

ECONOMY & FINANCE

ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY: THE JAMAICAN EXPERIENCE



Social Entrepreneurship addresses the failings of the traditional economy through their operations within the social economy. This is evident in some countries like Jamaica, having low economic performance indicators, yet having a high social progress index showing significant improvement in the provision of services that address basic human needs.

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Social entrepreneurship has been generating significant attention in research as a vehicle to support transformation in the lives of citizens who engage with the social economy. As with any discipline in its embryonic stage, the concept of SEs means different things to different stakeholders. The consensus, however, is that SEs are ventures that generate social value while addressing social problems, apply innovative approaches and are sustained through an independent income stream.

Essentially, SEs address the failings of the traditional economy through their operations within the social economy. This is evident in some countries like Jamaica, having low economic performance indicators, yet having a high social progress index showing significant improvement in the provision of services that address basic human needs. The

Social Progress Index 2014 done by Michael Porter et.al shows Jamaica, despite having a PPP GDP per capita of US\$7083, with a creditable index of 43 out of 132 countries examined.

Porter and his colleagues emphasise the need to incorporate the things that truly impact peoples' lives as central to how countries measure success. They argue that a model of development based on economic performance alone is incomplete. "...A society which fails to address basic human needs, equip citizens to improve their quality of life, erodes the environment, and limits opportunity for its citizens is not succeeding.... Economic growth without social progress results in lack of inclusion, discontent, and social unrest."

(Pg. 11). The Social Progress Index (SPI) instructs therefore the need to move past the traditional GDP per capita income measurement, to include national social and environmental performance as a tool to benchmark success and improve public policy.

The index presents three dimensions, as crucial: Basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing and opportunity. Addressing these components would enhance "the capacity of a society to meet

the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential" (Porter 2014, Pg. 13).

JAMAICA'S LONG EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP THINKING AND PRACTICE

It must be noted however that the social economy, which has generated the high value captured in the SPI did not emerge overnight. On the contrary, Jamaica has a long history of social entrepreneurship thinking spanning from the colonial period to the present. Evidence can be

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seen in the activities carried out by the peasantry, the church, free village movements and the Maroon settlements in Portland and St. Elizabeth. Cooperatives, Mutual and Benevolent Societies and Credit Unions and Social Movements particularly Rastafari as well as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) are also part of the evidence. Among these groups Marcus Garvey's UNIA presents the best model of modern social entrepreneurship, as a mission driven organisation which generated multiple values (social, economic, environmental and cultural) sustained by an independent income source, usually an enterprise.

More recently, social entrepreneurship thinking and practice have been emerging as a vehicle to support community safety and security efforts. This was informed by a series of research (15 technical reports) conducted by the Office of Social Entrepreneurship (OSE) at UWI, Mona, between 2010 and 2017 for several units within the Jamaica Constabulary Force. Through the Community Empowerment and Transformation Programme, (COMET) community-based policing was advanced as the preferred vehicle for engaging communities that are perceived to be at risk

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from violence. The research argued that community programmes will not be effective unless they are sustainable and generate both social and economic benefits for the community members, especially for youths, whether in rural or urban communities. ▶▶

Guided by the research, this SE approach was later adopted by USAID as a vehicle for community intervention programmes.

Currently USAID has and is financing a number of intervention programmes including COMET II under which 40 SEs have been developed in at-risk communities over five parishes (Kingston, St. Andrew, St. Catherine, St. James and Clarendon). Other initiatives include JN's Social Enterprise Boost Initiative which has funded 12 projects across the island and the FHI 360 programme which is seeking to build out at least 20 more SEs island-wide.

Support for SEs has also come from the British Council (which is supporting social entrepreneurship thinking within high schools), the British High Commission, UNDP, the European Union, and the Ministry of National Security. One current research project is examining how SEs can aid the reintegration of deported migrants into Jamaican society.

Furthermore, local foundations and endowments especially the DIGICEL Foundation through its 'Back to Roots Programme' are leading the way in using SEs as a vehicle to establish agrosocial enterprises and has supported the establishment of more than 50 SEs in this area. With additional support from the British Council through the Queen's Young Leaders Programme they are establishing 25 more SEs within the KMA, St. Andrew and St. Catherine.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Jamaica has established state entities—such as the National Housing Trust and HEART/NTA— which have a social enterprise structure. Both organisations are mission driven and sustained by an independent income source, legislated through the NHT Act and the HEART Trust Act.

NHT, through their 'Best Schemes Programme', have been transforming their Citizens Associations in SEs in over 140 communities (training being done through OSE). They have also done a programme with over 70 youth in the Ecopreneurship Programme (environmental entrepreneurship programme). Note too that Social Development Commission (SDC), through their Local Economic Development Programme; Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) through their Rural Enterprise Development Initiative Programme; and Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) through their Community Renewal Programme (CRP) are all adopting this model to support their social interventions. Essentially, SE

is now the preferred model for both state and non-state actors within Jamaica and by extension the Caribbean.

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The implementation of these programmes has resulted in increasing buy-in to the efficacy of the third sector and social enterprise in strengthening communities in need of sustainable intervention strategies (CINOSIS). Importantly, the research projects are informing the revision of the current MSME policy in Jamaica through the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries (MICAF), to expand to incorporate entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and the social economy. This is seen as crucial to bolstering the sector if it is to have the kind of sustained impact on the economy that is desired.

ROLE OF UWI: ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE INCUBATOR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Like the traditional MSME sector, those in the social economy face similar problems in particular, governance and effective management. Institutions like UWI have the capacity to establish a framework that can support the advancement and sustainability of the Social Economy. This is achievable through the Centre for Entrepreneurship Thinking and Practice (CETP), Mona Enterprise and Commercialisation Centre (MECC), Jamaica Business Development Corporation (JBDC) and Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work (DPSS).

The key to this strategy is the number of students across the departments with specialised skills and the faculty to support the process. It requires the adoption of an experiential learning methodology. The DPSS through its faculty and students would conduct psychometric testing and needs assessments for the community groups. This would be used to inform the strategic plans, business plans and models that would be developed by CETP. MSBM through its students would partner with MECC and JBDC to provide the management support required to ensure that the SEs have access to Financial/Accounting, Marketing, Operations and Human Resource support, as students are placed in community groups to support their venture development. This approach creates a 'win-win' scenario for all stakeholders as the students benefit significantly from the experience gained; the SEs would have an effective incubator system; and UWI will be fulfilling a component of its mission of 'unlocking the potential of Caribbean people' through embracing 'forward thinking.' ■

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