29174**

951464

Applicant Identification Number

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code

NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

See overleaf for conditions