

Leading Global Models in Social Entrepreneurship

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Abstract:

Entrepreneurship has garnered significant attention from various governments and entrepreneurs alike, as it is considered an effective means of achieving development, progress, and the fight against unemployment and poverty problems that hinder social stability and economic advancement. This has led to growing interest in social entrepreneurship, which is viewed as a contemporary socio-economic approach focused on funding and developing economic projects aimed at solving social, cultural, and environmental issues, rather than simply generating financial profit.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship, SEED Initiative, Barefoot College.

1. Introduction

Contemporary societies have witnessed profound economic and social transformations that have produced growing challenges, the most prominent of which are unemployment and poverty two interlinked phenomena. The labour market's continuing and persistent inability to absorb the increasing numbers of job seekers, combined with the limitations of public resources and the inadequacy of social policies and effective planning, has contributed to the deepening of this complex crisis.

Therefore, it has become necessary to search for alternative and innovative solutions that respond to the demands of the labour market on one hand, and take into account the changes affecting various social structures on the other. In this context, social entrepreneurship has emerged as the most suitable option, as it combines economic initiative with social justice. It goes beyond the narrow profit-oriented objective and instead focuses on creating social value and preserving essential social gains such as justice, equality of opportunity, and solidarity.

Thus, social entrepreneurship presents itself as the most effective response to the labour market's failure to achieve fairness and ensure equal opportunities. It seeks to establish economic projects with a social purpose that are managed according to key entrepreneurial principles efficiency and innovation while reinvesting profits to serve the community rather than accumulate wealth or monopolize gains. These projects, with their dual economic (entrepreneurial) and social dimensions regardless of their fields share a fundamental goal: empowering individuals, particularly the unemployed and vulnerable groups (the poor, widows, persons with disabilities, etc.), to play an active role in the development process by integrating them into economic and productive cycles and enhancing their capacity for financial and productive independence.

Accordingly, social entrepreneurship is not merely an economic alternative; it is also an ethical and cultural one, distancing itself from excessive individualism. Based on the above, this paper seeks to analyse the role of social entrepreneurship in combating unemployment and poverty by examining several pioneering international experiences that have succeeded in achieving significant developmental progress, serving as mechanisms that enable vulnerable social groups to succeed and move beyond poverty and unemployment.

A social enterprise, as defined by: a process that involves creating something different and generating value by dedicating the necessary time and work, while assuming accompanying financial, psychological, and social risks, and obtaining returns in the form of financial or personal satisfaction, is considered an optimal solution to many social and environmental challenges faced by various countries such as unemployment, poverty, pollution, and climate change, including drought.

The purpose of entrepreneurship has therefore shifted: its aim is no longer merely to achieve financial profit but to engage in the social sphere and utilize available means to create investments that effectively and sustainably serve society.

Problem Statement:

Despite the multiplicity of development programmes and policies aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty, large segments of the populations in developing societies continue to live in vulnerable conditions. Traditional market mechanisms have proven unable to provide fair and inclusive employment opportunities.

This reality raises a fundamental question regarding the capacity of social entrepreneurship to offer more sustainable and effective solutions. Thus, the central research question becomes:

To what extent can social entrepreneurship be considered a strategic and effective alternative to traditional development mechanisms, given its ability to reduce unemployment, poverty, and social vulnerability?

More specifically:

How has social entrepreneurship succeeded in creating sustainable employment opportunities for vulnerable groups?

2 - The Concept of Social Entrepreneurship

The concept of social entrepreneurship emerged at the end of the 20th century, drawing increased attention as part of the broader evolution of economic thinking and societal awareness of social responsibility. It was officially recognized in 2004 at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Despite its increasing importance, there is still no universally agreed-upon definition. The term is subject to multiple interpretations due to its overlap with concepts like volunteer work, civil society, and solidarity. Historically, social entrepreneurship as a disciplinary field emerged in the 1980s, notably when Bill Drayton founded Ashoka, Muhammad Yunus developed microcredit, and the social economy in Europe evolved towards market-based models¹ (Barthélémy & Slitine, 2011).

The rise of social entrepreneurship globally was encouraged by the decline in the role of the state and gaps in the provision of social services. Until the late 1990s, it was nearly absent in academic research, but it has since become a significant field of study, with increasing literature addressing its economic and social impact² (Huybrechts & Nicholls, 2012).

