

Giacomo Ciambotti

Scaling social entrepreneurship in Africa

Venturing in a stormy sea
with a hybrid organization



Giappichelli

Preface

I have been researching social entrepreneurship and innovation in Africa for more than a decade. In that time, I have had the privilege of meeting, learning from, exchanging ideas, and being inspired by hundreds of African social entrepreneurs and innovators. The ventures started by these entrepreneurs, and the innovations underpinning them, are diverse, ranging from clean energy solutions to technologies for financial inclusion, work on peacebuilding and reconciliation to job and livelihood creation. Social entrepreneurs and innovators can be found across Africa, from east to west and north to south. They may come from varied backgrounds, and have any age, gender, and ethnicity. However, despite this apparent diversity, these individuals and their social venturing are unified by a passion for social change and desire to positively impact society and the environment, which they pursue through the adoption of sustainable business-like activities.

Africa is rich in resources, people, ideas, and opportunities, but faces significant sustainable development challenges. African social entrepreneurs and innovators are developing solutions to these challenges, and positively impacting health and wellbeing, education, human rights, gender equality, wider social justice concerns etc. across the continent. Nevertheless, needs remain great, and it is therefore imperative that further ways are found to **scale** – expand or deepen – the impact of social entrepreneurship in Africa. This book and Giacomo’s longstanding work on **scaling social entrepreneurship in Africa** are thus very timely and needed.

Giacomo is at the cutting edge of research on social entrepreneurship and innovation in Africa, especially the subject of scaling. This expertise has been cultivated through years of studying, writing on, teaching, and working with African social entrepreneurs and innovators from Kenya to Sudan, Uganda to Zimbabwe. I was therefore excited to learn that he was writing this book and honoured when he asked me to write the preface. I have known Giacomo as a scholar, collaborator, and friend for a long time. The energy, creativity, and desire for social good he brings to his work is a mirror for the African social entrepreneurs and innovators he studies.

There is still much, however, that we do not know about social entrepreneurs and innovators in Africa, and their actions. Social entrepreneurship and innovation in Africa, including scaling, remain under-researched and theorised, with the potential insights such work could contribute to wider management scholarship often underestimated. There are also substantial opportunities to share knowledge, and

for shared learning inside and outside Africa. Such learning should not be one way i.e., from Global North to Global South. There are things social entrepreneurs and innovators in Europe, or the US might learn from their African counterparts, for instance about resource allocation, innovation, and bricolage under conditions of resource scarcity, and vice versa. Moreover, there are significant opportunities for learning and collaboration across social entrepreneurs in the Global South. Dialogue between those looking to support social entrepreneurial activity, whether policy-maker, international institution, or intermediary organisation (accelerator, incubator, hub, university, etc.), and whether in the Global North or South – like Africa – is further needed if we are to collectively achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Across his work, Giacomo is committed to this co-creative democratic academic agenda and real-world project for social change. This book represents his latest contribution.

This volume has important implications for academics, practitioners, and policy makers. Across its chapters we gain rich contextualised insights on environments for social entrepreneurship across Africa, and in particular the challenges – the ‘stormy sea’ - faced by African social entrepreneurs and innovators, especially as they seek to grow and scale their ventures and sustainable development impacts. Dynamics, tensions, and opportunities relating to hybridity in social enterprise scaling are further revealed and explored across diverse case studies. These fascinating cases provide a window into the practice of social entrepreneurship and the lived experiences of social entrepreneurs in Africa, as these ventures and individuals work to tackle some of the continent’s most pressing sustainable development challenges, including: access to sanitation; biodiversity loss and human wildlife conflict; youth unemployment, education, and skills deficiencies; housing, slum, and community development; financial exclusion etc.

Grounded in strategy perspectives and literature, this book particularly contributes to our understanding and theorising of social enterprise scaling strategies, including how scaling is done, how it might be enabled, and the ways scaling manifests across different kinds of social ventures. A novel holistic framework for understanding social enterprise scaling in Africa is proposed, and illustrated with further examples, with potential for application in wider contexts and development in future work.

In summary, this book synthesises current understanding and theorising of social entrepreneurship scaling in Africa and unveils the state of the art and field in relation to scaling challenges, enablers and strategies for African social entrepreneurs and innovators. In so doing, and building from this, it offers valuable empirical, conceptual, and practical insights for readers of different kinds.

This book is a welcome addition to the field and provides helpful future direction for scholars interested in social entrepreneurship and innovation scaling in Africa, and further afield.

