

Chapter 11

Social Entrepreneurial e-Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Muhammad Yunus, micro-lending advocate and founder of the Bank of the Poor, defines social enterprises as doing business to solve social, economic, and environmental adversities. The complexity of today global context hinders the emergence of innovative endeavors; this inner enhancement of capabilities springs out from worldwide entrepreneurs that reveal procuring the best environmental conditions and technologies to nourish new ingenious ventures whether of social or any capitalist profile. Social entrepreneurs noticeably understand that making an intensive use of new technologies engenders innovation and scales impact effects in society; that is why ICTs, and especially the Web 2.0, have constituted catalysts to accelerate collaborations for social change: social innovation labs, social e-enterprise incubators, social innovation centers, social innovation park, et cetera. This chapter reviews the main experiences of social entrepreneurial empowerments, pinpointing those pioneering projects that exploit new technologies to provide services and get access, with no boundaries, to a significant number of communities. It is structured as follows: it starts analyzing the emergence and development of social enterprise, its encouragement and empowerment. Later, some key initiatives for social entrepreneurs are examined, in particular those offered virtually (e-empowerment). The chapter concludes with a brief summary of final thoughts.

INTRODUCTION

The development and establishment of capitalism as a globally predominant system has left millions of poor people spread out all over the world, especially in the southern hemisphere. Despite

international efforts to temper this problem¹, there is a significant gap so far, between stated expectations and achieved challenges, in different areas such as funding for development, ensuring access to markets, new technologies and essential medicines, as well as sustainability of the debt.

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The concern is further accentuated because of the global economic crisis in which are embedded many of the most developed economies in the world, just those that, so far, earmarked funds and resources of all kinds to reduce inequalities in the world.

In this world conjuncture the social enterprise becomes increasingly relevance, if that is possible, in view of the fact that it is now considered a vital part of societal and economic systems, as well as the protagonist of a possible solution to the crisis. As noted by Porter and Kramer (2011) “business enterprise must reconnect prosperity with social progress. Shared value is not social responsibility, philanthropy or even sustainability, but a new way to achieve economic success. It is not on the margin of what companies do but at the center. We believe that it can give rise to the next major transformation of business thinking” (p. 4).

The social entrepreneur is a person² or a collective that develops and implements innovative solutions to create a positive social impact, combining business discipline with innovation perspective; all of this with social purposes (Anderson & Dees, 2007; Dees, 2001; Elkington & Hartigan, 2008). They lead the change in compliance with the principle of the triple bottom line (social, economic, and environmental responsibility) and have the ability not only to make efficient use of available resources, but also to multiply the effectiveness of limited funds (Fundación Bankinter, 2010). Social entrepreneurs are agents that respond to market failures with transformational and financially sustainable innovations, being uniquely positioned to assist any government to deal with the hardest social problems (Wolk, 2008).

The interest in social enterprise is not something new. By 1993, Harvard University launched the *Social Enterprise Initiative*. Since that time, numerous programs emerged from the patronage of universities and private foundations to support training and strategic consulting for social entrepreneurial managers, and that included many non-profit organizations. In Europe, it is

also gestated an emerging process for developing social businesses, particularly in countries like Italy³, the United Kingdom⁴ and Spain; a process characterized by the deficiency in the provision of certain public services and the existence, in these countries, of a significant development of “social economy.” Specifically, for the case of Spain, social enterprises were developed from the mid-nineties under the scheme of insertion companies⁵; the basic orientation of these entities has been the business transition⁶ to reserve a significant percentage of their jobs to individuals, in the process of insertion, who complete their training and gain enough employability to join the labor market.

Since then, growth of social sector is undeniable. In the past two decades, the global citizen sector, led by social entrepreneurs, has grown exponentially. Just as the business sector experienced a tremendous spurt in productivity over the last century, the citizen sector is experiencing a similar revolution, with the number and sophistication of citizen organizations increasing dramatically. In this context, social entrepreneurs play a vital role in fostering societal change. In the next years, social entrepreneurs and the social economy, at large, have a key role to play to generate new growth and strengthen the confidence of both citizens and businesses in the Single Market⁷.

In the present chapter, thus, it is intended as main purpose to take a closer look at some of the most remarkable experiences of today worldwide social entrepreneurial empowerments, denoting those projects that intensify the use of ICTs on reaching and interrelating individuals and communities. It is structured as follows: it starts analyzing the emergence and development of social enterprise, its encouragement and empowerment. Later, there are examined some key initiatives for social entrepreneurs, more in particular those offered virtually (e-empowerment). It is concluded with a concise allusion of possible future research and a brief summary of final thoughts.

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