Social entrepreneurship refers to the ability to establish economically profitable and socially purposeful projects aimed at meeting social needs. It does this by employing entrepreneurial mechanisms in a way that combines economic innovation with a strong commitment to social change. According to Gregory Dees, a leading thinker in the field, the social entrepreneur is one who “plays the role of change agent in the social sector by:

- Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
- Recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission,
- Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning,
- Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand,
- Exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.”³

Social entrepreneurship is often defined as the application of entrepreneurial principles risk-taking, innovation, and collaboration toward a social rather than a purely commercial goal. It serves as a “second invisible hand” in the economy, arising from the moral commitment and sense of shared responsibility of individuals⁴ (Santos, 2012). It creates jobs, adds value to goods within communities, promotes sustainable business methods, and influences both social and for-profit firms.

The scope of social entrepreneurship is broad and growing globally. As Sinha⁵ (2018) notes, it extends beyond activism to areas such as child welfare, healthcare, community policing, and counseling, across NGOs, social enterprises, and national/international bodies. Its qualitative features social mission, social change, innovation, and inclusion of marginalized populations are often more important than structural or legal forms. By filling developmental gaps left by state or traditional enterprises, social entrepreneurship improves quality of life and well-being, particularly for those at the Bottom of the Pyramid.

In Algeria, social entrepreneurship has evolved slowly, influenced by political and economic conditions. There is no national consensus on the definition of social enterprise, nor a single legal structure dedicated to it. Nevertheless, the principles of solidarity and mutual aid are deeply rooted in Algerian traditions, fostering the emergence of social enterprises. Social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a key mechanism for addressing challenges such as poverty, high unemployment, and environmental issues⁶ (Aliouche & Bonet Fernandez, 2017; Messahel, 2023). Women’s entrepreneurship, in particular, represents an important dimension of this movement, offering solutions to social problems and promoting sustainable local development⁷ (CNEIDFFE, 2024).

In the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report, social entrepreneurship is defined as: a type of entrepreneurship that addresses social, environmental, and community issues through innovative solutions, aiming to create sustainable impact, whether through nonprofit, for-profit, or hybrid organizations.⁸

2. International Experiences in Social Entrepreneurship

To better understand the impact and potential of social entrepreneurship in addressing poverty and unemployment, we will present some successful models from countries that have become global references in the field.

2.1 The Egyptian Experience

Egypt represents a significant case in the Arab region where social entrepreneurship has increasingly emerged as a response to persistent socio-economic challenges, particularly

poverty, unemployment, and unequal access to education and basic services. As highlighted by Fakoussa, O'Leary, and Salem (2020), social entrepreneurship in Egypt reflects a gradual shift away from ad-hoc philanthropic models toward financially sustainable social enterprises that aim to create long-term social impact through co-created solutions.⁹

The Egyptian social entrepreneurship ecosystem has been shaped by the involvement of international organizations, civil society actors, and hybrid support structures rather than relying solely on state-led interventions. Fakoussa et al. (2020) note that organizations such as Ashoka, INJAZ, and Misr El-Kheir have played a central role in promoting entrepreneurial approaches to development by supporting for-profit and non-profit social initiatives. In particular, Ashoka, which operates in Egypt as part of its global network, has contributed to the diffusion of social entrepreneurship principles by identifying, training, and supporting social entrepreneurs working in areas such as education, health, civic engagement, and community development.

Beyond international networks, local incubators have been instrumental in structuring early-stage social ventures. Nahdet El Mahrousa, established in 2003, functions as a social enterprise incubator that provides access to tools, mentoring, and professional networks over an extended support period. According to Fakoussa et al. (2020), the initiative has incubated more than 70 social enterprises and reaches tens of thousands of beneficiaries annually, illustrating the growing institutionalization of social entrepreneurship in Egypt.

Within this ecosystem, education-focused social enterprises have emerged as a response to limitations in the formal education system. Fakoussa et al. (2020) emphasize that Egypt's traditional education model often fails to equip young people with entrepreneurial skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving capacities. In this context, initiatives such as Educate Me exemplify mission-driven social enterprises that apply learner-centered and experiential approaches to address educational inequality, particularly in marginalized communities. Such initiatives align with the authors' argument that non-formal education plays a crucial role in nurturing social innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets.

Similarly, employment-oriented social enterprises have developed in response to structural unemployment and limited access to labor market opportunities. Fakoussa et al. (2020) identify access to resources especially finance and networks as a major barrier for aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly youth and women. Digital and intermediary platforms such as Shaghalni, which connect job seekers from underserved communities with employers, can be understood within this broader trend of social enterprises seeking market-based solutions to employment challenges while generating social value.

