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## **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AS THE GAME-CHANGER: EMBRACING INNOVATION AND DYNAMISM IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN ZIMBABWE**

**Rangarirai Frank<sup>a</sup> & Zororo Muranda<sup>b</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The integration of economic and social value creation through social entrepreneurship has become a global phenomenon. Only recently, social work practitioners, researchers, and academics have begun to explore social entrepreneurship including its significance to social work practice. This paper discusses social enterprise as an innovative and dynamic approach to social work practice which addresses complex societal challenges within a constrained but constantly changing environment. Since social entrepreneurship embraces the application of business acumen to raise income for the purposes of supporting a social mission, its application to social work practice in Zimbabwe's voluntary sector has become indispensable, given the dwindling state and donor funds to support and sustain social services delivery. The paper underscores that since social enterprise is premised on a culture of innovation, openness and adaption, it represents a hands-on approach to sustainable community economic development. This article concludes by proposing strategies for incorporating entrepreneurial initiatives in community and social sector agencies. Furthermore, the paper calls upon Zimbabwean social work educators to incorporate the concept of social entrepreneurship as it resonates with contemporary social work practice.*

**KEY TERMS:** *Social work practice, social entrepreneurship, innovation, social value and dynamism*

## INTRODUCTION

Especially in the twenty-first century, the social work profession faces multiple challenges times. Perennial issues such as poverty, joblessness, homelessness, drug abuse, child abuse, divorce, juvenile delinquency and many others continue to face humanity. Meanwhile, new challenges including human trafficking, HIV and AIDS, empowerment of marginalized populations, economic decline and technological change are emerging.

Consequently, the adoption of innovative and creative approaches has become imperative, given the complex social challenges that require the intervention of social work. Contemporary societal problems call for the ability to link global challenges and opportunities to local demands and opportunities while taking cognizance of the interdependence between the global and local context. Awareness between people and their social and physical environment is also critical (Dominelli, 2012). Modern challenges require the transformation of the social work theoretical frameworks and the formulation of ground-breaking and forward-looking forms of practice. Moreover, research as well as enhanced capacity to influence social policy at local, national and international levels.

Social entrepreneurship is one such innovation for the provision of functional solutions to societal issues. This is particularly true in the context of a developing country such as Zimbabwe, where resources are severely limited. Social entrepreneurship entails the utilization of an income-earning business or strategy by a non-profit distributing organization as a way of generating income for the purposes of supporting a social or charitable cause. It represents a unique and dynamic approach in dealing with social and economic challenges that span sectors and disciplines. Social entrepreneurial ventures are found in fields of practice which range from education, health, welfare reforms, human rights, economic development, environment and agriculture among others. The adoption of the social enterprise model to the provision of social services is increasingly becoming necessary, as the global economy is undergoing a recession. Social service spending has been severely affected by the prevailing economic circumstances. Zimbabwe's social sector has not been spared, since the government is currently facing budgetary constraints to support the provisioning of social services. Furthermore, donor-driven private voluntary organizations have been facing viability challenges because traditional sources of finance such as donations and grants from Western countries are drying up.

In light of the continuous funding crisis and escalating demand for social services, social entrepreneurship gaining momentum as it provides new potential opportunities for strengthening the voice of the social work profession in Zimbabwe and on the global stage. In this regard, it is high time the social work professionals adopted a deliberate business mindset which is embodied by social entrepreneurship, essentially a hybrid phenomenon of macro-social work principles and business innovation initiatives (Germak and Singh, 2010). It is now more than essential for social service professionals to foster business innovation by espousing an entrepreneurial mindset and in the process, transform the cultures of social service agencies to ensure sustainability of service provision and maintain good relations with the communities.

While entrepreneurship for the market economy is well known, and in spite of the potential benefits it bestows social entrepreneurship, it is not fully comprehended. This is particularly true when one relates it to contemporary social work. One may argue that that social work is most effective when it converges with the practice of social entrepreneurship. Evidence for this argument can be found in the realm of developmental social work, social and community development.

This paper examines social enterprise as an innovative approach to contemporary social work practice. It presents alternative approaches and solutions to societal problems given the fact that social entrepreneurship practices and values are closely aligned with social work. Additionally, the paper analyses the convergence of social work and social enterprise with a view to optimizing performance of social enterprise. The simplified objectives of the paper are as follows:

- i. Analyze the concept of social entrepreneurship as applied to contemporary social work practice.
- ii. Investigate the social entrepreneurship dynamics within the Zimbabwean context.
- iii. To evaluate the relevance of social enterprise as an innovative strategy in the field of social work.
- iv. To propose ways of enhancing dynamism in contemporary social work practice through the adoption of innovative social entrepreneurial approaches.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes a qualitative research approach. It benefits from various data collection methods. A desk research of existing literature and related policy documents on social enterprise in relation to contemporary social work practice was carried out. This was followed by collecting case data from relevant social service organizations that use social enterprise as an operational model. Finally, expert opinion interviews were carried out by social work and related policy practitioners. Data for this paper were analyzed using the thematic approach.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The conceptions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship, a practice that integrates social and economic value, has been in existence for some time now. Its roots can be traced to works by Bill Dryton who founded Ashoka (to provide seed funding social entrepreneurs), Professor Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank (who attempted to eradicate poverty and empower women in Bangladesh) among others. While economic entrepreneurship has received considerable attention, social enterprise has until recently been studied by scholars from various academic disciplines. The concept of social enterprise is still evolving. As an area for scholarly endeavor, social enterprise is arguably in its early stages (Mair and Marti, 2006). As a result, social entrepreneurship remains poorly defined as there is no consensus over its definition (Santos, 2012; Mair and Marti, 2006; Nicholls, 2006).

This is demonstrated by the dearth of a unifying framework. Social enterprise is a multifaceted concept whose definition and conceptual realm still seeks crystallisation partly because it has been studied from various perspectives and disciplines such as economics, strategic management and sociology among others. This situation enables the social work profess to articulate its understanding of social entrepreneurship and also explore the congruence and potential connection between social enterprise and social work (Berzin, 2012).

Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new field of study which has not fully developed firm philosophical foundations. However, its proponents draw on critical pedagogies, critical traditions in research such as Marxism, institutional theory and critical theory, among others (Ridley-Duff and Bennett, 2011). Social entrepreneurship is premised on the production of goods and services in an ethical manner, while its operations are clearly guided by the ultimate desire to attain a social purpose and tangible social impact (Low, 2006). The attainment of social objectives by social enterprises is premised upon the adoption of democratic governance and management of the enterprise. This, in turn, is achieved through the involvement of key stakeholders (Larner and Mason, 2014).

To that end, social entrepreneurship demands clarity of values as the social enterprise seeks further broad social, cultural, and environmental goals through the adoption of new ideas, novel methods and strategies to address societal challenges.

A social enterprise is defined by Santos (2012) as an entity that trades, not for private gain. Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skiller (2003) view social entrepreneurship as non-profit making initiatives that seek to provide alternative funding strategies, or management systems to create social value. Other authors, however, perceive social entrepreneurship as the socially responsible activities of commercial businesses that are involved in cross sector partnerships (Sagawa & Segal, 2000). Austin et al (2006: 2) view social entrepreneurship as “an innovative social value, social value creating activity that can occur within or across non-profit business or non-profit sector”. In response to the multiplicity of definitions of social enterprise, Mair and Mart (2006) define social entrepreneurship as a process of social value creation that makes use of combination of resources in new ways with the ultimate goal of stimulating social change or meeting societal needs. This process can be attained by provision of goods and services or by the creation of new organizations.

It is important at this juncture to note that the conceptual differences between social entrepreneurship and social enterprise. Defourny and Nyssens (2008:20) define social enterprise as not for profit private organizations that provide goods or services directly related to their explicit aim to benefit the community, based on collective dynamics which various stakeholders in their governance, prioritizing autonomy and bearing economic risks relating to their activity. Correspondingly, Dees (1998:4) regard social entrepreneurs:

*as change agents in the social sector by adopting a mission to create and sustain social 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, and finally exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.*

Categorically, social entrepreneurship refers to behaviour or process by individuals who create or run social enterprises, while social enterprise is the tangible outcome of the social entrepreneurship and also the context in which entrepreneurship occurs (whether nascent or established organization).

Definitions of social entrepreneurship illustrate two key defining characteristics, that is, the utilisation of commercial activities to generate revenues and the pursuit of a social mission or social goals (creation of social value). In this regard a social enterprise is fundamentally different from a private entity which seeks profit maximisation for the shareholders. The ultimate goal of social enterprise organisations is to address social concerns which include poverty, homelessness, inequality, carbon emissions and unemployment among others. Social elements of the social enterprise organisations are reflected by their ultimate aim to benefit and empower the community, stakeholder participation in decision making, and limited profit distribution among others. The economic dimension of social enterprise organisations often entail taking economic risks, some amount of paid work, and continuous production of goods and services and relative autonomy. Doherty, Haugh and Lyon (2014) assert that cooperation, community development and wealth sharing/ giving are some of the ideas behind social

enterprises as this is epitomised by providing employment to the disadvantaged community members (like the less able bodied, or less qualified). In this respect, social enterprise may promote the integration of the socially disadvantaged and excluded into some form of decent employment. Social change is therefore attained through the adoption of innovative, pattern breaking ideas and the utilisation of sound business strategies and skills.