Dr. David Littlewood
Sheffield University Management School

Acknowledgments

“It’s a gratitude that characterizes my life, so I’m not afraid to give it all”

Enzo Piccinini

Looking back at my personal story, I have to recognize the so many gifts that I received. I come from a small city in the centre of Italy named San Severino Marche, that is a fascinating village surrounded by countryside. I’m so grateful to this land, and to my origins because they taught me a lot, especially to combine the love for something, with hard work, creativity, brave and resilience. I always remember my grandparents working the land – waking up early, going to sleep at night – and offering the entire day for ‘something great’, even in front of big challenges and dramatic moments. I learned to take seriously the quest for a great life – inside the daily life – here and now, because certain of some little great things. To live the life as vocation, looking at our reality as a continuous gift to embrace, together with friends that share the journey in a common home (using Karen Blixen’s words). Therefore, my acknowledgements go to all the friends met along the journey (from San Severino to the world), who challenged me to keep my desire on fire, and supported me in this continuous discovery of what makes the life a fascinating experience.

I thank my family, **Massimo, Maria Grazia, Paola**, my grandparents, and relatives, because they have been silent observers in my pathway, but always representing a safe harbour in which to rest, and a lighthouse for the challenging decisions. I have been always inspired by how you face the reality, and I can say that it’s an honour to be son (in my case, it’s also a gift to follow the steps of my father in academia: it’s impressive how much is still passionate about his job!).

When I left my home country at the beginning of university life, I didn’t know what to expect. Indeed, I never thought to travel to Nairobi for an amazing working experience, and that – in the silent whispers of God in the African nights – Someone was cultivating a meeting. An encounter that changed our life, Michi. My greatest thank goes to you, **Michela**. In fact, I can easily recognize that living this journey with you, is the most incredible thing that happened in my life. Not be-

cause life is always simple (we know how much is hard!), but because we have the grace to follow a pathway together – to-get-there. I’m looking back at our traces, at how you supported me in the hard moments like the choice of the research topics at the first year of the PhD, the difficulties of writing papers and following R&Rs, and many others). In tackling my challenges, I had the chance to look at you, at how you have been faithful and committed in your pathway, both in your personal life and the professional career. You always remembered me to look at who I am, to believe, and to move on with the certainty that life is great. Thank you, Michi, for how you walk with me in this life.

I thank a lot prof. **Mario Molteni** and prof. **Matteo Pedrini**. I will always remember the time when prof. Molteni proposed me to start the PhD. I said ‘no’, but I had to realize that he was seeing something greater in myself that I was not aware of. That was the beginning of my adventure in academia. Thank you, Mario, for contributing to shape who am I. Also, I’m so grateful to you, Matteo, for your continuous guidance in the PhD journey, for always believing in my skills and supporting my human and professional development.

I would like to dedicate this book also to a very important friend, who has been a guide in my life, especially in front of hard decisions. I remember our meetings with questions and discussions which always pushed me to look at what and who makes the life great, and it was clear in your eyes and in your experience, Anas. I will never forget the smell of cigars, your loughs, your words. Thank you, **Anas!**

It’s a mystery to look back and see how many friends I met on the way. This book is also the fruit of such meetings and people. I’m very grateful to the many friends in different places, different part of the world, but experiencing a unity in the life. Here I just write some of those names to remind me how much they have been important. Thank you all!

San Severino Marche’s friends: Matty & Cate, Anto, Tota, Sara & Fra, Chiara, Elena, Elisa, Francesca Sgrò, Agnese, Francesca, Marco.

Milanese friends: Piro, Lumba, Don Sergio, Umbe, Tasso, Masu, Ste & Benny, Mary & Simo, Franci & Simo, Giuly & Andre, Andre Sottins & Ana, Laffro, AleIta, Hassi, Matte Cianci, Richi, BigMonte, Chiara Pola, Giulia Galimba, Chiara Maiols, Giangi, CatePozzi, Cecca, Cate Rembado, Garga, fam. Marazzi, Martina & Moha, Giulia & Alessandro, Elisabetta, Teresa, Simone, Guero, Grigna, Pippio, Giampa, Depa, Olmo, Tommy, Anna, Madda, Lau, Flavio, Marghe, Luci Margiotta.

Colleagues and other friends: Andrea Sottini, Lalla, Marco, Benny, Maria Cristina, Flavia, Maura, Gio, Vittorio, David Littlewood, Bob Doherty, Helen Haugh, Sophie Bacq, Silvia Dorado, Garima Sharma, Addisu Lashitew, Constance, Simone Carmine, Luca, Jessica, Fabio.

African friends: Masu, Nino, Andrea, David & Bella, Chrispine, Rose, Vivian, Felix, Dennis, and all the other friends in Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

The guiding friends: Anas, Vitta, Giuss, Julián, Enzo, Pigi.

Finally, I would like to thank all the African entrepreneurs and all the students who I've met so far in my teaching career. I believe that being a good professor and researcher is truly possible only in a meeting between two persons. I'm grateful to God for the chance of meeting you all, and I promise to give always my best in this life.

Giacomo Ciambotti

Introduction: scaling social entrepreneurship in Africa

We live in times characterized by growing social and environmental challenges that are affecting our daily life and wellbeing. Facing a complex or wicked problem is a common experience of human beings, who are always called to navigate challenges with tenacity, resilience, creativity, bravery and passion. Humans are always looking for a better life and a better world, with a profound ideal and responsible actions, even in front of the greatest challenges as the Covid-19 pandemic, widespread financial crises, and growing environmental issues.

