

## **Social Entrepreneurship in South Africa: A Different Narrative for a Different Context**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship, paying special attention to the new narratives that are emerging about this phenomenon in the context of Africa.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The paper addresses this issue, by comparing the meanings of what is called “social” in this context and in developed areas. The paper's particular interest in the use of language and narratives is grounded in the experience of how narratives and stories are genuinely constitutive and performative of people's actions.

**Findings:** This paper reveals that “social” in the social entrepreneurship narratives does not necessarily have the same meaning in different contexts. Specifically, when the phenomenon is re-interpreted in the context of the discourses that come from a developing area such as South Africa, it adds flexibility and a more local sense to the entrepreneurs' social missions.

**Research limitations/implications:** The study was affected by the limited availability of published data on social entrepreneurship in Africa. Economic challenges and failures by governments to access donor funds have resulted in militant governance thereby reducing the role of social entrepreneurship to negligible levels.

**Originality/value:** The study provides a narrative lens of looking at the challenges that social entrepreneurship is facing in Africa

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades, the notion of social entrepreneurship (SE) and its manifest linkage with the economic and social development has quickly gained prominence in the general discourse of academics and policymakers (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Leadbeater, 2007; Shaw and Carter, 2007; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006). While traditionally SE has generally been known by its development in the field of government or in the context of specific organizational forms of businesses, such as non-profit and voluntary organizations (Alexander and Weiner, 1998), other hybrid structures which mix for-profit and non-profit approaches have flourished recently (Austin et al. 2006; Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Dey, 2006). The wider diversity of formal structures in which SE can emerge, along with the increasing popularity of the concept have, however, come with less certainty about what exactly a social entrepreneur is and does.

In the academic field, conceptual differences have arisen among schools of thought (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Defourny and Kim, 2011). The definitions are varied depending on whether the focus of the concept is located on the founder of the initiative, the process and the social enterprise, or their tangible outcomes. Nevertheless, the general features that come up from these approaches relate to the phenomenon with the existence of individuals who respond to social needs through new ways, which produce social impact in the community (Bornstein, 2004; Leadbeater, 2007; Sharir and Lerner 2006; Shaw and Carter 2007; Westall and Chalkley, 2007; Zadek and Thake, 1997).

The range in the concept allows certain flexibility for its application by academics and practitioners. In turn, such flexibility suggests that with the expression '*social entrepreneurship*' different meanings can be obtained by different people, especially when it is applied to different times and places. Concretely, when we look at the evolution of the concept during the last years, what is striking is that much of the rhetoric of SE has passed from stressing the organizational forms to highlighting the figure of the entrepreneurs involved in social missions (Bornstein, 2004; Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Nicholls, 2006, 2010; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006). Similarly, the application of the concept to different contexts brings us diverse perspectives about what SE is (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). For instance, previous studies have found important differences between the social enterprises in the United States and Western Europe (Kerlin, 2006) as well as within those regions (Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Khayesi and George, 2011). Thus, not surprisingly, broader disparities could be manifested among areas with different levels of development (Kerlin, 2009; Urban, 2008). Nevertheless, since most of the literature on SE has been focused on developed areas, the meanings that developing contexts can bring to the concept of SE remain still unclear (Defourny and Nyssens, 2008; Mair and Marti, 2006; Umoren, 2010; Urban, 2008).

This paper aims to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon of SE within developing areas, paying special attention to the narratives that are emerging in the context of South Africa. Following the recent researches focused on obtaining better explanations of entrepreneurial topics through the discourses published in the field (Dey and Steyaert, 2010; Dey, 2006), we address this issue comparing the meanings of what is called "social" in this context with the most common rhetoric shaped in developed areas. Our particular interest in the use of language and narratives is grounded in the experience of how narratives and stories are genuinely constitutive and performative of our actions (Muncey, 2010; Boje, 2011). This also involves the effects that these actions have in our daily lives. The difficulties on employing this approach are increased, however, when the topic of study is relatively new –such as SE– and the stories available are limited –such as is the case of the stories about SE in South Africa. Moreover, in many instances, African narratives are not straightforward or easy to identify in scientific publications. For this reason, we matched the scientific publications gathering through a wide range of journals, book chapters and books with local stories that have been published on internet by the