In a bid to conceptualize social entrepreneurship, various models have been developed by various authors. The Shwaab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship proposed three models of social enterprise, namely the leveraged non-profit ventures, hybrid non-profit ventures and social business ventures:

a) *Leveraged Non-Profit Ventures*- these ventures are set up by entrepreneurs to promote the adoption of an innovation that seeks to address inadequacies by the market or by government. The social entrepreneur meets this task by engaging various stakeholder including government and private players to spearhead the innovation through a multiplier effect. These leveraged non-profit ventures are always dependent on outside philanthropic funding, though their long-term sustainability is often strengthened due to the fact that partners could be having a vested interest in seeing the project running continuously. A typical example (CASE i) of such a venture is Paruware Trust, a Harare based organization which promotes innovation and creativity through the formation and running of viable social enterprises by young people, including students and recent graduates from institutions of higher learning. The institution is also a multi-stakeholder partnership with individuals and institutions whose members seek to create employment as well as business opportunities, economic recovery and growth. The Trust's institutional partners include government institutions, private sector, academic institutions, and international development partners. Another example (CASE ii) of a profit based/ leverage based model is Musha Mukadzi, an organization which seeks to economically empower women through preserving, reinforcing and rebuilding the family fabric. The organization operates a micro-finance project which helps it raise income to fund its operations, while alleviating poverty and at the same time maintaining its clientele.

b) *Hybrid Non-profit Ventures*-these social entities are characterised by a cost recovery element through the sale of goods and services to a wide range of organizations, whether public or private, as well as to the target population groups. In this case, the social entrepreneur establishes several other legal entities to accommodate the earning of an income and the charitable expenditures in an optimum make-up. Revenue generated is therefore directed to meet operations that are directly related to its mission. This model will be illustrated by (CASE iii) Island Hospice, a Harare based organization which provides direct home-based palliative care and bereavement counselling to people with life threatening illnesses and also family members and care givers. Island Hospice also provides capacity building, training, and clinical placements and mentorship different groups and the general public at a nominal cost.

In order to fully sustain the transformative activities and address the needs of the beneficiaries who are mostly the poor or those marginalized from society, the social entrepreneur often mobilizes resources from alternative sources of funding including public organizations, private sector or donor agencies. Such funding can come in the form of grants and loans among other forms.

c) *Social Business Ventures*- these ventures are profit making entities or businesses set up to provide a social or environmental product or service. Although the enterprise engages in viable activities, the ultimate aim is not to maximize financial returns for shareholders. Rather the goal is to expand the social venture and to reach out to more people in need. Profits are reinvested in the entity. The social business venture courts investors who are willing to join together financial and social returns on their investment. This type of a venture is epitomized by (CASE iv) Light Zimbabwe, a social enterprise that provides high quality lamps to people without electricity living in rural areas at affordable prices. Light Zimbabwe also sells the lamps to families on flexible credit terms of up to two years and also rents the lamps to family reasonable prices. The agency reinvests profits into the enterprise. School children from rural areas tend to benefit from using the Light Zimbabwe's products for studying as this improves their school performance.

In addition, Thompson (2002) argues that social enterprises are mainly found in three main sectors which are:

- (a) Profit-making entities that have some level commitment towards aiding the community;
- (b) Social enterprises which are set up mainly to achieve a social purpose; and
- (c) Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or voluntary sector agencies.

The varying forms of social enterprise models show that social enterprise varies from profit oriented to non-profit oriented entities. Furthermore, different models of social entrepreneurship have implications for sources of funding and inherently the degree of dependence, self-sustenance and sustainability.

Williams (2005) also came up with three distinct models that are in line with varying schools of thought regarding how social enterprises ought to operate. These models are business (profit-based) model; social services (needs based model) and the hybrid (profit based and social benefit based. The business (profit-based model) is a social enterprise option where non-profit making organizations establish separate legal entities that conduct business which is unrelated to the mission of the non-profit making agency. The venture is profit-based and its aim is to make money. However, the profits generated are then channeled to the non-profit making organization fund its operations in pursuit of its vision and mission.

The social services (needs-based) model is an alternative approach to social enterprise where non-profit organizations create ventures that are directly linked to and contribute towards the attainment of organization's mission. As Williams (2005) explains, needs-based ventures are direct offshoots of or are integrated into, the agency's service or programmes and the primary objective of the venture is directly linked to agency's target clientele. This type of venture may or may not return profits to the founding social service organization. The non-profit making agency may opt to financially support the entity in the event that it is not operating viably as the entity would be providing needed and valued services to the clientele of the agency, thus contributing, in a way, towards the fulfillment of the agency's mission. Thirdly, an agency may adopt a social enterprise model (hybrid) which combines the provision of social benefit while also generating profits from its activities. The operations of the hybrid model based social enterprise are somewhat related to the organization's mission but its business activities are not directed towards the clientele of the non-profit making agency, but to the general public. This is illustrated by Case iii above. The profits generated from can be directed to support other activities or programmes within the non-profit making organization.

