

Role of Partnerships within Social Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

The paper aims to study the role of cross-sector partnerships and the broader implications of social entrepreneurship in achieving progress toward sustainable development goals. The paper adopts an inductive approach and exploratory design to understand the interaction process between research, policy, and various institutions to generate an in-depth analysis of the current ecosystem, building upon the Sustainable Development Goal 17 - "Partnerships to Achieve the Goal". It has been found that social entrepreneurship has evolved as a significant contributor to global progress towards sustainable development goals. Its unique approach, innovative practices, and cross partnerships have direct implications for developing resilient and sustainable solutions to social problems confronted globally.

Key Words: Ecosystem, Partnership, Resilience, Social Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Sustainability isn't a novel concept, as it dates back to the ancient time when humans were very close to nature. It preserves resources for future generations to secure better social and economic conditions. For achieving sustainability, collaboration across sectors plays a vital role. The entire social entrepreneurship model is based on advancing social purpose, including identifying a social problem and providing a specific solution. Moreover, an integrated and robust ecosystem facilitating social entrepreneurship brings resilience that helps adapt and respond effectively to adverse circumstances, which is the key to sustainable development.

Perceived as an ability to tackle dynamic changes and continue to grow, resilience is positioned as a new form of sustainability. Resilience supports the conservation of resources, same as sustainability focusing upon the needs of future generations by conservation of present resources. Whenever resilience is built in an ecosystem, it can bounce back in the future. Hence, while formulating policies and collaborating, there should be a focus on resilience and sustainability. Both these concepts should function in tandem to attain sustainable development.

Partnership for the Goals is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (hereafter "SDGs") recognized by the United Nations Agenda 2030. The SDGs, the blueprint for global development, denotes a paradigm shift in thinking, unequivocally acknowledging the interconnectedness of prosperous business, a thriving society, and a healthy environment (The SDG Partnership Guidebook, 2020). Agenda embrace cooperation and collaboration across civil society, business, government, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and others to achieve SDGs.

India's development efforts to ensure a better quality of life for all citizens have resulted in national priority areas. These priorities are aligned with global and national aspirations and normative frameworks to achieve equity and inclusion. As articulated in the National Institution for Transforming India (abbreviated as NITI), Aayog's Action Agenda and other policy announcements, such as A New India by 2022, and the Transformation of Aspirational Districts program, etc. Also, much of India's development agenda is mirrored in and is aligned to the globally agreed-upon 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a vital sector of the Indian economy, contributing significantly to employment generation, innovation, and inclusive growth (Report of the Expert Committee on MSME, 2019). As a result of structural and systemic changes in the recent past, social entrepreneurship has strongly emerged as a critical field, with immense scope of growth and potential of bringing in sustainability and resiliency through social innovation. Though immensely affected by the novel coronavirus pandemic 2019 in recent times, social entrepreneurship was again gaining attention and expected to gain momentum more in the post-COVID-19 era and significantly contribute to overcoming the current economic shocks and reviving the dipping economy.

It is also pertinent to mention the crucial 'legislative' changes that happened during COVID-19, for instance, revising the definition of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and up-scaling or widening the scope of existing schemes and financial assistance to promote youth for social entrepreneurship. This is also in furtherance to the PM's call to become Atmanirbhar (self-reliant), which inherently promotes the idea of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship in particular.

In addition to this, India is ranked the second most entrepreneurial country in the world by the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's (GEM) global report, 2019, third in entrepreneurship as per the Economic Survey 2019-20; and consistently moving up (68th position in 2018) on Global Entrepreneurship Index, makes an exciting area choice for investigation.

Social entrepreneurship has been observed as a potentially significant new source of social innovation, social capital, livelihood generation, or promotion, creating an inclusive, just, and equitable ecosystem in underdeveloped and rural areas and a viable

alternative for addressing social, economic, and environmental concerns. There is a growing body of evidence on the instrumental role that social entrepreneurship plays in driving local and national economies. The structure of rural economies is, in essence, composed of small enterprises, which are responsible for most of the employment opportunities and innovation. The sector is continually confronting the challenges of formalization, access to knowledge services, timely and adequate finance, improving competitiveness, availability of skilled workforce, latest technology, and marketing. Initiatives like self-help groups and rural entrepreneurship have progressed. However, creating an enabling and conducive ecosystem for their growth, building resilience and sustainability, is a task that remains to be accomplished.

