

Social Entrepreneurship: The Role of Intangible Resources in the Resource Scarce Environment

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Abstract—Resources are crucial to the development and sustainability of social ventures. Thus, resources and resources scarcity are central concepts to study and understand the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship specially in developing countries where resources are very limited. Social entrepreneurs in developing countries face bigger challenges because financial resources are scarce. The empirical findings in this paper suggest that social enterprises in poor resources environments survive and grow because of the existence of social and human capitals in which they serve as prerequisites for the physical resources required for sustainability. This research paper explores how governments and policymakers might take initiatives to support and foster social entrepreneurial activities in a resource-constraints environment reflecting on the experiences of Egypt-based social enterprises.

Keywords—Social ventures, financial constraints, intangible resources, scarce resources, legitimacy, developing countries, Egypt.

I. INTRODUCTION

DESPITE the newness of social entrepreneurship some concepts of it have gained great attention including opportunity identification, social value creation and new business model creation and entrepreneurial motivations [1]. Theory and empirical work related to the adoption of different approaches of crucial resources is limited [2]. Yet, current literature has touched little on the question of available resources for social entrepreneurs in developing countries [3], [4]. Through this research paper, we seek to identify the vital resources available to build social entrepreneurship highlighting the role of social and human resources, especially in resource-constrained environment. This subject is very important for academics as well as practitioners for better understanding of the social entrepreneurship in the developing countries. Given this, this empirical research provides an underpinning for further empirical research of resources in social entrepreneurship in these countries' context.

There are notable differences in the development path of social enterprises in different regions and countries [5], [6]. For example, while in the UK, as in other developed countries, the growth of social enterprise has been in the shadow of the welfare state or with the help of socially conscious philanthropists, the development of social enterprises in the developing world has taken a different, less structured path [4]. In developing countries where government support is meagre, social enterprises often start at grass roots level as small community enterprises and organically grow. There appears to

be a disconnection between the understanding of social entrepreneurship phenomenon between the developed and developing world studies [7]-[9]. Current research has almost entirely based its empirical focus on the developed world and, though valuable, it has rendered the overall understanding of the phenomenon incomplete. One of the disadvantages of this bias is the lack of effective policy development and implementation in the developing countries.

Types of resources available in resource poor environment of developing countries has received less attention [10]. Thus, this study provides valuable insights for the policy development as well as social entrepreneurship and resources theories. Social entrepreneurship has a practical significance due to its importance of achieving social transformation specially in developing countries where governments have limited budget for in developing countries [2].

This study is structured as follows. First section presents the introduction then followed by Section II that discusses social entrepreneurship literature and its theoretical underpinnings of the three resources highlighting the gap of exploring these resources in the developing countries context. After that, the methods used in the study are explained followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings using empirical quotes from social entrepreneurs and their teams and triangulated with the theory. Finally, the study discusses the possible policy implications based on the empirical findings for governments and policy makers.

II. RESOURCES AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social entrepreneurs are like traditional entrepreneurs, so they need financial and human resources to exploit opportunities, but they operate with limited resources [11]. Theory of social entrepreneurship suggests that social, human, and financial capitals have an impact on traditional and social enterprises [12]-[14]. Reference [15] suggested that finance, education, and networking help social entrepreneurs overcome any challenges they might face. The presence of the three resources is essential for social enterprises to create social value and without them entrepreneurs are not able to undertake their activities [12]. Because social entrepreneurs work in extreme resource constraints, “abundance mentality” that “involves attending to resources as plentiful, regenerative, and enabling” may help in shifting from problem solving to possibility-finding and encourage the innovative use of alternative resources [16, p.519].