### **Social entrepreneurship and social value creation**

Despite varying conceptualisations of social entrepreneurship, there is general agreement on the idea social enterprise seeks to achieve a social mission. As hinted at earlier, social enterprise entities fundamentally differ from commercial enterprises which seek to generate commercial value (wealth creation) for individuals. Social enterprises seek to create social value. Social value represents "the sum of value added to all members of the community less the value of the resources used" (Santos, 2009: 27). In other words, the social enterprises perform good works that pervade above and beyond the actions of traditional entrepreneurs and business entities. As an illustration, in Zimbabwe, there is Batsirai Project, located in Dzivarasekwa, a high density area in the City of Harare. The project is a women's artisan group that produce handicrafts for the local as well as the international market. The Batsirai project group membership comprise of mothers of children with special disabilities. The group sells a wide range of products which include embroiled yoga-bags, dolls, cards and herbal embroidered stay-awake pillows among others. Proceeds of the project are channelled towards the children with special needs, who often experience social isolation and lack of community support resulting in extreme poverty. In this case, social value is created in the form of betterment of quality of life of these vulnerable children derived from the trade in art crafts.

As a matter of fact, social value entails the accrued results or impact of social enterprise activities and initiatives. Jespersen (undated) adds an argument that the results of the work of a social enterprise may take economic, social or environmental dimensions. However, these attributes, when put together, form the concept of social value that would have been created by a social enterprise. When talking in terms of social value created as a result of innovation from the work of a social enterprise, that value should accrue to society as a whole, then to individuals. Auerswald (2009) posits that social value entails the creation of benefits and also reduction of costs to society through efforts directed at addressing societal problems or needs. Such efforts often go beyond private gains and general activity of the market. Economists often refer to these social benefits as positive externalities. Mair and Mart (2009) perceive social value as social change which has a higher priority over the economic value.

The social value generated goes beyond any financial measures as the community benefits through the provision of housing, care and education to the orphans and vulnerable children. In this regard, economic value becomes secondary to social value, as economic value creation reinforces, rather than subsuming or conflicting with social value creation (Torras, 2009). It should be noted however, that although social value is a key product of activities of social entrepreneurship agency, its actual measurement and operationalization remain complex as the concept of social value is yet to be fully comprehended (Dees, 2001). It can therefore be argued that social value creation within the social work context when social work practice is concomitantly integrated with the theory of social enterprise. This process creates maximum benefits for the community or target group being served by a social work agency which effectively utilises social enterprise as a conjecture for the provisioning of sustainable services.

### **Social enterprise as innovation to contemporary social work practice**

Social service agencies are adopting innovative and creative strategies that can enhance their capacity to meet or achieve the mission of their agencies, in light of the growing demand for their services. Engaging in social entrepreneurship is one such innovation. As Westall (2007) explains, innovation in social enterprises entails a wide range of potential organizational changes in products, services and processes in a bid to respond to new conditions and to meet needs of the clientele in different and effective ways. Bohwasi and Mukove (2008) posit that innovation represent the means by which entrepreneurs exploit change as they view it as an opportunity for enterprises. In their view, innovation in an organization comes in the form of new ideas, new products as well as new ways of doing things (Bohwasi and Mukove, 2008). Social enterprise is therefore a relatively new type of a non-profit organization in the realm of social service provision which adopts innovative solutions to complex societal problems which are yet to be sufficiently addressed by governments, charities or commercial markets

(Santos, 2012). In this regard, social enterprise is organizational innovation that is derived from a novel combination of social and business practices.

Social organizations demonstrate innovation in the adoption of social entrepreneurship through engaging in strategies like offering new products and services to existing or new target clientele in a way that maintain the agency's financial sustainability; adopting funding models that foster sustainability and the adoption of user driven model in social enterprise activities (Chew and Lyon, 2012). As a case in point (CASE vi), Fatima Women's Investment, a Nyazura (Manicaland) based social enterprise works to equip women with skills and opportunities for social and economic empowerment. Fatima attains its objectives by setting up women's training centre and an associated production unit within that rural set up to equip women with practical skills like carpentry, welding and many others, which were previously male dominated. Through the production unit, women utilize their acquired skills at the same time, exposing them to the benefits of a purposeful group experience while generating income that is self-sustaining. Social entrepreneurs are therefore agents of social change, they relentlessly seek new opportunities to attain social mission, engaging in a continuous process of innovation, adaptation and learning as well as demonstrating a high sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created (Laskowski and Loidl, 2012).