To overcome these challenges and promote social entrepreneurship, partnership across sectors has evolved as one of the defining concepts and an essential paradigm for progress towards sustainable development in the 21st century. The world resources are scarce, and the optimal utilization of the diverse yet limited resources is the partnership's core. Partnership within Social Entrepreneurship paves the way for avenues to achieve more impact, greater sustainability, and increased value to all. This is also where the significance and role of policy, governance, institutions, and their planned arrangements come into the picture and are much debated in both domestic and international forums. This also highlights the reliance on collaboration and dedication amongst governments, civil society organizations, multinational corporations, and numerous other actors.

Against this backdrop, this research explores the role of partnerships within social entrepreneurship for sustainable development. In addition, to understand the infallible relationship of social entrepreneurship to the different Sustainable Development Goals, this study would examine the broader implications social entrepreneurship has on SDGs and how crucial is a partnership for the same.

2. Defining Social Entrepreneurship

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines entrepreneurship broadly as “a phenomenon associated with entrepreneurial activity as the enterprising human action in the pursuit of the generation of value through the creation or expansion of economic activity by identifying and exploited new products, processes or market.” Thomas Gries and Wim Naudé, for The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) of the United Nations University (UNU) white paper A relevant definition for entrepreneurship in the framework of this was developed by. They define entrepreneurship as “the resource, process and state of being through and in which individuals utilize positive opportunities in the market by creating and growing new business firms.”

The interventions for addressing the issues and bringing about a transformation have emanated from the state and businesses and non-profits. The non-profits are often clubbed as third sector organizations outside the state and the markets. They are given rise by the situations wherein the state or the market might not perceive a prospect for intervention or as a result of a market or a state failure and is usually identified by the third sector or a sector that identifies this as a “social” problem to be addressed, rather than as a business opportunity.

The third sector also includes social entrepreneurship. It is an all-embracing nomenclature used for portraying a rational process of enterprise creation and sustenance, bringing about transformative societal change on a significant and impactful scale compared to a traditional Not-for-Profit or Non-Governmental Organisation. Social entrepreneurship refers to the innovation and sustainable utilization of prospects to create public goods or create societal and economic value on a sustainable basis.

The contemporary era has observed a rise or propagation of distinct entrepreneurial actions directed at addressing pressing social issues, such as poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. Social entrepreneurship advocates adopting innovative system-changing solutions (often integrating market mechanisms) for social problems. The various social value and social impact-creating activities have been subsumed under the umbrella concept of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship has emerged as a rapidly developing domain housing many social value-creating and innovative approaches.

Social entrepreneurship as a domain of academic inquiry is a multidisciplinary and emerging area. It is a contested concept that includes various sub-concepts (Choi and Majumdar, 2013). The debate on its definitions has existed. The West is being considered to have pursued defining and creating clear boundaries of the discipline (Martin and Osberg, 2007) in terms of academic writing on social entrepreneurship, which has not been the case in India. Social entrepreneurship in India is considered to be a post- twenty-first-century phenomenon. It is contextualized as something naturally embedded within Indian traditions of social innovation going back to India's freedom struggle in the early part of the twentieth century.

3. Existing literature encompassing the role of social entrepreneurship and partnerships in attaining sustainable development

The need to redefine the state's role as a driver in attaining the SDGs. The surge in governments' partnerships with corporates perils the principle of less governance, but more governance is required for achieving SDGs. Government and regulators formulate norms and monitor actions of corporates towards sustainability but many times get disheartened because of vehement opposition by business interests. Corporates that want to aid the spirit of the SDGs should actively support government action to promote the public interest (Agarwal et al., 2017).