main international centers for the support of SE in South Africa. As a complement, more informal medias, such as videos on youtube and local newspapers, were also employed. In addition, the backgrounds and personal experiences of one of the researchers, who comes from the area object of study, helped us in the understanding and interpretation of the narratives<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, it is important to note that debates regarding the understanding of narratives are often linked directly to assumptions about ontology, epistemology and theoretical frameworks (Molly et al., 2008). Therefore, in the following pages, we shall begin by summarizing the characteristics of the narrative approach and the ontological and epistemological view derived from its use in the area of SE. We shall then present the main characteristics of the South African context in an attempt to facilitate the understanding of the local stories. After that, the main aspects or the SE discourses emergent in this area are presented in comparison with the literature that deals theoretically with this phenomenon as well as with those referred commonly to developed areas. The final section draws conclusions regarding the dominant discourses of the “social” in the context analyzed, and discusses the implications, limitations as well as the opportunities for possible future research.

## **2. THE NARRATIVE APPROACH: ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

In the last decade, there has been a great deal of interest in the employ of narratives within the social sciences (Boje, 2011; Czarniawska, 2004; Diochon and Anderson, 2001; Elliot, 2005; Steyaert, 1997). Narratives, according to Hinchman and Hincham (1997), are considered as discourses that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, offering insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it. Then, narrative purposefully sets out to make sense of the experiences of the self in society, becoming a device through which the self-identity is shaped and performed (Muncey, 2010).

From a methodological perspective, narrative locates the personal experiences on the heart of research, offering understandable explanations to the researchers for the questions concerning human experiences. Nevertheless, the way in which these experiences are understood and narrated depend, in turn, on the worldview adopted – ontology- as well as on the form in which the knowledge is acquired –epistemology.

In general, the different views, and knowledge about the social world, that are held by researchers’ changes from objective to subjective continuum (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) (see Figure 1).



order to understand the different meanings that can emerge from applying the generic principles of SE to local realities. On the other hand, a significant theme within the critical relational constructionism is the particular emphasis on appreciation and openness –viewed as vital to the construction of soft self/other differentiation (Falzon, 1998), which fits in the different stories of social entrepreneurs that we find all around the world (Kerlin, 2009). In fact, construction is viewed as on-going in relational processes that make and re-make local language games and their related forms of life. Then, relations become significant, since social entrepreneurs face their social enterprises taking into account not only their own self but, above all, others. In this sense, entrepreneurs and local communities work together to create a shared reality, and the social enterprises may be understood as the result of reciprocal co-creations that are always in processes of change.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT FOR SE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In recent years, SE is increasingly becoming recognized by governments, donors, and the public as a key aspect of development in South Africa (CSR, 2011; Masendeke and Mugova, 2009; Urban, 2008). However, political, social, economic, and cultural forces have influenced the evolution and form of the social enterprises in this area.

Unemployment, insecurity, food shortages and environmental degradation have been some of the major problems in South Africa during the last years (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Data profile South Africa

	2000	2005	2008	2009	2010
Population, total (millions)	44,00	47,20	48,79	49,32	49,99
Population growth (annual %)	2,5	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,4
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	55	51	51	52	...
Prevalence of HIV, total (% of population ages 15-49)	16,1	18,1	17,9	17,8	...
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000)	78	80	66	61	57
Immunization, measles (% of children ages 12-23 months)	72	64	65	65	65
CO2 emissions (metric tons per capita)	8,4	8,6	8,9	...	...
GDP (current US\$) (billions)	132,88	247,06	275,28	282,75	363,70
GDP growth (annual %)	4,2	5,3	3,6	-1,7	2,8
Time required to start a business (days)	...	35	22	22	22
Workers' remittances and compensation of employees, received (current US\$) (millions)	344	658	823	302	1.119

**Source:** World Development Indicators database

For instance, from 2000 until 2008, South Africa's unemployment rate averaged 26.38 percent (World Bank, 2012). Nevertheless, higher rates were achieved in the 1990s, when the employment-oriented social enterprises emerged (Masendeke and Mugova,

2009). The effects of other calamities such as prevalence of HIV and a short life expectancy have also influenced the social enterprise development, and its particular focus on healthcare services.