Social enterprises provide a paradigm innovation for social workers providing services in various domains such as family and child welfare, youth, clinical and mental social work, school social work; substance abuse rehabilitation, palliative and hospice services, gerontology services, community development, correctional services, private practice and many others. Social entrepreneurship is therefore a potential avenue for practitioners in varying domains of practice to adopt entrepreneurial strategies to ensure continued provision of services to their intended beneficiaries. Social workers can become effective entrepreneurs. As hinted at earlier, social entrepreneurs are people who take risks for people the organization exist for (Brikerhoff, 2000).

Social workers need to change the way they do business embrace social entrepreneurship. Most non-profit making agencies in the social sector have been adopting some aspects of entrepreneurship as they compete for limited donor funding. These agencies have started packing their products and services in ways that increase their chances of securing resources to fund their operations and programmes. In this sense, aspects of entrepreneurship and innovation are not completely new to the sector, but rather the adoption of more business approaches for the purposes of achieving their social goals represents a new dimension toward transformation in the provision of services. As a matter of fact, non-profit social service organizations are preparing for fierce competition for scarce resources because they endure writing competitive proposals. They have had to demonstrate indices for accountability, service targets and programme milestones (Germak and Singh, 2010). William (2005) concurs that stiff competition for corporate and public donations, and very sophisticated professionally organized fundraising campaigns run by well-established social service agencies has left less resourced or smaller organizations in the dark, lurching for financial resources. Social enterprise, therefore presents an alternative solution to organization faced with this dilemma.

In addition, changes have occurred in the nature and pattern of charitable giving for social sector organizations by philanthropists and humanitarian donors. This is because there has been a drive for social sector organizations to earn rather than simply receive income. This scenario is emerging against the background that the notion of sustainability has had little results worked well in Zimbabwe despite investment of millions of dollars in the NGO sector by international donors. The NGO sector has recorded limited success in building social and economic value for the communities they serve while deepening crisis of underdevelopment continue to persist. Without doubt, traditional funding models for non-profit making social service organizations are proving to be insufficient as funds, donations and grants are no longer readily available, hence the need to adopt social enterprise models as one of the innovative measures to broaden revenue streams to sustain their operations by non-profit social sector entities and subsequently develop positive relations and confidence with communities which benefit from their services.

Furthermore, as Gummer (2001) explains, donations and grants are often provided for specific programmes and activities and such, may not suffice to meet the financial needs of the organization in terms of overall programme implementation as well as administrative and overhead expenses. Therefore, non-profit making organization can derive numerous benefits from starting business initiatives that can assist in raising income for the purpose of providing financial resources for programmes and general operations; funds which are not restricted to specific programmes or activities. Such unrestricted funds can effectively complement traditional funding which an agency could already be receiving. Engaging in entrepreneurial activities gives non-profit social service organizations financial independence. This ensures sustainability, stability and reduce the organization's reliance on donor funding for the organization to run. In the correctional services, the Zimbabwe Prison Services embarks on various income-generation projects such as the Car Wash service for motorists in Chinhoyi. This popular service is a double bottom line in the sense that it serves as a revenue generation for the correctional services, while it achieves the social aspect of rehabilitating offenders as well integrating them with the community.

Earning internally generated revenue also gives social services agencies the impetus to diversify and develop additional programmes that meet the needs of their clients in a holistic manner. For example, (CASE viii), child

welfare organizations such as SOS in Bindura and Hope Tariro in Chinhoyi operate primary schools which accommodate children from the child care centers and those from the community. This strategy helps to ensure the provision of quality education to the children in need of care, while generating additional income through the collection of fees and levies from children in the local community. The funds are used to supplement their day to day running of the children's homes. Gray and Crofts (2002) support the innovative and creative nature of social enterprise in the provision of social services. In their view, social entrepreneurship represents a radical shift from the traditional community development and welfare models, whose major weakness has been observed to breed dependence syndrome on the welfare recipients who continue to become marginalized and oppressed. Furthermore, welfarist models have also received criticism from practitioners and authors for their bureaucratic and governmentality tendencies, where service provisioning is associated with a multifarious web of rules, regulations, numerous committees and processes which often delay decision making and service provision at the expense of the clientele. In fact, social entrepreneurship places emphasis on people rather than structures, accountability to the community served, better economic prosperity for disadvantaged and for the outcome delivered (Gray and Crofts, 2002) through the use of innovative and creative approaches such as the application of business acumen towards the attainment of social goals. As such, much benefit can be derived from the optimization social entrepreneurship theoretical underpinnings in the administration of social work programmes.

The notion of social entrepreneurship is strikingly comparable to the theory of social development which helps to explain the interrelation between economic and social development within the field of social work. Midgley (1994) posits that economic development is a prerequisite for social development, while at the same time economic development is meaningless in the absence of an improvement in social welfare of the served community. Authors such as Osei (2002) concur with this analysis by proclaiming that development is not development unless it has a human face. Social development perspective in social work aims at providing comprehensive solutions through the collective efforts of sectors such as housing, welfare, education, work and, of late, business. Social enterprise, therefore shares some philosophical underpinnings with social development in social work, particularly developmental (as opposed to remedial social work).