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A. Human Capital

Human capital has been found to be an important component in understanding resources in social entrepreneurship as it helps entrepreneurs to marshal the cognitive resources and improve the entrepreneurial motivation to overcome daily challenges [17]. References [18] and [19], for instance, argue that since improved knowledge, cognitive ability and skills improve human performance, they are best viewed as enhancing human capital. The ability of the entrepreneur to resolve puzzles is therefore essential to acting entrepreneurially drawing upon explicit and tacit knowledge, social skills, and emotional attachment to the project [20]. Theory suggests that various measures of entrepreneurs' general human capital include educational qualifications, while specific human capital refers to trainings, age, management experience and knowledge, and industry experience [21], [22]. Reference [23] also identifies three forms of human capital that contribute to increasing entrepreneurs' human capital base - formal, informal, and non-formal. They illustrated these forms of human capital as educational attainment, average income, and life expectancy. Both [24] and [25] have also highlighted the unforeseen and non-linear effects of education and human capital development. The review of literature identifies the role of education in developing human capital and shows that well-educated individuals have greater tendency to do volunteerism and become more social entrepreneurs than commercial entrepreneurs [12], [14], [26]. In summary, whilst human capital development and usage is important in all enterprises, it seems especial in social enterprises. Reference [23] suggests that industry-specific human capital may play an important role in the generation of innovative activity within an industry if it is characterized by high quality knowledge exchange among the main players within that industry. From a different perspective, [27] suggests that experience in business accumulates to human capital and correlates closely with further business success. Individuals who have higher human capital are in better position to identify an exploit business opportunity. Furthermore, they can run successful ventures even without financial support [22].

B. Social Capital

Social capital reflects the social connections, ties, and networking. Social entrepreneurship is the sum of its internal social capital (relationships between individuals) and its external social capital (relationships between external organizations and individuals in the focal firm) [28]. Social capital can be utilized to create human capital- that is, the possession of social capital within the family and communities accumulate to knowledge and human capital stock [29], [30]. Social resources can also facilitate access to additional resources that build and leverage capabilities to achieve competitiveness [31]. There is also evidence that an entrepreneur's social skills and social networks can influence outcomes for both new ventures and established organizations [31]. Social skills such as reputation and social networks are also crucial to the success of persons to attract more valuable resources like employees and finance. It has been suggested that

social capital leads to trust and reciprocity among individuals, so it eases the sharing knowledge and information sharing [12]. Reference [33] in their study illustrated the important role of trust and transparency as key success factors in social enterprises across MENA region. Reference [34] observed that although social capital is of huge significance to social entrepreneurship, little or no attention is paid to the social aspects in the creation of enterprises in developing economies. They consider entrepreneurship as a social practice, which means that the presence or absence of social capital affects the nature of the business. A further suggestion made is that families with high socio-economic class could use the social capital to accumulate both human and financial capitals in children [34]. Reference [23] suggested social capital as features of social organizations, such as network structures, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and co-operation for mutual benefit within a society. In addition to this, social capital is an effective resource tool where resources are limited as it enables social entrepreneurs to become more efficient and create new strategies. Thus, the central proposition in the social capital literature is that networks of relationships constitute, or lead to, resources that can be used for the good of the individuals as well as society.

C. Financial Capital

Financial capital assembly is an essential part of the entrepreneurial process because without technology, buildings, and working capital opportunities remain unexploited [28], [6]. Financial resource is presented in form of household income and other physical assets. Reference [35] argues that financial capital is fundamental for social value creation and without it entrepreneurs will prioritize the economic goals to fulfill basic human needs. So, small amounts of capital are often raised from family and friends or crowdfunding and at later stages from banks and market sources of capital are required. Whilst in theory capital assembly and the legitimacy of a business can be separated, they mutually support each other in practice [36]. Depending on who is contributing, social entrepreneurs often face a bewildering array of accountabilities if their capital assembly includes gifts, grants, loans, project finance and/or equity. Capital assembly and its subsequent accountability are therefore much more complex for social entrepreneurs than for-profit entrepreneurs. In short, resources: tangible and intangible [37] are two important constituents of social entrepreneurship. However, intangible resources are even more important at the development stages of any social foundation, a view contrasting [38] and [13] who said that financial capitals increase credibility and make it easy for entrepreneurs get access to other means of support. Accordingly, entrepreneurs are in a better position to overcome uncertainties. In short, the possessions of valuable resources are important to generate social value through their orchestration in a new way.