Despite the rapid expansion of the nstate sector, the success in social enterprise initiatives remained constrained due to a number of macroeconomic and structural factors that needed reform by the state (Masendeke and Mugova, 2009). The political measures adopted in the past did not contribute to facilitating the consolidation of these businesses. In fact, in some African countries the governments failed to solve challenges facing projects because of their reliance on donor funding for their national budgetary shortfalls (Karen, 1989; Blum,1988). In this sense, several authors have stressed the dangers of trust on donor funding as a sustainable national option (Kwame, 1983; Sesan, 2006). In addition, problems with leadership, conflicts, immigration and economic incompetence have been highlighted as issues that make the role of the social entrepreneurs in many African countries difficult (Sesan, 2006).

With these historical backgrounds, Africa is currently in a similar socio-economic predicament and the role of the civil social actors in mediating between the people (grassroots) and opportunities is becoming critical. Whilst Africa is rich in minerals, other natural resources and a strong human capital base this is not visible to some of the citizens because of the inadequacy of access to basic infrastructure. Nevertheless, such as Kuria (2011) has recently pointed out, the role of civil society in Africa will remain relevant in areas of advocacy, good governance, transformative thinking and research. Accordingly, African agenda dictates that the governments are the custodians of the people's hopes yet lack of democracy also challenges such notions. There is a prevalence of clashes between the civil society organisations in the rural areas to the projects in urban centres that advocate a cause and the state (CSR, 2011). In this respect, Ronning (1996) has previously stressed that the second phase in the history of the notion of civil society in Africa, which dates from independence in Africa, implies the birth of the deracialised state and the establishment of universal rights. The social group which was in the forefront of pressing for these changes were the new black African middle classes and what they demanded was entry to both the civil society and the state. In addition, in the new African countries the state became the centre of social relations. In this respect, it is important to note that the struggles for democratic transition in Southern Africa had a huge impact on the nature of social enterprises (Masendeke and Mugova, 2009), which initiatlly were highly controlled by the state institutions. Nevertheless, gradually, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community groups started to redefine both their constituency base and their linkages with the state and the private sector, which produced a slight increase in the number of the social enterprises (Masendeke and Mugova, 2009; Sonobe et al., 2011).

Currently, however, economic challenges facing South Africa and other African nations mirror negatively against attempts to sustain or maintain socio entrepreneurial

initiatives. Politics plays a central role in the success of such initiatives and the role played by developed nations is also alleged to be central to Africa's economic failures (Nafukho and Helen Muyia, 2010; Umoren, 2010). The independence of most African countries such as Malawi, Zambia with its rich copper reserves, Nigeria with its oil reserves and Zimbabwe with rich diamond and uranium deposits have failed to support social entrepreneurship meaningfully. In situations of economic turmoil the successes of any socio entrepreneurial initiatives is greatly challenged as a result of the daily pitfalls to meaningful exchange or trade.

#### **4. THE NARRATIVES OF THE “SOCIAL” IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITHIN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT**

As was noted above, the current social discourses generated by the activities of the businesses that prioritize the social behaviours seem to focus their attention on the emergent area of SE. Despite the common features that have been stressed for its identification, the diverse contexts in which the phenomenon is emerging shed some light on its different particularities (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Defourny and Kim, 2011; Kerlin, 2006, 2009). In the following pages we highlight the main aspects of the kind of narratives that are emerging in the South African context, as an example of developing area, in contrast with the grand narrative that is being popularized around the phenomenon in most of the developed areas. In particular, we focus on: (1) the role of entrepreneur as agent who initiates the social enterprise; (2) the singularity of the business created for achieving the social objectives of the entrepreneur; and (3) the consequences or effects that these behaviours have in the social context.

##### **4.1. The role of the entrepreneur: mundane leaders and idealistic entrepreneurs**

Characterizations of social entrepreneurs focused on the founders of the initiative and their social purposes have been frequently employed to identify the concept of SE (Mair and Marti, 2006) and distinguish the particularities of the phenomenon in different contexts (Catford, 1998; Harding, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Zahra et al., 2009).