Furthermore, consistent with Gray and Crofts' (2002) observation, social entrepreneurship resonates with the strengths and empowerment theory in social work, as well as social work mission and values, particularly, the promotion of social justice among others. In this regard, the dual targeted nature of social entrepreneurship represents an innovation with multiple prospects for broadening the domain of the social work profession, mainly, in the area of social development in which economic and social development are intricately linked. It is therefore critical for the social profession to maximize the returns generated from the power of social work methodologies and the strengths of social entrepreneurial ideas and approaches.

Community development social work entails the direct engagement of the local community in identifying and addressing problems that affect them. Similarly, social entrepreneurship, in some instances, involves direct participation of beneficiaries in projects that would result in total empowerment. Social entrepreneurship can be contrasted with social activism (taking indirect action) and system bound social service provisioning as it places major emphasis the utilization of new, improved and efficient ways of providing services in manner that disrupts the status core, thereby bringing about much desired social change through engaging in market-oriented entrepreneurial behavior. Gray and Crofts (2002) have it that social entrepreneurship is strength focused as it draws on people's assets and skills that are pivotal in developing profitable ventures from which they derive economic benefits. This view is best demonstrated by the Binga Handicraft Centre, a community based organization operating in Binga district of Zimbabwe, involving over 400 women who are engaged into production of craftwork. Production of crafts is based on creative skills of the members and on sustainable use of natural resources. The craft centre has gradually developed to become a small scale industry supplying its products to the local and international markets for craft sales. The proceeds are shared with the women membership, thereby improving their standards of living and socio-economic status.

## DISCUSSION

Zimbabwe has been experiencing socio-economic and political challenges for more than a decade. This has resulted in mass poverty, high levels of unemployment, food insecurity, poor public health services, poor water supply and poor sanitation, among other challenges. The government's perennial failure to provide social services has prompted non-profit sector to support government's efforts in social service delivery. Auerswald (2009) notes that it is the failure of governments and corporations that creates prospects for social entrepreneurs. This situation strengthens the position of social workers in social enterprise to make the call for addressing pressing social problems that afflict the community. Similarly, entrepreneurial social work practitioners in Zimbabwe can adopt innovative ways of addressing pressing issues and this give them an edge in influencing national policy decision in a manner that results in meaningful social change and improvement of wellbeing of the Zimbabwean populace. Social workers wishing to run social enterprises (or incorporate social enterprise elements in their practice) may

need to come to terms with practical realities and the various challenges facing social enterprise (or practicing social work within a social enterprise) within the Zimbabwean context.

Firstly, there is no clear legislative framework for the registration of social enterprise organizations. Some organizations register as private voluntary organizations with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare under the Private Voluntary Organizations' Act (Chapter 17:05). Registration as a PVO is cumbersome and difficult such that most organizations prefer to register as Trusts. Registration of a social enterprise as a trust is less cumbersome; one needs to engage a legal practitioner who prepares a Deed of Trust with a list of trustee for the purposes of protecting public interest. A certificate of registration is issued once the deed of trust is registered with the Deeds Office. Another option would be to register as private company under companies Act. In view of this Masendeke and Mugova (2009) observe that socio-economic and political factors have largely shaped the evolution and development of legal forms of social enterprises in Southern Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. Poon, Zhou and Chan (2007) expressed similar sentiments when they argue that enterprise success is largely determined by socially and institutionally regulated environments.

Social enterprise is a complex form of organization where prudent and pragmatic business practices have to be followed, as well as identifying market opportunities for leads to profitability for the social business. Care needs to be taken in order to adhere to taxation and financial reporting requirements and corporate governance, particularly in instances where business activities are not totally related to the social mission of the organization.

Social enterprises in Zimbabwe face a contracting economy, low demand for goods and services, excessive costs of capital and liquidity crisis. Therefore, social workers in social entrepreneurship need to be sufficiently pragmatic in their operations since the socio-economic environment is not business- friendly. In this regard, social enterprises may need to remain vigilant and profitable in order to ensure resilience and sustainability for their organizations.

Social enterprise organizations also face serious challenges in mobilizing resources for capitalizing their businesses. It is increasingly becoming difficult to access financial resources from financial institutions in Zimbabwe. The cost of borrowing money in Zimbabwe is prohibitive to the extent of threatening the viability of businesses who borrow money for the sake of capitalizing their businesses. Furthermore, microfinance companies which lend low- interest or cheap finance are practically non-existent in the current Zimbabwean economic set up. Furthermore, some financial institutions are not keen to lend money to individuals who want to invest money for social purposes as they perceive them as a high risk category. Despite these constraints the complexity of societal problems and limited financial resources available for social service delivery may implore social work practitioners to take more risk through social enterprise engagement.