Michele and Vieta (2019) discuss the significance of cooperatives in Italy and their crucial role in redefining the economy and attaining SDGs. The studies in the paper emphasize that community cooperatives can achieve development objectives and work toward implementing the SDGs. Community cooperatives overcome challenges by deploying well-connected social networks and counting on participative and multistakeholder governance strategies. Hence, community cooperatives use organizational models for fulfilling the SDGs at the local level.

Dodds (2015) mentioned that it is very well agreed that cross-sector partnerships play a pivotal role in implementing the 2030 agenda, and partnerships must be aligned with SDGs. There is a need for efficient mechanisms and procedures to review and evaluate the outcomes of partnerships. Intergovernmental supervision and a systematic approach must build upon past successful partnerships to create confidence.

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) face economic problems because of lower demands and external factors. The Cooperatives enterprise model can be considered a catalyst to SDG attainment. The basic tenets of the cooperative model are based on equity and inclusivity. There is improvement in the level of awareness among corporates that they must take decisions after considering all the environmental, social, and legal issues. There should be a partnership between cooperatives and different bodies of the United Nations on the proper implementation of SDGs in developing countries. The inclusive and participative approach of cooperatives will facilitate the implementation of SDGs (Gicheru 2016).

Nelson (2006) recognizes the need to enhance collaboration to improve corporate engagement in sustainable development. Partnerships are pivotal to bringing a paradigm shift from conventional to responsible and sustainable growth. However, it can't be considered a cure because many partnerships are challenging to build and include very high costs. There are myriad challenges that need to be overcome to make collaboration efficient and effective. Efficient cross-sector partnerships mandate novel attitudes, different mindsets, improved capabilities, and skills. In this modern era of short-term goals and dynamic changes, there is a requirement of perseverance and long-term commitment from government and corporates. Moreover, it is vital to improve the scale and bring the impact required by mobilizing resources and capabilities. "The ability to galvanize and convene other stakeholders to co-create effective partnerships has become one of the essential leadership imperatives for the 21st Century to achieve the SDGs".

Littlewood and Khan (2018) analyze the topic of social enterprise and networks. In the case of social entrepreneurship, the surplus is not a sole aim, and it is considered a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Social entrepreneurship focuses on driving a social mission and catering to a social need. The modern technological changes brought opportunities as well as threats for social enterprises. To tap these opportunities, social enterprises should adopt innovative methodologies and alternatives.

Pattberg and Widerberg (2014) identified nine key blocks of creating effective multistakeholder partnerships: leadership, appropriate partners, deciding goals, funding, management, monitoring, reporting, evaluation, learning, and meta-governance. The big focus should be on improving the credibility and effectiveness of partnerships. Governmental oversight is mandatory for achieving the goals of partnerships. Many good examples of successful multi-stakeholder partnerships include the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), etc.

Schumpeter's perspective can add significant value in the emerging field of social entrepreneurship. It helps in encouraging corporates to be drivers for sustainable development. Social enterprises strive to use novel solutions to eradicate deeply ingrained social problems and, if scaled up, can positively impact society and help attain sustainable development goals. There is a need for social enterprises guided by similar objectives to coordinate with social entrepreneurs who are vital managers. Further, the study highlights the significance of the contribution made by sustainable businesses and social enterprises in achieving SDGs. Moreover, numerous companies carry out Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities at micro-levels, which helps attain sustainability on the macro scale (Rahdari et al., 2016).

4. Social Entrepreneurship as a significant driver for sustainable development

Entrepreneurship is becoming an essential component of development policies worldwide, as a wide range of actors considers it as an "enabler, driver, and empowering tool for sustainable development with far-reaching benefits," according to the United Nations. In such a context, social entrepreneurship has a vital role in achieving the SDGs by offering financially self-sustaining models for positive social change.

As per the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and recent work narratives of the International Labour Organization (ILO), enterprises must work for sustainability (ILO 2018). Through its 17 goals, SDGs narrate broad contours and yet very emphatic outcomes concerning society, environment, and development with distributive justice instead of mere growth (Rawls 1971). An agreement has been reached unanimously by large and top business organizations today. Those businesses need to adopt strategic initiatives to remain growth-oriented and contribute to society, the environment, and local communities where their businesses are (ICA-AP 2019).

As outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 17, which focuses on strengthening implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, a multistakeholder approach delivers better economic, social, and environmental results than any single organizational entity acting alone (Tinsley and Agapitaova, 2018). Target 17.17 encourages and promotes effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on partnerships' experience and resourcing strategies. Within this framework, social enterprises offer international organizations and national Governments an additional partner in scaling up efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The overall objective of sustainable development is to find an optimal interaction of economic, human, environmental, and technological systems. It demonstrates that entrepreneurial activities can deal with many social, economic, and ecological challenges locally and globally. By linking social entrepreneurship with sustainability and providing a way for sustainable social enterprise formation, an attempt towards developing the process model of social entrepreneurship can be made. Social entrepreneurship with a cooperative approach offers an entrance into business ownership for many people who are not likely to start or own a business by themselves.

It is a self-help response of mutual co-operation to the economic crisis to all the people (women, in particular) who are participating and aiming to lead sustainable development in the broader society or each enterprise at the base village level. Co-operative

incubation at the village level acts as a driving force benefiting low-income members. It also provided many benefits, including better-paying jobs, wealth and skill-building, enhanced control over their lives & better bargaining power in the larger society. The few factors for ensuring successful worker participation in social entrepreneurship are (i) Effective and long-term support, (ii) Ongoing training & cultivation of collaborative culture, (iii) Inducing continuous capital, (iv) Building on a solid network, (v) Social awareness (vi) Good governance. (<http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jbm/papers/Vol20-issue2/Version-7/O2002079198.pdf>)

5. Actors in Partnership with Social Entrepreneurship for SDG: An Overview

5.1 Governments

Governments with similar objectives of accomplishing the SDGs increasingly recognizing partnerships are essential for innovative solutions in the social sector to have a sustainable impact at scale. They have been changing how they work with social innovators and realized that they must accelerate these partnerships to meet the SDGs. The government of India with a dedicated national ministry for promoting entrepreneurship and skill-building, i.e., the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (M/o SDE) and Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (M/o MSME), and its national policy and flagship programs, namely the National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship; the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act; National Innovation Strategy, NewGen Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Development Centre, etc. are being recognized internationally for their collaboration and practical actions to promote entrepreneurship in India.

5.2 Educational Institutes

Indeed, educational institutes can play a huge role in fostering an ecosystem for social entrepreneurship, creating platforms for research and pilot projects, and, most importantly, stimulating youngsters to take up Social Enterprise as a career. Within educational institutions, partnership programs like Student Start-up and Innovation Policy (SSIP), Social Enterprise Education Programme (SEEP), etc., within academic institutions have helped build collaborative partnerships facilitating opportunities to students and faculty by providing a grant for mobility and project activities. The primary purpose is to create a social enterprise ecosystem in Education systems and strengthen policy and practice of embedding social enterprise in the curricula of higher educational institutions in India.

Further, these collaborations pave the way for mainstreaming social enterprise across disciplines, regardless of what course is being offered, embedding social enterprise curriculum into an existing system, or developing new ones. These collaborations also are focused on developing incubation centers/tinkering labs within universities and attracting new partners, including industry and corporates, to contribute to incubation and seed funding. The partnerships value the networks around collaboration and sharing of resources to reduce duplication and smooth scaling. The network further provides a clear vision within the social enterprise ecosystem and adds credibility to policy advocacy endeavours.

The partnerships with academic institutions also serve the purpose of generating knowledge on social enterprises and their practice, carrying out joint research activities, shared learning, student-based teaching, and strengthening the skills of executive education institutions to serve their respective communities. In line with academic institutes, Hubs have also been created to have a literary reference ecosystem for social entrepreneurs, channel and transfer relevant knowledge for social entrepreneurship, and create an international network with ecosystem participants.