Specifically, in the context of South Africa we are provided with a narrative of social entrepreneurs that respond to a typology which is initially embedded into a small and disadvantaged sphere (Otunga et al., 2001; Smith-Hunter, 2007). The entrepreneur, in these cases, often belongs to a new kind of informal leader who uses his/her own life experience for opening new ways of operating in order to transform the concept of social judgment into a local reality (CSR, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). This kind of social entrepreneur would be close to the Rehn and Taalas's (2004) concept of “mundane entrepreneur” or “social bricoleurs” in Zahra et al.,'s (2009: 522) terms, that

is, persons “positioned to discover social needs whereby they can leverage their motivation, expertise and personal resources to create and enhance social wealth”. In a great part of their narratives, the difficulties suffered by the entrepreneurs during their early ages and how they influenced their leadership style are exalted. An example is the Pat Pillai’s story, in which it is stressed that growing up in a poor family gave him the opportunity to observe how some people with the same set of circumstances managed to find a way to excel while others made different choices and ended up in a life of crime (ASEN, 2012). His social enterprise “*Life college*” is the answer to his desire to develop a “champion mentality” in children by creating and implementing programmes that address previous “slave mentalities”. Although the image derived from the rhetoric in this respect could suggest the existence of ordinary and sometimes irrelevant people for governments and public media, their capabilities and skills for pursuing their chosen causes are being recognized at a small scale (Sonobe et al., 2011; CSR, 2011; UNECA, 2005; Sesan, 2006). Precisely, in terms of social causes or purposes, the discourses are focused on rebuilding their communities through the improvement of the economic and social circumstances (Urban, 2008; Orford et al., 2003; Sonobe et al., 2011; Novogratz, 2005).

On the contrary, the rhetoric of social entrepreneurs within developed areas seems to be closer to the idea of private entrepreneurship driven for “idealistic entrepreneurs” (Piore and Sabel, 1984). The stories often stress the figure of extraordinary people doing big things (Bornstein, 2004). The focus is placed on the vision and social opportunity, as well as their ability to convince and empower others to help them in their social enterprises (Catford, 1998). Then, the same entrepreneurial minds full of tactics of the private sector are bringing to the discourse of social entrepreneurs, emphasizing the task of meeting social needs (Sharir and Lerner, 2006, Shaw and Carter, 2007; Zahra et al., 2009). This discourse, in general, operates with a conception of SE that makes legitimate a representation of social problems (unmet social needs) as economic problems with business solutions. Those social problems that guide their purposes often are founded in the local context and range from environmental issues until the recovery of cultural aspects (Nicholls, 2006, 2010; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006).

#### **4.2. The social enterprise and their resources**

The approach adopted in this section focuses on the type of social enterprise created as well as on entrepreneurs’ modes of action regarding the use of the resources for its creation and development. Both aspects have previously been considered for clarifying the range of enterprises included under the concept of SE (Diochom and Anderson, 2009; Dorado, 2006; Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Kerlin, 2009).

On the one hand, several investigations have pointed out the wide branch of activities that can be organized under the form of social enterprises (Nicholls, 2006; Shaw and

Carter, 2007; Westall and Chalkley, 2007). However, such as Kerling (2009) points out, there are a certain set of activities within these kind of businesses that appear to be related to the regional context at hand. This becomes evident when we compare social enterprises created in South Africa with some of them in developed areas (Borstein, 2004; Kerlin, 2009; Ronning, 1996; Sesan, 2006). Concretely, the rhetorics in South Africa often include activities that provide services linked with the security, basic health or education (CSR, 2011; Orford et al., 2003; Sesan, 2006; Sonobe et al., 2011; UNECA, 2011), which are usually offered by public governments or private institutions in many developed countries. A good practical example is to be found in the Veronica Khosa's case (Bornstein, 2004), whose enterprise was created with the objective of improving the health of the members of the community by providing home-based nursing care to HIV/AIDS infected and affected persons, as well as other chronically/terminally ill patients (Tateni, 2012). In contrast, the generic rhetoric in developed countries locates the social enterprises within the environmental, cultural, and ethical areas, and focus on people with risk of social exclusion -woman, immigrant, people with disabilities - as well as poor people from developing countries (Chell, 2007; Leadbetter, 1997; Harding, 2004; Kerlin and Gagnaire, 2009). In addition, although social enterprise is not constrained to the adoption of specific organizational forms of business, it is interesting to stress the solid presence that big NGOs and international charity organizations have achieved during the last years in developed countries (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006), while the evolution of the narratives in South Africa illustrates a growing existence of co-operative private initiatives within this sector (Kerlin, 2009; Nafukho and Helen Muyia, 2010; Otunga et al., 2001; UNECA, 2005; Umoren, 2010). *Bonditis Benefit Sheme* provides an example of this kind of enterprises. This cooperative was built by a group of 25 people who had recently moved to the area of Vosloorus and decided to start an informal collective saving scheme to save and pool funds for their personal financial needs (ASEN, 2012).