Social entrepreneurs are first of all individuals who decided to take seriously the challenges that affect people and societies in the world and – moved by compassion, empathy and creativity – decided to start organizations which address social and environmental needs through the adoption of commercial and market activities. Such entrepreneurs are actively engaged in venturing for the common good (Doherty et al., 2014) with a strong sense of belonging and mattering for the society and with a desire to enact social change especially for unprivileged people and local communities (Bacq et al., 2015; Haugh and Talwar, 2016; Bakker and McMullen, 2023). By tackling social and environmental issues with entrepreneurial action, social entrepreneurs put people at center of their enterprises, with the purpose of creating impact for a group of stakeholders: individuals, families, communities, the broader society and the environment. Therefore, social entrepreneurs are in business not merely to maximize profits for shareholders, but rather to use such profits in order to scale the impact, changing the life of more and more people, and enhancing livelihood of entire communities (Haugh, 2007; Bacq et al., 2022). They represent a profound shift in the economic activity from ‘for profit’ venturing, toward a logic of using ‘profit for’ doing well and doing good.

At core of social entrepreneurial activity, there is the desire and commitment for *scaling* the social and commercial missions of social enterprises to achieve greater impact and financial sustainability. Scaling have been recently defined as “an ongoing process of increasing the magnitude of both quantitative and qualitative positive changes” (Islam, 2020, p. 2). On one side, the process of scaling is necessary for social entrepreneurs to achieve greater impact over time, which means to change the life of more and more beneficiaries, also qualitatively enhancing the so-

lutions offered to them (Desa and Koch, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). On the other side, scaling is crucial for social enterprises to establish a greater financial sustainability and economic equilibrium with an increase in revenues and profits (Siebold et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2019). In so doing, social enterprises can effectively achieve the ‘hybrid ideal’, as a continuous process of profit generation and reinvestment in social impact activities (Battilana et al., 2012).

However, scaling in social enterprises is a very complex phenomenon that bring several challenges and tensions (Battilana et al., 2015), especially in the need of ensuring a balanced growth between the achievement of the social mission and the commercial one (Smith and Besharov, 2019). In fact, literature largely discusses how social enterprises and entrepreneurs may frequently incur in mission drift, that is a stronger focus on the pursuit of one mission, with the neglect of the other one (Ebrahim et al., 2014). This is very detrimental at scaling, because it can drive social enterprises in losing the sight from addressing the social needs of beneficiaries, or – the worst case – in overlooking the financial sustainability of the organization, with the risk of going into bankruptcy (Siebold et al., 2019). Literature on scaling drivers, challenges, strategies and processes is growing with the need of find urgent and effective solutions to the phenomenon, but it’s still fragmented with the result of unclear pathways of a successful scaling of the dual mission. This is the **first point of departure** of this book: the evidence of severe grand challenges in our times, a growing acknowledgement of social entrepreneurship as possible mean to address such challenges, and an urgency for scaling in social entrepreneurship to better and effectively tackle the complex social and environmental issues.

A second important aspect to mention is related to the contexts of scaling in social entrepreneurship. Most of the scientific research in the field of entrepreneurship and management, including the studies on growth and scaling, are mainly focusing on Western societies and developed countries (Bruton et al., 2022; Littlewood et al., 2022). Only recently the literature moved to focus on emerging economies with germinal attention provided to Africa, the so-called ‘dark continent’ (George et al., 2016a; Busch and Barkema, 2021). Social entrepreneurship in such contexts have been found as a fruitful mean to contribute toward sustainable development, reduce poverty and inequalities, addressing hunger, low education, poor healthcare systems, reducing armed conflicts, etc. (e.g., Kanothra et al., 2018; Sutter et al., 2019; Busch and Barkema, 2021). However, despite the recent theoretical development, Africa is still at the margins of the scientific research (Mol et al., 2017; George et al., 2023), also in terms of social entrepreneurial initiatives¹. More specifically, current scholarship misses to provide explanations on many of the phenomenon that characterizes Africa, where the current knowledge can provide an effective guidance in order to address local challenges and drive toward sustainable development of African countries (George et al., 2016a). However, lack

¹ For recent literature reviews, it’s possible to refer to Rivera-Santos et al. (2015), Vermeire and Bruton (2016), and Littlewood et al. (2022).

of knowledge is also evident in the opposite direction, where African characteristics, creative, and sometimes very localized and indigenous entrepreneurial initiatives can really inform the current knowledge on scaling social entrepreneurship with new solutions and theories.