III. METHODS

To generate the research insights delivered here, we employed ethnography approach to generate insights from social entrepreneurs in Egypt we have known for long time

about the availability of resources at hand for their social ventures. Through this research method we involved social entrepreneurs in their own environment through use of various tools such as observation and face-to-face interviews with them and field experts [39]. During the six years of research experience, especially while the researchers working with a variety of social enterprises across Egypt and Africa, a question has been raised on how those enterprises can drive social and economic development and what nature of support they need to thrive. In doing ethnographic studies, for example, it has been suggested that long time should be involved because participant observation requires commitment and understanding. In this sense, we become part of the social entrepreneurship phenomenon under study [35]. The ethnographic research usually focusses on key insights relevant to the context of the study, clear stories with important meanings, and informants' language [36]. The generated insights can be used as a foundation for theory and policy development [37]. It became apparent that; networks are the root from which new ideas around business and technology originate. This is critical given that most of the few successful enterprises in the developing countries survived mainly due to their connections and networks that granted them access to grants and sources of funds from international donors.

We designed two interview schedules to elicit information from the following: (a) social entrepreneurs' stories to cover the themes identified in our literature review, (b) expert informants to provide a better understanding of the Egyptian context, (c) using secondary data sources such as websites, documents, and previous research on social entrepreneurship in Egypt. The face-to-face interviews took two months obtaining data from ten social entrepreneurs and five filed experts. The observations took six years of direct contact with the social entrepreneurs through our dedication to empirical research projects which address social entrepreneurship phenomenon in the developing countries. The first interview was used as a pilot for our interview schedule, and it was found that whilst the main questions were satisfactory, some supplementary questions were adjusted for future interviews. As [38] suggests, all the interviews were guided by the literature review. Interviews were conducted in Arabic/English and recorded. In translation and transcription of the Arabic parts, we took care to capture meanings rather than literal translation. The analysis of data involved the reading and re-reading of interviews transcripts, websites, enterprises documents and reports to search for similar themes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the resource marshalling by Egyptian social entrepreneurs: human, social, and financial capital, stressing the importance of intangible assets, (including formal and tacit knowledge) and their search for legitimacy in social entrepreneurs' target community and with Government, NGOs, and financial institutions. We begin by analyzing human capital, then social and finally financial capital.

A. Human Capital and Legitimate Social Enterprises

The interviewed social entrepreneurs have received good education, often studied abroad which enabled them to bring a repository of knowledge and wisdom to their project. The characteristic of education as human capital is observed across the sample of interviewed social entrepreneurs. Some social entrepreneurs studied in Washington, Harvard and Pennsylvania; supporting [23]'s argument that high human capital is important for all entrepreneurs. Theory shows that well-educated individuals have greater tendency to do volunteerism and become more social entrepreneurs than commercial entrepreneurs [12], [14], [26]. Education brings a bundle of unforeseen wisdom to social ventures, as [24] and [25] argue.

Since as [27] suggests, experience in business correlates closely with further business success, we expected to find successful social entrepreneurs to have serious business experience, which was the case. The interviewees stress the importance of combining business experience with a social vision as building legitimacy: "the founder of the social enterprise has saved thousands of lives in many developing countries" (Executive Director Case 1). Moreover, the founders of other social enterprises have similar experiences which give them the confidence instigate new social ventures. One of the experts explained that applying business techniques and experience to social enterprises, creates additional dynamic capabilities, reinforcing [23]'s points that industry-specific human capital promotes innovation built upon specialist knowledge and empathy with the values of the target recipients.

Our research reveals that successful social entrepreneurs learn in both formal and informal settings, cumulating and apply both tacit and formal knowledge to the advantage of their venture; for example, the social entrepreneurs brought invaluable prior knowledge as Interviewee reports:

... Therefore, the know-how is very important in this field. The social entrepreneur is keen on transferring this know-how to young doctors to keep this foundation after his death.

As [20] notes, without applicable knowledge, social entrepreneurs cannot hope to envision new solutions to intractable social problems. Examples include the using of marketing expertise of the founders of the social entrepreneur to enroll disabled people; similarly, other social entrepreneurs brought to the project their prior knowledge of development and human rights whilst an interviewed expert states:

It is all about strategies and how to implement them to benefit from what you must scale social impact. We really underestimate the role of knowledge and know-how of doing anything we do.

Evidence from these social entrepreneurs and experts demonstrate that their prior, applicable knowledge and expertise are significant to social entrepreneurship, supporting [18] and [19]'s work on the importance of human capital.