On the other hand, with respect to the actors' modes of action regarding the resources utilized during the entrepreneurial process, the general discourse suggests that the social capital becomes as important as the financial capital in any context (Kerlin, 2009). Nevertheless, what is distinctive within African narratives is how the entrepreneurs make use of that social capital (Blum, 1988; Nafukho and Helen Muyia, 2010; Orford et al., 2003). One of the examples can be found in the story of Kovin Naidoo who through out his social business revolutionized the access to eye care and eyeglasses for South Africa's rural poor (Ashoka, 2012). Specifically, a "cooperative" language instead of the "collective" speech, makes a distinction with most of the narratives from the developed countries (Dorado, 2006; Pearce and Doh, 2005). Naidoo involved in his project a complex network of people and institutions linked with the health care, which included educators, practitioners, clinics, hospitals, suppliers and the whole community. This kind of cooperation seems prevalent to people who share not only common views about their social problems, but also a transcended sense of the way to achieve the human happiness and a selfless love.

### 4.3. The social benefits: social value and social change

One of the principles in which SE finds its foundations is the production of social benefits rather than simply economic results (Harding, 2004; Pearce and Doh, 2005; Zadek and Thake, 1997). It has been told that creating and sustaining social value is what distinguishes social entrepreneurs from other kinds of entrepreneurs (Dees, 2001). In addition, such a social-benefit conception of social enterprise, and its impact at a societal level, is also useful for distinguishing particularities of SE in different contexts (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010).

In this respect, the dominant discourse in South Africa is embedded in an idea of achieving a survival medium through the creation of a social value (Bond, 1988; Novagratz, 2005; Schofield, 2010). Specifically, the social value created is stressed from the perspective of meeting the entrepreneur's social needs as well as of the local community with whom they share common values and religious ideas (Blum, 1988; Kwame, 1983; Rossouw, 1997; Smith-Hunter, 2007). Moreover, a humble responsibility in the figure of the social entrepreneur can be appreciated in this kind of discourse, at the same time that the feeling of hope is spread among the local community (Ashoka, 2012; ASEN, 2012; Karen, 1989; Kwame, 1983; Rossouw, 1997; Umoren, 2010). As a particular example, we find the *Sodla Sonke's* story ("We are all going to benefit"), an enterprise that offers cleaning services and that is contributing to the eradication of poverty among people around the suburb of Walmer, offering job opportunities to unemployed people from the Walmer community (ASEN, 2012). It is also important to highlight that in these narratives, the idea of development of the community is also embedded implicitly in a set of conditions that go around the social business to the effect that the entrepreneur becomes an independent income earner, a tax payer and, such as in the story of Sodla Sonke, an employer.

On the contrary, the enunciation of social benefits within the discourse of developed areas is more linked with the optimistic idea of creating social benefits by stimulating social change (Dees, 2001; Nicholls, 2006; Thompson et al., 2000). In particular, the narratives in this context often emphasize the biggest aspects of SE as the engine for social transformation of societies and a way for achieving creative solutions to the complex and persistent social problems (Harding, 2004; Zahra et al., 2009). Nevertheless, some of these discourses do not correspond with a truly social innovation or an alternative for social change but also with a different way for meeting social needs. As we noted above, this illustrates, in part, how the common narrative of SE in developed areas is affected for the cultural discourse that involves the entrepreneurial phenomenon in general, which frequently suggest an image of the entrepreneur as an hero who drives the economic and social change (Dey and Steyaert, 2010).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we help to address the recent calls that have been made in the literature for scholars to pay greater attention to the SE topic in Africa or developing countries (Urban, 2008; Austin et al, 2006), as well as to use the discourse and narrative genre for improving our understanding about the problems emerging within the entrepreneurship field (Czarniawska, 2004; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Steyaert, 1997). In particular, taking into account the possibilities that language and discourse produce for the understanding of the meanings of the “social” within SE in South Africa, as well as the application of the critical relational constructionism (Hosking, 2004) approach to this field, we have accepted that the social entrepreneurs, their missions, businesses and results are not simply “objects” that possess a fixed or static business idea for solving social problems, but their initiatives and motivations come from the interactions that maintain with other members of the community.