In addition to operational and regulatory challenges for running social enterprise organisations, social work practitioners also encounter numerous ethical dilemmas which need to be considered as they affect their practice. Firstly, social work is a regulated profession which is guided by professional values and ethics (Council of Social Workers, 2013). Social workers running (or practicing in) social enterprise organisations are expected to uphold social work principles and values as prescribed by the social work profession code of ethics. Balancing social work and social enterprise therefore has theoretical and practical implications for social service practitioners running entrepreneurial ventures.

Owing to the dual targeted nature of social entrepreneurship, practitioners engaging in entrepreneurship activities are expected maintain their commitment to clients. In this regard, they may need to strike a balance between the needs of organisation's clients, and the demands of its stakeholders, funding sources, government and the media, among others (Germak and Singh, 2010). The philosophical concern in question relates to placing too much focus on money, business and profit at the expense of the community and target clientele. Furthermore, it becomes an ethical responsibility of the practitioner to ensure fiscal foresight to ensure that the social enterprise is a going concern which is able to respond to its social obligations in medium and long term. As a matter of fact, financial stability creates room for business growth for social enterprises, a phenomenon which is not common in traditional social work settings. As such, balancing the potentially competing interests of service delivery, community responsibility and revenue generation is a matter of great concern. In this regard, social work practice is much more effective when social enterprise philosophies are properly interwoven with the principles, values and eclectic knowledge base of social work practice.

Social workers who charge fees which for services that are directly linked to the social mission of the organisation may need to accommodate a reasonable number of those clients who are marginalised and who may not have the means to pay for the services that the social work practitioner provides. All clients must be treated fairly despite their ability to meet the cost of services. Incidentally, social workers need to balance the altruism of social work and the egocentric nature of business activity.

As more social workers embrace the notion of social entrepreneurship (or the integration of its elements) in their practice, it becomes important for them to develop additional competencies that can help them to manage social enterprise organisations competently and effectively. Traditional social work training models in Zimbabwe have not sufficiently incorporated business-related social work courses. As a result, the courses were hardly compatible with the skills set appropriate for social work practice in social welfare settings. However, as social

needs are becoming more complex and as the social work profession is moving towards incorporating beneficial elements of social enterprise, an appreciation of basic business management and entrepreneurial discourses becomes handy. As Healy (2002) puts it, practitioners also need to be conversant with current public management discourses that are now shaping the social work field if they are to fulfil service outcomes that are in line with their values and make a greater impact in the human service domain. Application of modern business practices like market research, strategic planning and consumer satisfaction is of colossal value to social work practitioners to succeed in entrepreneurial endeavours. Social work makes the best when a social service agency draws from the core strengths of social enterprise and social work practice. For this reason, non-profit social agencies tend to be more successful when they appropriately integrate entrepreneurship (or its elements) into mandate or philosophy and directly link the core strengths of social enterprise and social work practice.

It should be noted, however, that although social enterprise represents an innovative and creative approach to financial independence and sustainable service provision by social service agencies in the non-profit sector in Zimbabwe and beyond, it is not a panacea for financial prosperity. It is definitely not a quick fix for funding challenges. Private voluntary social service organisation may still need to explore other options which advances their mission, vision and mandates. As such, not all social service agencies may require the adoption of social enterprise as its key strategy for them to succeed in executing their mandate. Correspondingly, non-profit making social sector agencies may need to make serious philosophical considerations before deciding to embrace social enterprise as an organizational strategy. It is rather critical for them to understand the varying models of social enterprise and determine if there any models that are compatible with the agencies' operational framework. The agencies may therefore have to decide whether or not to adopt social enterprise models if they enhance their capacities to fulfill their mandates and meet the needs of their clientele in a holistic manner. Furthermore, the agencies may need to assess their core competencies and determine their managerial capabilities in relation to the organizational requirements needed to sustain a social enterprise model that befits their scope of operation. In some cases, agencies may have make decisions to restructure or to recruit skilled personnel to spearhead business development aspects of the business.

In other instances, non-profit making organizations may have to set separate legal business entities that are independently and professionally run where profits and dividends are channeled to finance activities of the social service organizations. Further to this, if non-profit making agencies choose to go the venture creation route, they may consider various strategies of business start-ups (such as franchising, partnership, buying an existing business, starting from scratch) and choose the strategy which matches the agency's capacity and resources. Other non-profit making agencies may opt to adopt low risk income generation activities as part of their fund raising efforts, while others may include a cost recovery element depending on the nature of services they provide as well as the nature of clientele served. In view of that, social work practitioners in private voluntary agencies need to consider the cost and benefits of integrating social enterprise into its scope of operation. Be that as it may, social enterprise remains an opportunity for social service agencies within the non-profit sector to develop new approaches in addressing complex societal challenges are require innovative and dynamic solutions. It is through the amalgamation of social work practice with social entrepreneurial approaches that produces powerful and incredible social impact thus enhancing the value of social profession in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