Overall, the Egyptian experience demonstrates that social entrepreneurship functions as a hybrid development strategy that integrates economic activity with social objectives. As Fakoussa et al. (2020) argue, despite infrastructural constraints and cultural challenges, social entrepreneurship in Egypt continues to expand due to international support, local incubators, and culturally embedded practices such as waqf, which historically emphasize social solidarity. These dynamics position social entrepreneurship as a complementary mechanism for addressing socio-economic inequalities and fostering sustainable development in the Egyptian context.

2.2. The SEED Initiative: Supporting Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development

The SEED Initiative (Supporting Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development) is an international programme that identifies, supports, and researches innovative entrepreneurial approaches to locally led sustainable development. It was founded in 2002 by a partnership between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in response to the commitments made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg¹⁰ (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008).

SEED focuses on start-up social and environmental enterprises operating in developing countries and emerging economies. Its core objective is to promote sustainable development by supporting enterprises that deliberately integrate economic viability with social equity and environmental conservation, in line with the “triple bottom line” approach. Through its activities, SEED seeks to contribute to poverty reduction, livelihood improvement, community well-being, and the sustainable management of natural resources (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008).

A defining feature of the SEED Initiative is its emphasis on multi-stakeholder partnerships. SEED-supported enterprises typically involve collaboration between local communities, civil society organizations, private sector actors, research institutions, and public authorities. These partnerships are viewed as essential mechanisms for achieving equitable benefit sharing, enhancing community ownership, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of entrepreneurial initiatives (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008).

Beyond recognition, SEED provides a tailored package of non-financial and technical support to award winners. This includes capacity development in key areas such as leadership, partnership management, business planning, marketing, administrative and financial reporting, and strategic planning. These support activities are coordinated by a central SEED Secretariat and delivered through specialist service providers, with the aim of strengthening the managerial and operational capacities of start-up enterprises (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008).

The SEED Research and Learning Programme, implemented by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), plays a central role in documenting and analysing the experiences of SEED award winners. Drawing on empirical research with supported enterprises and the broader literature on social and environmental entrepreneurship, the programme has identified eight critical success factors that increase the likelihood of enterprise sustainability. These include committed leadership, effective partnerships, clarity and validation of the innovative concept, access to business and marketing skills, triple bottom line planning, management of short- and long-term benefits, community engagement, and risk management (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008).

In addition, the SEED Initiative has developed a set of fourteen performance indicators that enable enterprises and investors to monitor progress toward economic, social, and environmental goals. These indicators cover business performance (such as financial viability and market development), social performance (including income generation, skills development, and community organization), environmental performance (such as conservation outcomes and technological innovation), and partnership effectiveness (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008). Together, these indicators form the basis of a rapid assessment framework that can be used both for self-evaluation by enterprise leaders and for informed decision-making by donors and development partners.

SEED also operates an annual global awards scheme that identifies and recognizes outstanding start-up social and environmental enterprises. Award winners benefit from international visibility, access to networks of previous winners and institutional partners, tailored technical assistance, and limited seed funding typically up to USD 5,000 to support the implementation of a specific component of their development plan, as agreed between the enterprise and the SEED Initiative (SEED Initiative & IISD, 2008).

Overall, the SEED Initiative represents a comprehensive support model for social and environmental entrepreneurship, combining recognition, research, capacity development, and partnership building. By linking enterprise-level innovation with broader sustainable development objectives, SEED contributes to advancing inclusive economic development, social well-being, and environmental protection at the local level.

2.3 The Indian Experience: The Barefoot College

2.3.1 Founding and Philosophy

The Barefoot College (BC), founded by Bunker Roy in 1972 in Tilonia, Rajasthan, India, emerged from Roy's conviction that poverty should not be a barrier to education or development. After graduating in 1967, Roy moved to Tilonia, where he observed that local youth were leaving rural areas due to high unemployment and limited access to formal education, often resulting in migration to cities¹¹ (Roy & Hartigan, 2008).

Roy believed that development programs should not rely solely on formally educated specialists but should instead leverage the hidden talents and practical skills of local populations, even if they were illiterate or semi-literate. The BC was designed to place marginalized communities at the center of development processes, enabling them to become agents of change within their own villages¹² (Shaikh, 2024; The Barefoot College.).

Inspired by Gandhian principles, the college emphasized self-reliance, collective decision-making, and the utilization of local knowledge and skills before seeking external expertise (Roy & Hartigan, 2008; The Barefoot College).

2.3.2 Admission Criteria

Students admitted to BC are typically poor, from marginalized rural communities, and motivated to apply their skills toward community development. The college does not accept students who are solely interested in academic degrees or prefer office-based work, prioritizing resilience, courage, flexibility, and innovation (Shaikh, 2024).