5.3 Incubators

A Start-up Incubator is a collaborative program designed to aid start-ups by helping entrepreneurs solve commonly associated start-up problems. Examples of the assistance typically provided by Start-up incubators are- seed funding, marketing assistance, accounting/financial management assistance, access to angel investors or venture capital, help with regulatory compliance, etc. Start-up incubators are thus believed to possess information about the on-ground reality related to the legal issues faced by start-ups.

Incubators have been credited with bringing out the potential of social entrepreneurs across the country and also supporting innovators by training them, mentoring and seed-funding, leadership development, getting skilled in project management, talent management, risk management, governance, impact assessment, investing in prototyping, infrastructure and early growth phase, access to networks, and, etc. Many of the incubators work in tandem with

Governments of India's flagship initiatives like Startup India, Skill India, and Digital India to ensure sustainable scaling or enterprises support and provide necessary guidance, knowledge, skills, advice, mentorship, and technology to scale sustainably.

A few well-known start-up incubators are as follows-

- a) CIIE IIMA (Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship – IIMA)
- b) IAN incubator (Indian Angel Network)
- c) Sine (Indian Angel Network)
- d) STEP (Science and Technology Entrepreneurship Park)
- e) NsrceI (Nadathur S. Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning)
- f) CEI IIMC (Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation- IIMC)
- g) Kerala Start-up Mission

- h) IIML – Incubator (IIM Lucknow Incubator)
- i) Pupil first
- j) Villgro

5.4 The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)

CII works to create and sustain an environment conducive to the development of India, partnering industry, Government, and civil society, through advisory and consultative processes. It is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry-led, and industry-managed organization. It conducts a competition on social entrepreneurship for existing early-stage social enterprises and students with entrepreneurial ideas that are socially focused and with significant social impact.

The following graphic developed by PYXERA Global exquisitely consolidates the SDGs into four focus areas: human rights, health, human and natural environment, and economic opportunity/employment to make the goals more accessible and actionable. Then by illustrating the interdependent nature of the plans, it also demonstrates the overlap among the various purposes and places ‘partnership’ (goal 17) in the centre as the heart of all the goals.