Africa is a very fascinating yet a controversial context. In fact, similarly to many other emerging economies, African countries are affected by most of the grand challenges captured by the 17's UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), such as poverty, hunger, lack of healthcare and educational systems, youth unemployment, inequalities, civil wars, but also deforestation and several climate disasters on land and sea. In turn, African countries are facing several opportunities for growth and sustainable development. Most of the countries present growing GDPs and economic opportunities in various sectors (International Monetary Fund, 2022), as agriculture, healthcare, fashion, telecommunication, construction, etc. The economic growth also follows a growth in the population (around 20% in the last years), with approximately half of the population which is youth (World Bank, 2022). Also, Africa is advancing in technological development (Mkalama et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2022) for instance with the spread of mobile systems and apps, blockchain and artificial intelligence tools that brought to the rise of giants tech corporations such as *M-Pesa* or *Jumia* (Oborn et al., 2019; Peprah et al., 2022). By offering this brief overview of the African context, it's then evident that social entrepreneurship represents a fundamental toolkit in order to contribute to address the grand challenges and achieve the promises of a sustainable development. In line with this imperative, scaling the social enterprises become a crucial aspect to foster the economic, societal and environmental development. Social entrepreneurs own the responsibility to grow their organizations in order to reach beneficiaries and positively impact the life of millions of individuals by adopting a sustainable model. This ownership of social entrepreneurs and enterprises toward a sustainable development of African societies is the **second point of departure** of this book, because the chapters that follow aim to inspire African social entrepreneurs and scholars toward a greater sense of our destiny and a concrete understanding of the pathways to achieve our desirable and prosperous future. Therefore, the present volume does not want to develop new empirical insights from scratch, rather the purpose of the book is to gather the current knowledge and contextualize the scaling pathways in African social entrepreneurship, providing a fine grained evidence and fresh implications to social entrepreneurship theory and practice.

The purpose of the book

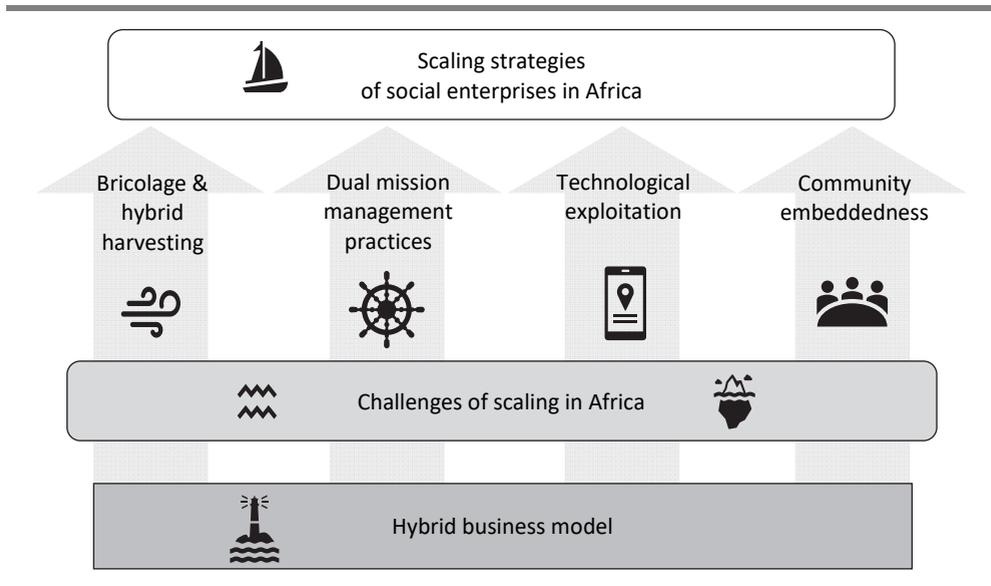
The purpose of the present book is twofold. First, the volume aims at illustrating the complex determinants and components of the scaling pathway, deep diving into the peculiarities of social enterprises as hybrid organizations and offering a clear overview of the models, challenges, enablers and strategies to scale impact in the African context. Secondly, this book aims at contextualizing scaling strategies in African social entrepreneurship, by offering the evidence of scaling challenges

which are rooted in the African contexts and provide effective solutions to navigate them. This is important to offer a localized knowledge, ‘decolonized’ from the current western-oriented literature (Zoogah et al., 2015; Bruton et al., 2022; George et al., 2023). The theoretical and practical evidence offered by this book is generalizable and replicable to social enterprises operating in other countries, because most of the challenges and solutions are also experienced by entrepreneurs in similar situation of the African economies (Vermeire and Bruton, 2016). Indeed, the highlighted case studies, the peculiar challenges and the creative solutions exemplified in the book, are adapted to the African characteristics, and requires extensions and customizations to be applied to other international contexts (Zoogah et al., 2015; Mol et al., 2017).

The framework of scaling social enterprises in Africa

The book introduces a novel framework (Figure 1) to the literature of scaling in social entrepreneurship and have been developed by the author basing on the field works and recent research in Africa. The framework explains the process of scaling in Africa with an example from the maritime experience of a ship (venture) trying to navigate in a stormy sea.