Reference [11] suggested that the knowledge is important to social entrepreneurship to enable entrepreneurs manage and distribute the resources among operational teams, thereby making the project more effective and efficient. This is a

contribution of knowledge that enhances the creation of innovation. For example, The Executive Manager of social enterprise has a wide experience and knowledge that helped her manage the social enterprise in an innovative way. She comments:

[...] I believe that this job needs the person, who promotes the subject and using his expertise.

Each of these projects benefit from the distribution of knowledge to teams.

The Expert explained the role of management qualification for any development project. Based on his expertise of development projects in emerging markets and as member of judges' panel of Harvard Social Entrepreneurship Competition 2012 he illustrated the importance of management.

[...] we look at the qualifications of persons who could manage the project. So, management becomes a critical factor there. So, the number of beneficiaries they going to serve, the visibility, the required finance and social entrepreneurs' qualifications.

Another Expert stressed on the qualifications of persons who could manage projects is a critical factor:

[...] Management team is very important. For example, most of organizations have "one-man show and depend on the founder or manager only once this man leaves the company they fail to continue". Having said this, the background and qualifications of all teams are important for the success of any enterprise.

These findings support the human resources literature, such [40] and [41] that emphasizes management competences and the distribution of knowledge to teams.

B. Social Capital and Legitimate Social Enterprises

The social capital in form of internal and external relationships with other organizations and individuals found to be crucial and supported by our findings as the findings reveal the importance of the informal networks for all social entrepreneurs included in the study. For example, the management teams of the social enterprises used their own networks as well as the founding entrepreneurs' networks at start-up to get financial support. Additionally, they built partnerships and collaborations with some public governmental entities and private sectors for serving social purposes. Furthermore, an example of leveraging these social resources is given here:

[...] We have Strategic collaboration with Imperial College London, 8-10 research programs links with some research centers and hospitals in Montreal, Canada. In the Middle East we have link with the Medical City of Sheikh Zayed in Dubai and Heart Centre in Doha, Qatar.

Social entrepreneurs have extensive networks in Egypt, Middle East and internationally, which they use to assemble resources and collaborate in knowledge transfers. Social capital benefits venture creation, especially in human capital [31]. Our research finding confirms this view: intangible resources are critical to social enterprise success: they build legitimacy and therefore in turn help assemble other capital resources like finance. An interviewed Expert demonstrates the symbiotic

relationship between capital assembly and human resources highlighting the role of human and social capitals for social enterprises to survive and grow in Egypt where financial resources are rare.

To sum up, the social and human capital resources are essential to social enterprises operate in Egypt. They all have started their social ventures with little amount of informal financial capital. The key to build legitimacy and access finance was to assemble and utilize these intangible resources strategically. Furthermore, the analysis indicated that global exposure and international networks and relations play a prominence role to create innovative processes and social value.

C. Financial Capital as an Outcome of Intangible Assets Assembly and Legitimacy

Sources and types of capital assembly vary in Egypt's social enterprises, however, each need to meet the requirement of the Ministry of Social Solidarity in Egypt (including presenting budgets). In these social enterprises, capital assembled was originally informal and comes from savings, salaries, prizes, family, friends, and/or university community club budget [35]. Social Entrepreneurs took this route and then additional capital was assembled from fund raising and donation from the founders' networks, including international networks. At later phases social entrepreneurs managed to leverage this extra financial capital to reinvest in social activities to develop financial models and sustain social ventures. While some enterprises have started with founder's capitals initially; the head of HR of one of the social enterprises giving this example.

[...] It is only our own financial resources. Social entrepreneur of case 4 allocates 10,000,000 Egyptian Pound annual budgets for her enterprise. Ever since that day we felt how gifted we are for having such an opportunity to make a Change for Change.

Mentioning three key resources of capital, human, social, and financial, an Expert emphasizes their importance:

I can say human and social resources are the big assets for social entrepreneurs in Egypt, but they lack the financial resources as I said before. I believe that the three resources are important.

