

Chapter 48

Social Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Analysis of Diaspora Social Investments

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ABSTRACT

There has been a growing interest in “social entrepreneurship”, but very few analyses have attempted to go beyond definitional disagreements in capturing the role of the diaspora within a theoretical and evidence-based framework. It is in this context that this chapter systematises competing perspectives on social entrepreneurship, that is, the neo-liberal conception, the institutional/social organisation framework and the agenda of social transformation. On the basis, we proceed to analyse how far so-called “social impact investments” in Sub-Saharan Africa by the diaspora has contributed to poverty alleviation and a fundamental social transformation. Our study will not only clarify competing viewpoints, but also place the diaspora at the centre of this process. While great strides have been made in the institutional context by the African diaspora such as Mutombo and Akon in making the world a better place, there are limitations to what they can do. Indeed, our alternative social transformation conception of social entrepreneurship teases out these limitations, politically and socially.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing interest in “social entrepreneurship” and its seductive appeal to government officials, businesspeople and civil society organisations, it is surprising that relatively few studies have cast their net to capture the role of the diaspora within a theoretical and evidence-based framework. Indeed, ever since Bill Drayton, the founder of Ashoka Foundation (Newton, 2014a), and latterly the

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Social Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa

Schwab Foundation For Social Entrepreneurship (Newton, 2014b), assumed the concept, the debate has been largely confined to definitional disagreements. Other organising concepts such as “non-profit venture” (Surdna Foundation, undated) have also been proffered and used interchangeably with “social entrepreneurship”. In addition, some analysts have cited the practical experience of Muhammad Yunus’ Grameen Bank as illustrative of how loans can be used to lift poor women in, for example, Bangladesh out of poverty (also see Ndhlovu, forthcoming 2016).

Notwithstanding the difficulties in assessing the impact of “social impact investment”, this chapter attempts to tentatively gauge how far such investments by the diaspora in Sub-Saharan Africa can effect social change. Hayes (2010), Karmwar (2010) and Ojo (2012) trace the term “diaspora” from, initially, its reference to Jewish immigrants to, latterly, the involuntary or voluntary displacement of many other peoples (Africans included) from their homelands. Put in other words:

The nature and composition of the African Diaspora have undergone significant changes over time from forced migration to the voluntary emigration of free, skilled Africans in search of economic opportunities from a Diaspora with little contact with the point of origin (Africa) to one that maintains active contact with the mother continent. - - - The term “African Diaspora” in its more modern usage emerged clearly in the 1950s and sixties. It served in scholarly debates both as a political term, with which to emphasise unifying experiences of African people dispersed by the slave trade, and also as an analytical term that enabled scholars to talk about black communities across national boundaries. Much of this scholarship examined the dispersal of people of African descent, their role in the transformation and creation of new cultures, institutions, and ideas outside Africa. - - - its [the Diaspora concept] conceptualizations came about as a result of the independence movements in Africa. - - - [Because of many “streams of the African Diaspora movement], there is no single African Diasporic community, or consciousness (Karmwar, 2010: 70-71).

For example, Roberts (1999) contends that: “the concept of the motherland remains part of an imagined community, but one with only a weak capacity to sustain collective political action. - - - The motherland calls precisely because the real world so often requires constant and painful accommodations from a marginal position” (Roberts, 1999: 188). Espinosa (2012), on the other hand, views the gendered nature of diaspora philanthropy in the Philippines, that is, collection and distribution of donations that are specific to particular communities, as reflecting migration of women to Australia (“mail-order brides”), one that gives expression to the inequalities in the motherland. This is what Dr Jacqueline Copeland-Carson, the renowned social justice advocate, refers to as community-based social finance. Lewis (2011) and Singh (2004) base their analyses on Marcus Garvey’s work, Rastafarianism, anti-colonial and Black Power movements. Identity and culture are recast so that notions of “Africa”, “blackness” and “African diasporic identity” highlight the racism in which the diaspora operate. This is the basis of Pan-Africanism, the African version of nationalism, and post-apartheid notions of “diaspora return (physically and metaphorically) programmes”. Similarly, the edited volume on Igbo (of Nigeria) diasporic destinations focuses on their enslavement and experiences in America (Falola and Njoku, 2016). In addition, the volume covers issues of integration of the Igbo into the Atlantic World, the transformation of their identities, language and culture, how far they resisted this encroachment, and consequently the impact of returnees to Nigeria.

For his part, Ojo (2012) focuses on the Diaspora that maintains contact with countries of origin, those “who are rooted in at least two different social and economic arenas” (Ojo, 2012: 146). He adds that: “Transnational entrepreneurs are individuals who migrate from one country to another, simultaneously

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