Figure 1. – Framework of scaling social enterprises in Africa



The starting point for navigation is leaving the harbour, weighing the anchor and taking the sea. The book starts by conceptualizing social enterprises as hybrid organization, and a first important insight is offered by revealing the hybrid busi-

ness model as a guiding light for scaling decision (figurately represented as a lighthouse). Once left the harbour, social enterprises encounter several scaling challenges in Africa (a stormy sea) that hinder the growth potential of these organizations. By skilfully engaging with strategic and organizational enablers, social enterprises are capable of navigating the stormy sea, thus overcoming the challenges and implementing scaling strategies. The overall result is related to clear pathways to scale, with the growth in social impact and commercial revenues.

The structure of the book

Building on the framework illustrated in Figure 1, the **first chapter** offers a conceptualization of social entrepreneurship and scaling social enterprises with the extant literature, also contextualizing them in the African economies. Definitions of social entrepreneurship are variegated (Bacq and Janssen, 2011) and followed a profound shift over the recent years (Saebi et al., 2019). The author drives the readers through the recent conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship in different levels of analysis – individual level (social entrepreneur), organizational level (social enterprise), institutional level (social entrepreneurial ecosystem) and process level (process of social entrepreneurship). Further, the book explains the relevance of conceptualizing scaling of social entrepreneurship in Africa with an organizational level, by exploring and exploiting the hybrid nature of social enterprises: in accordance with recent literature, social enterprises are then viewed as the best case of hybrid organizations (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Santos et al., 2015), combining missions, processes, means of both social and commercial missions. Chapter 1 also offers a contextualization of social entrepreneurship and scaling social enterprises in Africa, by providing a brief overview of the African context with main challenges and opportunities related to this setting. This overview prepares the ground for the theoretical advancements which are introduced in the following chapters.

The **second chapter** illustrates the importance of hybrid business models for scaling social entrepreneurship in Africa. In fact, the author builds on the recent literature on sustainable business models to illustrate how social enterprises can embrace hybridity, that is combining the processes of value proposition, value creation, value delivery and value capture in relationship to the social and commercial missions. Hybrid business models are identified as the lighthouse for social enterprises because they drive the organization toward pathways of scaling and to overcome scaling challenges. Battilana and Lee (2014) and Santos et al. (2015) identified *integrated* and *differentiated* hybrid organizations, mainly basing on the overlap between activities to pursue and scale the social mission, with the one to pursue and scale the commercial offering. Examples of social enterprises in Africa are then illustrated, to offer an overview of the key characteristics of ventures that embrace hybridity with a integration approach – such as the base of the pyramid (BoP) social enterprises and microfinance social enterprises (MFSEs) – and the ones that use differentiation approach, pursuing social and commercial goals with separated

activities and processes. This is the case of Work-Integration social enterprises (WISEs) and Fair Trade Producers social enterprises (FTPSEs).

The **third chapter** focuses on challenges faced by social enterprises when scaling their organizations in Africa. Following the Figure 1, scaling challenges are multifaced and involve not only the ‘stormy’ sea – meaning challenges associated with the external conditions of African countries, like the resource scarcity, market dynamics, weak infrastructure, etc. – but also challenges that are deeply rooted in the African societies, such as cultural norms and institutional patterns. Scaling challenges are then mapped into three categories, in relationship with (1) resource-constraints and the hybrid nature of social enterprises, (2) the African market conditions, and (3) the formal and informal institutional voids in Africa. To navigate such stormy waters and avoid possible icebergs ahead that could hinder the growth in impact and revenues, social enterprises are required to leverage the hybrid nature and implement strategic and organizational enablers.

The **fourth chapter**, then, illustrates four strategic and organizational enablers than allow the social enterprise to effectively implement scaling strategies. These enablers include: (1) the use of entrepreneurial bricolage and hybrid harvesting strategies (e.g., Baker and Nelson, 2005; Di Domenico et al., 2010; Ciambotti and Pedrini, 2021); (2) the leverage of dual mission management practices (e.g., Battilana et al., 2015; Smith and Besharov, 2019); (3) the exploitation of technologies (e.g., Nambisan, 2017; Ndemo and Weiss, 2017b; Weiss et al., 2022); (4) the embeddedness with local communities (e.g., Haugh, 2007; Hertel et al., 2022; Bacq et al., 2022).

Those strategies and organizational practices enable the hybrid social enterprise to activate certain scaling pathways. Therefore, the **fifth chapter** offers a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that social enterprises can implement to scale their social impact and commercial revenues in Africa. First, the chapter illustrates two important conditions for scaling, by elucidating how to validate the scalability in the hybrid business model and the fit between the business model components and the scaling pathways. In the second paragraph, the author offers a brief synthesis of the most recognized frameworks to scale social enterprises, with a classification of strategies into *scaling deep* and *scaling wide* approaches (Desa and Koch, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Also, the author offers a specific and holistic framework for scaling social enterprises in Africa, that change basing on the type of social enterprise and the hybrid business model. Therefore, the core paragraphs of Chapter 5 illustrate the scaling strategies in *integrated social enterprises*, and the scaling strategies in *differentiated social enterprises*, with various examples from the African context. Lastly, the chapter offers a paragraph which identifies three main scaling modes that can be implemented: an organic growth, selected partnerships, and social franchising. A final paragraph is devoted to ongoing practices that aims at ensuring the alignment between the social and commercial mission during the scaling, that aims to ensure a continuous pursuit of a balanced dual mission growth (Siebold et al., 2019; Ciambotti et al., 2023b).