Our research findings show that assembling human and social capital (part of legitimacy) facilitates the assemblage of financial capital: success breeds success. In this we disagree with [28] who argues that financial capital is more important for acquiring the necessary resources and without it, opportunities remain unexploited. He and (for example) [38] appear to us to reverse causality: money follows the vision, rather than the vision (social and human resource assemblage) following money. Of course, we agree with [36] that financial resources are important; our point relates to how social entrepreneurs assemble capital.

In summary, the availability of human and social capitals for social entrepreneurship in Egypt is clear in our discussion. In addition to that, they act as a prerequisite to legitimacy and appear relevant to the community that facilitate the access the finance that is important for sustainability. Our observation of these social enterprises over the time span of six years we can

see the scaling up activities that lead to foreseen social and economic achievements across different sectors in Egypt. This identifies how social entrepreneurs move beyond the constraints of resources scarcity to fashion their own collection of resources to create their legitimacy and social value. Furthermore, self-funded enterprises had to leverage those two resources for more support and knowledge sharing. This finding agrees with [6]'s argument that networks and relationships development bring trust and credibility that serve as legitimate base for access to other physical and financial resources.

V.CONCLUSION

This paper unpacks the dynamic relationship between social entrepreneurs' assets assembly and legitimacy that move beyond the lack of financial support. The findings demonstrate that entrepreneurs who own a larger stock of capital resources are more able to sustain and grow. Clearly, social and human capitals are the most important to identify opportunities, marshal resources strategically and to access other resources such as finance that is important to sustain the enterprise. The possession of resources helps entrepreneurs to buffer against uncertainty in the surrounded environment. The investigation of different resources available to social entrepreneurship in Egypt this research disagrees with [38] who argues that firms with strong financial position at the development stages are likely to survive. We extend social entrepreneurship and capital theory by highlighting the importance of human and social capital for setting up social enterprises.

Through this research, we find that successful enterprises were rooted in strong human capital and networks which produced new ideas around businesses. The findings of this research suggest that successful social entrepreneurial activities are driven by the collective actions not "lone brilliance". Rather, we find that interactions and collaborations are essential to create social value. This research contributes to the development of social entrepreneurship literature that aims to identify social entrepreneurial processes and success. In addition to this, the findings of the study have an important implication for policy development in the developing countries context. For example, we find that many social enterprises in developing countries have survived by utilizing their connections or networks to access grants or other support from international donors. Similarly, social ventures relied heavily on their social ties and networks in order to gain access to other resources like finance and community involvement. With the challenges imposed by COVID-19 pandemic social entrepreneurs will continue to engage in their social networks to survive and grow.

VI.PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

Policy makers increasingly consider social entrepreneurs as valued agents in economic, social, and environmental revival. This study is tackling the societal challenge of how social entrepreneurs can contribute to provide new solutions to old problems despite the lack of financial resources. Although social entrepreneurship has been hailed as a solution to poverty

and disadvantage, it seems that it is often privileged individuals who conceive of such solutions and business models designed to tackle these issues. Yet those who reside and are embedded in disadvantaged communities have arguably a better understanding of both the social issues as well as of possible opportunities in those contexts.

Based on this paper it could be recommended that government must pay attention and mobilize the human capitals of social entrepreneurs and their teams. Moreover, social resources particularly networks including national and international ones are great assets for social ventures creation and could make a privilege for the government, business incubators and other entities which take the responsibility to train individuals who possess these assets for social goals. Identifiably, there are hundreds of innovative social entrepreneurs who work hard to make a difference in the lives of the people. What these social entrepreneurs located in poor-resources environment lack is structures and enough financial resources to support their efforts. These purposeful social enterprises are worth researching. This research creates an opportunity for policymakers to open spaces for dialogue and think about untapped human resources of social entrepreneurs, which can potentially allow for improving responsiveness today and addressing social and environmental interactable issues.

The landscape of social entrepreneurship is growing in the last 10-15 years; however, it lacks assistance from the media, government, and public sector. With constrained public and private resources, traditional development frameworks in the developing countries are inadequate and need transformation. Social entrepreneurship with the use of business models and methods can scale positive and sustainable social impact. It also provides a platform upon which such a development model can be built. Within the complex ecosystem of domestic governments, international donors, private businesses and individual philanthropists, the emerging model of social entrepreneurship offers potential as being one model to address the multi-sectorial challenges young people face in Egypt and other similar countries in Africa.

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