2.3.3 Key Projects and Initiatives

2.3.3.1 Healthcare Project

Started in 1973, the BC healthcare initiative provides free healthcare services to remote villages lacking basic facilities. Over 200 health centers now operate, each staffed with at least one health supervisor trained in first aid, CPR, and vaccination awareness. General practitioners and specialists conduct regular checkups, improving access to primary healthcare in rural communities (Roy & Hartigan, 2008).

2.3.3.2 Shelter for the Homeless Project

BC graduates trained in construction have built over 200 homes benefiting approximately 50,000 rural residents. Using local materials and simple tools, the self-help construction method allows communities to create functional houses including sleeping and cooking spaces and multi-use roofs without professional engineers or architects (Shaikh, 2024).

2.3.3.3 Maternal and Childcare Project

Women in the villages are trained as midwives to perform monthly checkups, raise awareness about family planning, nutrition, prenatal and postnatal care, and infant health, including vaccinations. This project enhances maternal and child health in underserved communities (Shaikh, 2024).

2.3.3.4 Arid Environmental Development Project

Due to severe water scarcity, women and girls previously traveled long distances for clean water. The BC promoted sustainable environmental practices such as planting drought-resistant trees, constructing hand-dug wells, and using traditional rainwater harvesting methods. By 1984, over 1,042 individuals, including 39 women, were trained to install and maintain hand-dug wells (Roy & Hartigan, 2008).

2.3.3.5 Solar Energy Project

Since 1989, BC has pioneered solar energy initiatives to provide electricity to remote villages. The program trains local men and women—especially older rural women—to manufacture, install, and maintain solar lighting systems. Students undergo a six-month training program emphasizing hands-on learning, color-coded visual aids, and practical exercises to demystify technology (Shaikh, 2024; The Barefoot College.).

Graduates return to their villages to assemble and maintain solar equipment, forming village solar committees to manage operations and fees. This decentralized approach ensures community ownership and financial sustainability. Within India, over 1,700 women solar engineers have been trained across 20 states, electrifying more than 75,000 homes and saving an estimated 30,000 liters of kerosene per month¹³ (International Renewable Energy Agency, 2022).

The program also integrates entrepreneurial training and life skills, including financial literacy, marketing, menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, waste management, and water conservation, empowering women as both technical experts and agents of social change¹⁴ (“Empowering Change: 26 Rural Women Pioneering Solar Engineering!”, 2023).

2.3.3.6 Night Schools Project

BC established over 250 night schools serving approximately 7,000 students annually. Committees manage daily school operations, including educational materials, enrollment, maintenance, and circulation of mobile libraries. Solar energy powers the schools, enabling sustainable learning opportunities in rural areas (Roy & Hartigan, 2008).

2.3.3.7 Women’s Development Project

Cultural restrictions often limit rural women to household tasks, such as fetching water, restricting their participation in development initiatives. BC launched a women’s development program to educate women about legal rights, health, and income-generating activities like embroidery and weaving. Over 300 women have received training and now earn income from home, achieving greater economic and social empowerment (Shaikh, 2024).

2.3.4 Expansion and Global Impact

By the late 20th century, BC expanded to over 134 Indian districts and trained rural communities in countries such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone. Its programs have created lasting impacts in energy access, sustainable livelihoods, women’s empowerment, and community self-reliance (Shaikh, 2024; The Barefoot College.).

The BC exemplifies decentralized, practical, and gender-sensitive development, demonstrating that marginalized populations—particularly older, semi-literate women—can lead technological

and social innovations when provided with appropriate training and community support (Roy & Hartigan, 2008; Shaikh, 2024).

3. Social entrepreneurship in Algeria:

Social entrepreneurship in Algeria remains relatively unknown and is growing slowly, due to a lack of social awareness about entrepreneurship and limited understanding of its importance and effectiveness. Nevertheless, it remains a hope for achieving sustainable local development and overcoming issues such as poverty and unemployment through initiatives that combine a social dimension with an economic one. This type of enterprise aims not only at profit, but also at offering solutions to social problems such as professional integration, local development, improving living conditions, and creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities in a sustainable way. As El Amine (2024) notes, “Algeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem remains influenced by traditional cultural norms and social structures that can both support and hinder entrepreneurial initiatives,”¹⁵ highlighting how social and familial factors shape the development of social enterprises in the country.