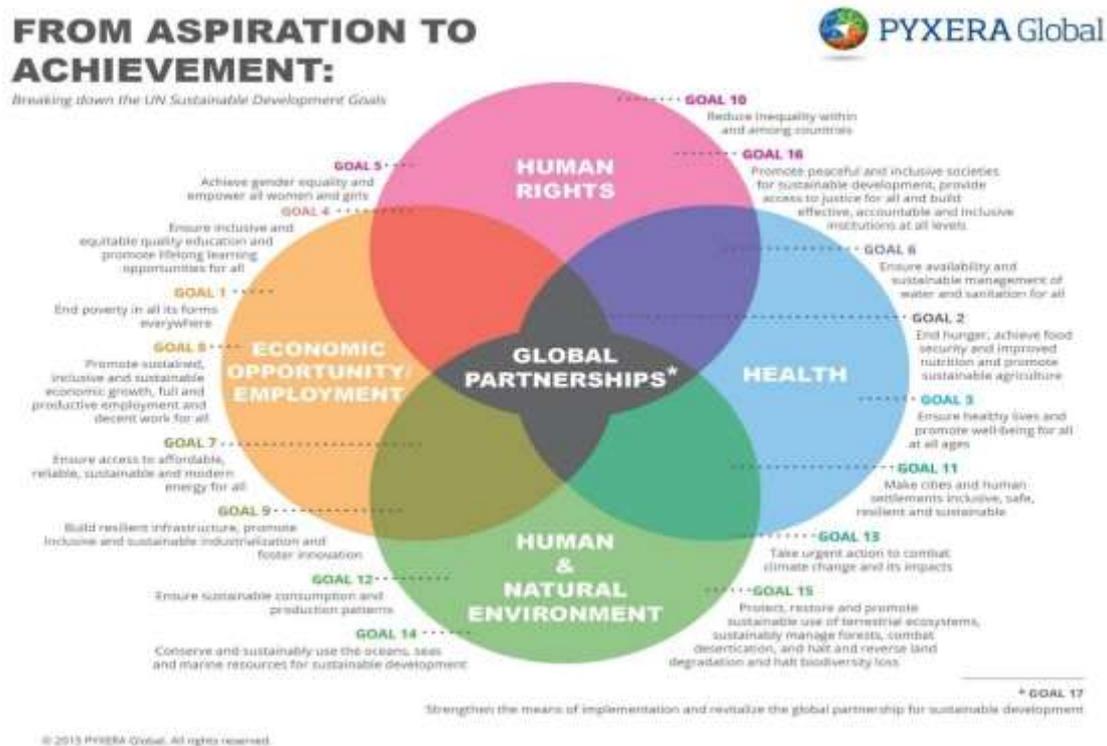


Figure 1: Four focus areas of SDGs and significant interdependence for ‘Partnerships’

Image Source: [SDGs-VEEN-DIAGRAM.pdf \(pyxeraglobal.org\)](#)

6. Primary objectives and ways of partnerships

From the discussion above, it is evident that primarily the partnerships serve three objectives, and also the three ways for collaboration emerges as under:

Skills Partnerships. It facilitates the development and delivery of an agreed project plan that supports national-level policy priorities related to skills development and employability. This has been recognized as one of the best partnerships by governments and industry and a powerful and highly cost-effective way of building skills. It further leverages the substantial resources of social enterprises, global corporations, and organizations to address the inadequate resources, contributing to employee engagement and development for the corporation and any number of business benefits for the social enterprise, depending on the partnership focus. Skill partnerships can thus deliver a natural, sustainable change that can be replicated to transform systems by sharing knowledge and expertise and applying creative, innovative approaches.

Channel Partnerships bring the in-depth insight and targeted products and services of social enterprises to global corporations' large-scale supply and distribution networks, helping social enterprises achieve scale and multinational corporations strengthen their supply chains and sales.

Venture Partnerships bring together corporations and social enterprises and are intended to develop new businesses or provide the funds to scale a company's operations and impact. It combines the risk tolerance of social enterprises with the resources of global corporations to develop new products and services and even entirely new business models through investments, joint ventures, and acquisitions. These partnerships allow corporations to move beyond simply giving back and towards collaborative efforts to drive

impact on the ground through entrepreneurial solutions. Many large corporations are now looking to build inclusive, sustainable business models and find that venture partnership is an approach that works well.

7. Conclusion

After deep perusal, it can be concluded that poverty, inequality, and injustice are longstanding challenges augmented by global issues like the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, migration, digital divide, and overlaid with other social, economic, political, and environmental crises. This blend of situations and varied levels of deficits have devastating impacts on people's everyday lives and livelihoods. It is pivotal to analyze how the government or public sector, private sector, societies, and social development actors respond. Their responses will play a crucial role in determining the direction of social and human development outcomes for years to come. Among these, 'social entrepreneurship' has evolved to contribute significantly to global progress towards sustainable development goals. Its unique approach, innovative practices, and cross-partnerships are crucial to developing resilient and sustainable solutions to social problems confronted globally.

The learnings and framework ascending from the study indicate clearly that the SDGs are not achievable by any one body by design. Achieving them requires collaboration across sectors, organizations, and individuals committed to improvising the human experience for all. To move the Global Goals from aspiration to achievement, the partnership amongst the public, private, and social sectors is recognized as crucial with their unique strengths. Thus, the tri-sector partnership appears not as a stand-alone goal but as a catalyst and enabler. In such a way, by balancing sustainability and impact, social entrepreneurship paves the way to realize a long-term vision with measurable short-term steps.

The study findings suggest that cross-sector partnerships within social entrepreneurship are crucial for sustainability, scalability, and resiliency. It also points toward contextually appropriate initiatives and cross-sector partnerships as key for social change. Thereby, state and non-state actors, civil society, education, research institutes, and legal and other support ecosystems emerge as significant partners in social entrepreneurship for sustainable development.

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