Specifically, from our analysis of the discourses that are emerging in South Africa around the SE phenomenon we can conclude that, such as it has been demonstrated in previous researches (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010; Kerlin, 2006, 2009), the “social” in the SE narratives does not necessarily have the same meaning in different contexts. Specifically, when the phenomenon is re-interpreted in a developing area such as South Africa, it adds flexibility and a more local sense to the entrepreneurs’ social missions. In this area, meeting local social problems, using cooperative relationships among the members of community and generating social value to small scale seems to characterize the practice of social enterprises. In contrast, the great social projects of idealistic entrepreneurs are closer to the rhetoric generated in the developed countries.

In addition, in the light of the previous African narratives, new entrepreneurial identities can be identified about the figure of the social entrepreneur. In particular, from their discourses we can realize how growing up in a difficult context has contributed to shaping persons with a high level of commitment with their community. These social entrepreneurs often express an inner motivation that comes from their heart more than an external and apparent logic rationality of a business man with a social responsibility. In fact, their stories demonstrate a great sensibility, giving the impression of being persons inspired by the principle of loving others as themselves. Accordingly, this provides insights on how SE can be better understood in some areas by analysing how particular individuals strive to exercise control over the events that affect their lives directly. In some cases, the striving for control over hard life conditions drives them to become social entrepreneurs and, in some levels, agents of social change. In fact, although their current narratives could not show great achievements in terms of results for the consecution of a social change, an internal change could be produced in people’s minds through the social businesses, which, in turn, could modify (and improve) the results of social enterprises as well as their future narratives.

This study provides some lessons for the academics and practitioners in the entrepreneurial and politic arena. In particular, stories as the Pat Pillai and Veronica Khosa can become a source of inspiration for other individuals from developing countries who are striving for improving their circumstances as well as of their community. In this sense, researching the narrative of SE in South Africa contributes to the extension of its recognition as well as to spreading role models for future social entrepreneurs. Moreover, trying to obtain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon through small stories can offer new insights for policy makers, on how important it is to consider the particularities of the human development in order to combat the major problems of the developing countries and help people to become agents of the social change.

Finally, although our focus on the recent written discourses concerning SE in South Africa advises us to interpret the conclusions modestly, they can also encourage researchers to broaden their thinking about how to study a new phenomenon in which the lack of data can become the main barrier. Nevertheless, much more effort in this new research field would be necessary. Some of the possible directions for future research could be focused on entrepreneurial practices in other developing countries, such as India or the Philippines. On the other hand, and due to the fact that many entrepreneurs in developing areas are acting as social entrepreneurs although they do not recognize themselves in these terms, we could learn more about this topic introducing a serendipity factor in our own empirical research. Additionally, a more exhaustive study of the narratives written or told in local medium –newspapers, local tv, etc.- could bring us fresh ideas about the local interpretation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, future researches based on case studies or ethnographies have the potential to make significant contributions in this field.

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, using different database (Proquest, EBSCO, Google-Scholar and ABI-Inform), we searched for articles that met the keywords “social entrepreneurship” and “South Africa” in the article title or abstract. However, the few results obtained drove us to extend the search including one or more key words related to entrepreneurship (i.e., entrepreneur\*, new enterprise). For the results obtained were not enough for giving us an image of the African narratives we extended the search to web pages of institutions that work in the field of SE in Africa. Concretely, we used the information published in the web pages of Ashoka Africa, Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Economy of Johannesburg, ASEN- African social entrepreneurs networks. Local newspapers such as SouthAfrica.info were also consulted. Consequently, the narratives analyzed in this paper are, in part, dependent on the author’s own research process, and the review may not be free of some possible omissions. Hence, our review effort has to be understood more as a general overview of the current African narratives concerning the topic of SE, than as a complete identification of the entire works related to this topic. The selection of the African narratives cannot be fully exhaustive but it provides a significant basis for starting to appreciate the meanings given to SE in the context of South Africa.