Women's entrepreneurship, in particular, plays a critical role in promoting socio-economic development in Algeria. According to the second national hybrid conference on Women and Socio-Economic Development (CNEIDFFE, 2024), women represent a substantial proportion of the female labor market (18.8% as reported by the National Office of Statistics, 2019). However, they face significant challenges, including operating businesses from home (73.56% of women entrepreneurs), lack of social security coverage (83.2% not covered), difficulties in obtaining finance, and limited access to specialized training and mentorship. Despite these obstacles, digital transformation provides new opportunities for women to expand their businesses, access larger markets, and overcome traditional barriers. The conference emphasized the importance of public policies, training programs, mentorship networks, and digital tools to enhance the success and sustainability of women-led enterprises in Algeria (CNEIDFFE, 2024).

Despite some support from microfinance programs and certain institutions, social entrepreneurship in Algeria faces many obstacles: such as a weak legislative and regulatory environment governing this field, difficulties in accessing financing, and a lack of training and awareness about the culture of social entrepreneurship. However, the opportunity remains open: if the “culture of social enterprise” is strengthened in society, and effective support is provided to initiatives whether by the state or the private sector social entrepreneurship can become a lever for balanced economic and social development in Algeria, provided the structural challenges are addressed and the support system is developed.

Among the obstacles that have prevented the success of social entrepreneurship in Algeria are the following:

- A lack in the legislative and regulatory framework governing this domain, which leads to a gap in the legal and administrative framework for economic activity.
- A shortage of accurate economic and statistical information, making it difficult for public and private sectors to make strategic decisions based on precise and reliable data.
- The absence of a comprehensive vision and clear conception of the development process; challenges are dealt with without an integrated and studied strategy. As a result, attempts are

repeated without achieving the desired results leading to waste of resources and failure to make the most of efforts made.

Recent empirical findings shed further light on the state of social entrepreneurship in Algeria. According to a comprehensive study conducted by the British Council ¹⁶(Global Social Enterprise, 2023), social enterprises in Algeria are a relatively recent phenomenon: 66% of surveyed enterprises have emerged within the last three years, and 76% are still in the start-up or growth stage. They operate across diverse sectors such as arts and crafts (20%), culture and leisure (8%), and environment (8%), often with a regional rather than national reach. Importantly, these enterprises demonstrate significant gender inclusivity: women comprise more than 50% of the workforce in 64% of social enterprises, and leadership is equally shared between men and women (49% each), a figure far higher than in conventional businesses.

The study also identifies **key barriers to growth**, which extend beyond structural challenges. Access to finance remains a critical constraint, with 59% of respondents relying primarily on personal funds, while 49% report regulatory and administrative burdens as major obstacles. Additionally, confusion regarding the concept of social enterprise persists: 36% of respondents had never heard of it, and many perceive trading for profit as taboo, highlighting the need for greater awareness and education.

Despite these challenges, social entrepreneurs remain **optimistic about the future**, with 66% expecting growth in turnover. The study underscores the importance of targeted **public programmes**, such as CAPDEL (2016), PADSEL-NOA (2017), and UNDP's Social Economy programme (2020), which provide capacity building, training, and financial support for social enterprises, particularly those led by youth and women. These interventions reflect the potential for social entrepreneurship to complement government efforts and to serve as a sustainable engine for economic inclusion, job creation, and social innovation.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the notion that while Algeria lacks a formal legal framework and comprehensive statistical data on social enterprises, there is a **nascent yet vibrant ecosystem**, rooted in cultural principles of solidarity and mutual aid. Addressing structural barriers, expanding access to finance, and improving awareness and training could transform social entrepreneurship into a **strategic lever for socio-economic development**, capable of tackling unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion in a sustainable manner.

4. Conclusion

It has become clear from the above discussion that social entrepreneurship has emerged as the most effective and powerful solution to tackle socio-economic challenges. As a practical tool to achieve balance across developmental, economic, social, and environmental fields, it plays a crucial role in combating unemployment. Social enterprises create new job opportunities and stimulate local economies. Unlike traditional jobs, which may be scarce in certain regions, social projects provide sustainable employment especially for women, people with disabilities, and unqualified youth while opening the door for training, development, and empowerment.

Thus, social entrepreneurship follows a cumulative trajectory: it starts in one area and expands into others, as demonstrated by Barefoot College, which enabled vulnerable and poor populations to become self-sufficient and improved their quality of life. This is why it is viewed as a comprehensive socio-economic development model spanning education, health, clean energy, and more.

However, in Algeria, social entrepreneurship faces several barriers, such as:

- A lack of legislative and regulatory frameworks governing the field, creating gaps in legal and administrative processes.
- A lack of accurate economic and statistical information, making it difficult for the public and private sectors to make informed strategic decisions.
- The absence of a comprehensive vision and clear developmental plan, resulting in fragmented efforts that fail to yield desired outcomes and waste valuable resources.

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