Contextualizing scaling processes of social enterprises in Africa and offering a

comprehensive framework to scale allow to contribute to the existing literature on social entrepreneurship with several theoretical implications and practical suggestions that are illustrated in the conclusion section. Overall, this book is not an endpoint, rather tries to stimulate a broader debate in the theoretical aspects that constitute the scaling phenomenon in the field of social entrepreneurship; however, the author also hopes to fuel a deeper debate which goes into the local peculiarities of certain settings such as emerging African countries and capturing the essence and the fascinating aspects of running and scaling social enterprises even in presence of stormy waters, in order to contribute to a sustainable development of the societies and a better life on our planet. Overall, the author believes that this is the role of scholars, entrepreneurs and change-makers: to take seriously the opportunity for sharing theoretical and practical knowledge, envision bold actions, and collaborate together to achieve a meaningful life for everyone.

1

Social entrepreneurship in Africa: concepts and context

“If I know a song of Africa, of the giraffe and the African new moon lying on her back, of the plows in the fields and the sweaty faces of the coffee pickers, does Africa know a song of me?”

Karen Blixen

1.1. Social entrepreneurship in Africa: the need of conceptualization and contextualization

Research on social entrepreneurship grew up significantly in the last decade with several qualitative and quantitative studies from developed and developing countries (Saebi et al., 2019; Littlewood et al., 2022). This growing interest of scholars and practitioners have been driven by two important phenomena: the rise of several challenges all over the world, and the increasing need of innovative and creative solutions to address them. First, civil society is continuously experiencing grand challenges in all the continents (Ferraro et al., 2015; Gümüşay et al., 2022; Dorado et al., 2022), which are complex social and environmental problems that are constraining the life of people. Those growing problems are related to poverty, hunger, weak education and healthcare systems, youth unemployment, social and economic inequality, deforestation and climate change. In recent times we observed a growth both in terms of variety in issues and in the magnitude of their negative impact on the society and environment. Many of the grand challenges manifest at global level and involve all the human beings, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or climate change which is dramatically affecting the nature and the environment in all the continents, from the North Pole to the Antarctic region. Other challenges happen at regional or local level, but still generates geo-political echoes in other contexts. The UNs’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a

clear overview of such challenges, setting the stage for Government and policy-makers to define local agendas to achieve those targets (United Nations, 2015), and thus support entrepreneurial and organizational actions to tackle them. African continent, in particular way, has been historically characterized by severe grand challenges, which affect in different ways the countries from the north to the south, and both west and east Africa regions (George et al., 2016a; Ciambotti et al., 2020). Acute poverty is probably the leading challenge, with most of the African population currently living under extreme poverty (World Bank, 2021), but also civil wars and internal conflicts (Sottini and Ciambotti, 2020). Moreover, grand challenges which affect Africa (are related among others) to access to healthcare and food security, huge unemployment, lack of education, internal conflicts, and various climate change related problems (George et al., 2016b; Littlewood and Holt, 2018b; Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2018). The rise of several social and environmental issues also triggers the need for new and bold solutions.

Therefore, a second reason behind the growing interest of scholars in social entrepreneurship, relies in the urgency of innovative and creative solutions to address, that has to be translated into concrete and robust actions (Ferraro et al., 2015). Since 2000 we have been observing a rise in multi-level responses to the pressing needs of population, and various actors involved proactively to tackle social and environmental challenges. Government and public institutions have the historical ownership for the wellbeing and the environment preservation, and also non-profit sector (such as by NGOs) were actively involved in addressing specific problems (humanitarian aspects, educational problems, the preservation of the cultural heritage, etc.). More recently, the for-profit sector especially with large corporations started to recognize their role in the society and moved beyond the objective of maximizing profits for shareholders (Battilana et al., 2022) to integrate in their operation a focus toward social and ecological factors. This brought to the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives by for-profit companies with different levels of intervention (Molteni, 2013).

