
Guest editorial: Gender and social entrepreneurship: building cumulative knowledge

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Introduction

Women's participation in social entrepreneurship is significant and the potential of social entrepreneurship to empower women is increasingly recognised (e.g. [Cherrier et al., 2017](#); [Dimitriadis et al., 2017](#); [Haugh and Talwar, 2016](#); [Hechavarria et al., 2017](#)). However, despite a fast-developing and maturing literature on social entrepreneurship ([Teasdale et al., 2023](#)), scholarship on the gender–social entrepreneurship nexus remains sparse. Little is known about how gendered social entrepreneurship catalyses social change in varied contexts. The outcomes of women's involvement and the processes by which they impact social ventures remain under-researched and under-theorised ([Garcia-Lomas and Gabaldon, 2023](#)).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the scope for the social entrepreneurship sector to address social challenges at the local, national and global levels ([Bacq and Lumpkin, 2021](#)). Yet little is known about the gender dimensions of these responses. Going forward into the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, together with the need for heightened action to achieve the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is both vital and timely to seek new understanding on the gender dimensions of social entrepreneurship. Thus, in this Special Issue (SI), we sought to enhance the understanding of the intersection between gender and social entrepreneurship, draw attention to implications for practice and reflect on a forward research agenda.

Since the overarching purpose of the SI was to generally advance the limited understanding on gendered social entrepreneurship, we deliberately kept the ambit of the SI broad and clearly signposted this in the SI title, "Gender and social entrepreneurship: building cumulative knowledge". Accordingly, we suggested a wide, albeit not comprehensive, set of possible topics in the call for papers.

The initial call for papers for this SI was issued in September 2022, with submissions closing at the beginning of April 2023. Following extensive promotion of the call via the Emerald Group Publishing website, other websites and online forums in related areas as well as tapping into the personal networks of the three guest editors, 14 submissions to the SI were received. After a desk review, seven of these manuscripts were sent out for peer review. Upon completion of the review process and following editorial feedback, five submissions were finally accepted for the SI. Since even within the rapidly maturing body of scholarly literature on social entrepreneurship there is considerable need for understanding beyond the tried and tested Global North contexts ([de Bruin and Teasdale, 2019](#)), it is noteworthy that two of these papers provide gendered social entrepreneurial insights from developing countries in Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The conceptual paper selected for the SI, serves to highlight that social entrepreneurship practices and principles lie at the intersection of gender equality and justice as well as climate action that is fair, effective and sustainable. Taken together, the five research papers that comprise this SI represent a significant addition to the extant body of knowledge on gender and social entrepreneurship.

Overview of the selected papers

The first two papers in the SI focus on social entrepreneurial intentions. They bring new insights into the contextualised factors that affect women's choices about undertaking social



entrepreneurship, in two quite different geographical contexts, using different research approaches.

The first paper, “Antecedents of women’s social entrepreneurship: values development and the perceived desirability and feasibility of social venture creation” by Persephone de Magdalene, is a qualitative study that uses life story interviews of 30 women social entrepreneurs operating ventures in the United Kingdom. The paper delves into the values antecedents of women’s social entrepreneurship and makes an important contribution to the literature by identifying that entrepreneurs’ pro-social values develop over time across three experiential domains: family, work and life. Thus foundational familial experiences, mainly transmittance of parental pro-social values, are progressively built on in the work and life domains, to catalyse social entrepreneurship. A novel illustrative framework shows how this contextualised process operates and finally leads to a commitment to social entrepreneurial activity. Interestingly, de Magdalene highlights that crisis events, for example, workplace challenges that conflict with the women’s core foundational values, move them into a “temporal buffer zone” in-between social venture desirability and social venture feasibility. In this zone, critical reflection enables them to bridge the intention–behaviour gap and move to social venture formation.