## CONCLUSIONS

The social work profession is at cross roads owing to the complexity and constantly changing nature of societal challenges affecting communities as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds. The global crisis and dwindling of resources for social service provision in the face of burgeoning demand for such services has stimulated social work practitioners to think outside the box. Social workers are searching for innovative and creative strategies for generating ingenious solutions that make sustained and meaningful impact in the lives of the communities they serve. Progressive social work practitioners have embraced social entrepreneurship to complement their existing but inadequate tools in addressing increasingly societal problems. Adoption of the hybrid model by social work practitioners allows them to combine non-profit and profit making activities.

By engaging in market-driven approaches through social entrepreneurship, social work profession has animated itself in varying domains of practice to provide sustainable solutions to social problems and empower communities. Social entrepreneurship comes ashore to contemporary social work practice as an innovative strategy that is effective in ensuring viability, financial independence, self-reliance and effectiveness of social service organizations within the non-profit sector in Zimbabwe, owing the close alignment of the principles and values of social entrepreneurship and social work. Social workers engaged in social entrepreneurial ventures may have to overcome ethical dilemmas as well as regulatory, environmental and structural concerns that constrain operations of social enterprises in the Zimbabwean context. Given the evidence supporting social entrepreneurship as a proficient approach for addressing intractable social issues, it pays dividends for social work profession to seriously embrace this new paradigm for practice within its varying domains and to advocate government support

through legislative and social policy reforms so as minimize existing barriers and invigorate its efficacy in Zimbabwe.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **To encourage the uptake and incorporation of social entrepreneurship by social services practitioners in the non-profit sector**

Organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers and Council of Social workers need to educate social work professionals on the benefits and success stories of social entrepreneurship within social work and other fields. Furthermore, social workers need to be encouraged and supported to start social enterprises where feasible, or rather incorporate specific elements of social enterprise through the adoption of commercial income earning strategies as an alternative measure of invigorating and diversifying their revenue streams.

### **To lobby for a legislative and policy framework that creates favorable conditions for social entrepreneurship**

There is need to engage policy makers in a bid to influence the creation frameworks that create conditions promote social enterprises in Zimbabwe. Effort is also needed in legislative reforms that minimize entry barriers as well as regulatory impediments that make it difficult for social enterprises to freely operate. The proposed reforms should also create institutional support mechanisms and structure suitable for the dual targeted nature of social entrepreneurship, which include but not limited to access to affordable capital and also tax incentives from fiscal authorities.

### **To incorporate social entrepreneurship practice into social work education**

Social entrepreneurship need to be integrated into the social work curriculum in Zimbabwe. This will create social work practitioners who have an appreciation of entrepreneurial approaches of practice as they relate to social work. There is need to introduce Master's Degree and other post graduate programmes in Social Work that offer modules that include social entrepreneurship or even launch social entrepreneurship as a specialty at that level. This may result in the production of graduates with competences and leadership skills for social enterprise within the social work domain. This track may be offered joint with expertise from graduate business schools within the country. Social enterprise modules can also be taught to practicing social workers through short courses and seminars as a way of equipping them with skills they may need to go the entrepreneurial route in their practice.

### **To promote the establishment of internal structures and controls that help to maintain equilibrium between commercial and social aspects of the social enterprise in existing organizations**

Promoting the establishment of internal structures and controls in social enterprises help social work practitioners to manage the commercial demands and interests of the enterprise, at the same time remaining committed to the social obligation of the enterprise and ensuring provision of services to the targeted clientele. Non-profit social sector agencies operating as social enterprises may need to seek professional advice on how to run business elements of their organizations in a competent and professional manner and to remain competitive and strategically positioned to respond to economic opportunities on the market. Furthermore, social work practitioners operating social enterprises may need to establish internal controls or set up an independent committee to which helps to assess from time to time the social enterprises fulfillment of its social obligations as well as commitment to its clients. This may also be complemented by conducting periodic evaluations to assess social value creation as well as improving quality of service for the community being served. The dual targeted nature of social enterprise organizations requires the established of corporate governance structures protects the interests of all stakeholders to the social enterprise.

### **To conduct empirical studies in a bid to assess the effectiveness of and also strengthen social enterprise venture in the attainment of social work goals**

As social entrepreneurship is relatively new in the social work fraternity and in other fields, it would be beneficial to conduct empirical investigations to assess the effectiveness of social enterprise as a model to address social problems within the Zimbabwean context. This could also lead to creation of new knowledge for enhancing the incorporation of social entrepreneurial ventures in the practice of social work to alleviate social problems and human suffering.

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