Social and Environmental Enterprise in Namibia - Sector mapping and a review of public policy responses

Dr David Littlewood* & Dr Diane Holt

Queen’s University Management School, 
Queen’s University Belfast

*Author for Correspondence
25 University Square, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT7 1NN
Tel: +44 (0) 28 9097 3160 Fax: +44 (0) 28 9097 5156
Email: d.littlewood@qub.ac.uk

Extended Abstract – Scholarly Paper

Over the last twenty years social and environmental enterprise has gained increasing global prominence. In many countries social and environmental enterprise sectors have rapidly expanded. During this period, governments and international institutions have also expressed growing interest in such enterprise, and its potential to tackle long standing social, environmental and development problems through innovative activity. There has furthermore been a burgeoning of academic interest in social and environmental enterprise and entrepreneurship. However in many areas, research into the field of social and environmental enterprise lags behind developments on the ground, and to date the coverage of such research has been quite patchy (Short et al 2009). Considerable attention has been given to the definition of social and environmental enterprise, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship (Peredo and Mclean 2006; Martin and Osberg 2007; Boschee and McClurg 2003; Dees 1998), and discussion of their distinctiveness (or not) from traditional entrepreneurial activity (Spear 2006; Chell 2007). Case studies have also been a common feature of social enterprise research, although at times such studies have been relatively ad hoc and it has been difficult to draw wider conclusions from them. Finally, research has predominantly been directed towards social enterprise in the global North (Kerlin 2006; Borzaga and Defourney 2004), with work originating from and focussing on social enterprise in the US and UK particularly prominent.

There is growing interest and even excitement about the role social and environmental enterprises can play in sustainable development and poverty alleviation in the global south (Yunus 2007). However research in this area remains fragmented, ad hoc, prescriptive rather than descriptive, and with considerable spatial variation in coverage (Hall et al 2010). Empirical work examining these issues, beyond single case study examples, is also limited (Boyer et al., 2008). In particular, very little systematic research has been undertaken on social and environmental enterprises, typically MSMEs, in Sub-Saharan Africa, or in relation to their role in poverty alleviation and fostering sustainable development across the region. It is in this context that the ‘Trickles Out’ Project (2011-13) was initiated, with the aim of undertaking a systematic evaluation of eco-social enterprises across 18 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa, alongside in-depth comparative case study analysis to consider what is actually happening on the ground. Through the ‘Trickle Out’ Project a directory of East and Southern African social and environmental enterprises will be developed, and in-depth case
study analysis undertaken of the trickle out effects of these enterprises in poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

This paper draws upon data from the wider Trickle Out Project and maps the social and environmental enterprise sector in Namibia. This mapping exercise is complimented by knowledge and experience of Namibia’s social and environmental enterprise sector gained from previous research in the country. The paper furthermore undertakes a review of public policy towards the social and environmental enterprise sector in Namibia. It assesses the institutions, support and incentives presently offered and available to such enterprises in Namibia, and makes suggestions for innovation and improvement drawing upon regional and international examples and knowledge.

Academic work examining the social and environmental enterprise sector across Sub-Saharan Africa is very limited, it is in this context that the Trickle Out Project aims to make a significant innovative contribution to what has to date been an underdeveloped area of enquiry. Work addressing the social and environmental enterprise sector in Namibia is similarly limited. In this paper the social and environmental enterprise sector in Namibia will be mapped with a typology of enterprise types created. The characteristics of such enterprises in relation to issues like size, sector, area of activity, location, funding regime and governance and organisational structure will be outlined. Various examples of Namibian social and environmental enterprises will be drawn upon to enliven the mapping exercise. The paper will also address public policy responses in Namibia to the social and environmental enterprise sector. In Namibia, across Africa and globally there is a need for new and innovative public policy responses to incentivise and support social and environmental enterprise and entrepreneurship. In this context the paper will consider how the government of Namibia has approached such enterprises, where its policy responses are working and the lessons and insights it can export internationally, and where its policy responses can be strengthened and improved.

References