Among these tentative to address grand challenges, social entrepreneurship has been identified as one of the most promising approaches to effectively tackle complex social and environmental problems (see for instance, Doherty et al., 2014; Littlewood and Holt, 2018a; Saebi et al., 2019; George et al., 2016b). Research in this field captured various strategies and actions of social entrepreneurs to create a better life and a better world, but most of the social entrepreneurship research has been focused on Western countries (such as USA and Europe), or large emerging economies such as Brazil and Cina. In turn, very limited research has shown locally enabled entrepreneurial actions to tackle social and environmental issues (Saebi et al., 2019; Bacq et al., 2022), and this is very limited considering the multitude of problems and needs that affects the global South. Scholars in the field of entrepreneurship, thus, recently pointed out the need to recalibrate the research because of a Western-centric theorization (George et al., 2016b; Bruton et al., 2022), with an overemphasis of scholars on “startups with elite characteristics such as high tech,

high growth” (George et al., 2023). Therefore, in approaching phenomenon such as social entrepreneurship and scaling strategies the important premise which constitute a starting point for this book, is to **conceptualize** and **contextualize** those phenomena in the African context. Without this effort, research and practice would rely on limited and blurred knowledge, with two main problems that can be recognized.

First, scholars claimed a lack of conceptualization and contextualization because the research that investigates social entrepreneurial phenomena (such as the recognition and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities, the innovation and scaling) can fail to capture the pluralism and variety of alternative ways and means to achieve social and environmental outcomes (Welter, 2011; George et al., 2023). For instance, without clarifying what are the key definitional aspects of social entrepreneurship and scaling in Africa, the literature could remain jeopardized and not anchored to a consistent approach of investigation which is suitable for this specific setting. Similarly, scaling and growth of enterprises, without contextualization, could be merely associated with tech-based startups oriented to a rapid growth in sales and profits, and operating in well-supported ecosystems by venture capitalist and business angels which share the same purpose of get an exit of million dollars. Scholars could be found with a *research myopia* that brings them to overlook many unconventional approaches to social entrepreneurship which are simply out of the Western mindset and habits, or to undermine the specificities of some challenges faced when scaling in contexts such as Africa (George et al., 2016a; Bakker and McMullen, 2023).

Secondly, social entrepreneurship and scaling largely studied in Western contexts have been represented as a phenomenon related to well-established ecosystems where social entrepreneurs are able to make plans for the future, collect the resources, and implement their strategies being supported by interconnected and well-established actors, such as Government, tech hubs, accelerators, venture capitalists (Friederici, 2018; Littlewood and Kiyumbu, 2018; Theodoraki et al., 2022). In turn, when looking at most of the emerging economies in the global South, such as African countries, entrepreneurship manifests as a fragmented phenomenon, where many social entrepreneurs lack of business support, and entrepreneurial processes such as innovation and scaling are strongly affected by the contextual challenges. In other words, scholars claimed that by looking at scaling in social entrepreneurship through a Western theoretical approach, the scientific knowledge may overlook the ‘everydayness of entrepreneurship’ (George et al., 2023), ultimately failing to provide effective explanations on how scaling is enacted, the (often daily) challenges encountered by social entrepreneurs and the different processes for scaling, with proper enablers and strategies.

This book embraces this purpose of providing a better conceptualization and contextualization of scaling social entrepreneurship in Africa. Therefore, before proceeding with the framework presented in this book, in the following paragraph are illustrated the definitional factors of social entrepreneurship.

1.2. Conceptualizing social entrepreneurship

The purpose of this paragraph is to briefly illustrate the rise of social entrepreneurship in literature in response to growing grand challenges, and to highlight some key definitional aspects of the phenomenon. This section offers an overview of the development of social entrepreneurship as a field of research, while going deeper in the conceptualization of social entrepreneurship in the African context.

1.2.1. *Historical roots of social entrepreneurship in the public and private spheres*

Historically, welfare state systems have been accountable for most of the social and environmental issues of the Nations, for instance in the promotion of labor market and industrial development, ensuring prosperity and wellbeing, reducing poverty, fostering access to education, as well as promoting the cultural heritage and preserving the environment. In other words, the Governments and the public sector have been the leading players toward a sustainable development. However, due to the growing complex social and environmental problems of our era, we have been observing a shift in how such grand challenges are tackled, which brought to the rise of alternative, innovative and creative models of solutions. The pathways observed are threefold.

First, **Governments and policymakers** significantly reduced over time the investments in the social issues, highlighting what has been referred as ‘welfare state crisis’ (Huber et al., 2001; Maino and Ferrara, 2017). The failures in welfare state systems were ranging all over the world – from Europe, US, Japan, and are nested in multifaceted crisis, as tax systems, labor markets, financial crisis, etc. Such welfare state crisis also happened in different ways, depending on the geographical areas and the characteristics of the contexts¹. Bacq and Janssen (2011, p. 380), in their famous literature review of social entrepreneurship, argued that: “Governmental actions against exclusion and poverty are better organized and more common in Europe, where public policies traditionally play a central role compared to the government-detached American approach. In the US, poverty is not so much a governmental concern as a moral and charity issue. Therefore, in the US, social entrepreneurship could be considered as a substitute for the Welfare State – a social state that guards for social protection and free negotiation between social partners”. Heeding this explanation, social entrepreneurship literature has been developed depending on the context specificities concerning the institutional support with proper policies. For example, since early 2000 social entrepreneurial initiatives have been on the European Union agenda (European Commission, 2011), and increased the relevance over time becoming a pressing topic for European and national governments (European Commission, 2022). This is not the case of Africa, where lack of institutional support (so called institutional voids, Webb et al., 2020) are strongly

¹ The book by Robson (2018) offers a comprehensive documentation of the welfare state crises.

constraining the management and entrepreneurial processes (George et al., 2016b; Littlewood et al., 2022) failing to provide the adequate support so far.

A second important pathway which has been observed rely in the **non-profit actors** in the so-called third sector such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) which faced increased issues in their management and operations. Such actors have been affected by a strong decrease in the collection of funding: donations and association fees by members significantly decreased over time since the '80s (Dees, 1998), while the financial risk was growing up (Young, 2001), ultimately hindering the interventions and contributions offered by such organizations toward social and environmental causes. Also, the Governments reduced their financial support to the non-profit sector. The combined result is that non-profit organizations and charities, in operations to accomplish a social mission, started to adopt practices and processes which are related to commercial logics, for instance identifying revenue streams or moving toward other organizational forms (e.g., cooperative, community-based organizations, etc.). An example of this, is the case of Italian cooperative which moved toward a more innovative social enterprise model (Perrini et al., 2010). Ebrahim et al. (2014, p. 82) documented this growing phenomenon since '80s, when “charities have generated a substantial portion of their revenues from the sales of goods and services, especially in the arts, education, and healthcare sectors (...) And they have experienced a growing shift toward the hiring of professional managers, and the adoption of formalized practices such as strategic planning, independent financial auditing, and quantitative evaluation and performance measurement.”

A third pathway which contributed to the rise of social entrepreneurship in recent times has been observed in the **for-profit sector**. In particular, for-profit companies started to recognize the importance of incorporating social and environmental causes into their objectives and processes, becoming accountable for the broader stakeholders (Battilana et al., 2022). This phenomenon is related to the development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Molteni, 2013) with several interventions also in the African contexts done by multinational corporations such as Unilever, Coca Cola, Nestlé in emerging markets (see for instance the extensive works done by Prahalad and Hammond, 2002; Prahalad, 2009; Dembek et al., 2020; Chmielewski et al., 2020).

According with these roots, social entrepreneurship has been viewed over time as an independent and distinct category from profit and non-profit domains (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Murphy et al., 2022), with a specific body of research that focuses on how individuals can create and scale a social enterprise to address societal and environmental problem. In the next paragraph the key definitions of social entrepreneurship identified in the current knowledge will be illustrated.

1.2.2. *Definitional aspects of social entrepreneurship*

The notion of social entrepreneurship has been at the center of several debates, with contrasting and complementary views on the historical roots and a missing

shared definition (Doherty et al., 2014; Saebi et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2022). The notion of undertaking commerce for the common good of the society is not recent, with evidence not only rooted in '50s, but also with historical evidence in the Victorian age in UK (Murphy et al., 2022) or in the middle age in Europe. For instance, medieval merchants such as Francesco Datini, Jacques Coeur and Benedetto Cotrugli were typically involved in business for pursuing the social development of the society, and actively involved in building hospitals, and promoting charities (Jouanique, 1996). Despite these ancient roots, the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship found its own space in the civil society only in the last decades, with organizations that started to go “beyond the market-state dichotomy that has dominated policymaking and the domain of business studies for at least 100 years” (Murphy and Coombes, 2009, p. 327). This step toward breaking the boundaries of for-profit and non-profit domains, brought to various studies between 1990 and 2010 that contributed with germinal definitions of the social entrepreneurship. Some of these key definitions used by scholarship in the early stage of social entrepreneurship literature are captured in Table 1.

Table 1. – Selected definitions of social entrepreneurship

Author/s	Definition
Bowen, 1953	Business operations entailing policies, decisions, and operations that are desirable in terms of the values of society.
Waddock and Post (1991)	A large array of non-profit activities in many areas such as economics, education, research, welfare and social activities.
Boschee (1995)	Non-profit actions that balance moral imperatives and the profit motives. Non-profit executives who pay increased attention to market forces without losing sight of their underlying mission, to somehow balance moral imperatives and the profit motives – and that balancing act is the heart and soul of the movement.
Leadbeater (1997)	A large array of non-profit activities in many areas such as economics, education, research, welfare and social activities.
Haugh (2005)	Range of organizations that trade for a social purpose. They adopt one of a variety of different legal formats but have in common, the principles of pursuing business-led solutions to achieve social aims, and the reinvestment of surplus for community benefit.
Mair and Marti (2006)	We view social entrepreneurship as a process of creating value by combining resources in new ways. Second, these resource combinations are intended primarily to explore and exploit opportunities to create social value by stimulating social change or meeting social needs. And third, when viewed as a process, social entrepreneurship involves the offering of services and products but can also refer to the creation of new organizations.