The second paper, “How do gender attitudes influence the relationships between perceived desirability, perceived feasibility and social entrepreneurial intentions?”, by João M. Lopes, Sofia Gomes and Cláudia Dias, explores social entrepreneurial intentions amongst male and female higher education students in Portugal. Drawing on data from an online questionnaire with a representative sample of students, the study employs structural equation modelling to test hypotheses on perceived desirability and feasibility of both social entrepreneurship and general entrepreneurship intention, with gender as the moderator. The findings reveal that the impact of perceived desirability on social as well as general entrepreneurial intention, is higher for men than women. However, women’s perceptions of the feasibility of social and general entrepreneurship are greater than that of their male counterparts. Thus while women are less attracted to entrepreneurship, they are more confident than men when it comes to engaging in entrepreneurial activity. The authors point out that their findings contrast with a similar study on German higher-education students ([Dickel and Eckardt, 2021](#)), and underscore the importance of considering spatial, cultural and organisational contextual differences. For instance, unlike Germany, Portugal belongs to the Latin European cultural cluster which is characterised by greater tolerance of power inequalities and lower risk-taking.

The third paper continues with the higher education theme, but shifts the focus to the ecosystem in which social entrepreneurs operate. “The role of universities in Latin American social entrepreneurship ecosystems: A gender perspective” by John Fernando Macías-Prada, Yamila Silva and Ángela María Zapata, is an exploratory qualitative study that draws on in-depth interviews with 24 women from eight Latin American countries. The authors adopt [Gonzalez and Dentchev’s \(2021\)](#) framework that classifies three categories of support for social entrepreneurs in the ecosystem – “fuel” (resource availability including appropriate skills), “hardware” (infrastructure and services that enable social entrepreneurs to scale their social impact) and “DNA” (an entrepreneurial culture with supportive policies for social entrepreneurs). The paper provides fresh insights into the pivotal role universities play in entrepreneurial ecosystems in countries where all three types of support are underdeveloped and much less attuned to women. The paper describes what the women interviewees perceive to be the vital characteristics of social entrepreneurs and the core competencies that should be integrated into university-based social entrepreneurship training programmes. This paper also highlights the impact of cultural context on the gender–social entrepreneurship dynamic.

The next paper focusses on the experiences of women participating in cooperatives and social enterprises in the artisan sector in Sub-Saharan Africa. “Weaving together social capital to empower women artisan entrepreneurs”, by Garrett S. Brogan and Kim E. Dooley,

constitutes an important addition to knowledge on artisan entrepreneurship. Hitherto, much of the research on artisan entrepreneurship has been conducted in a Western cultural context (Pret and Cogan, 2019); this study's novel focus on African contexts sheds light on the importance of the artisan sector for sustainable employment of women in the developing world. The authors adopt a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate how social capital impacts women artisans in cooperatives and social enterprises, complemented by an emic perspective from the lead author's prior experience of living in East Africa and working with women's cooperatives. Notably, the authors employ the [Hidalgo *et al.* \(2021\)](#) framework on the role that social capital can play in developing social entrepreneurship, and identify partnership development as a path for enterprise expansion as well as for positively impacting the communities surrounding them. Pro-active partnership development is also demonstrated to be critical for survival in the face of exogenous shocks like the recent pandemic. Ultimately, developing a consistent income stream is shown to be integral to empowerment for women in the study.

Each of these four research papers offer practical implications for education and training. The first, by de Magdalene emphasises vocational, community-based experiential learning to develop capacity for social entrepreneurship. The two papers that follow emphasise strategies for higher education institutions, particularly universities. Lopes, Gomes and Dias provide specific recommendations for universities such as the development of protocols with social purpose organisations for student internships and the encouragement of student volunteering; the development of new social entrepreneurship programmes that foster community engagement and collective action, and curriculum development to address the particular challenges women entrepreneurs face as well as attention to relevant skills development in areas such as social impact measurement. Macías-Prada, Silva and Zapata, working in contexts with weak entrepreneurial ecosystems, draw attention to need for universities to inculcate a DNA that values gender equity and social impact. In light of the structural and cultural barriers that significantly impede women's inclusive participation in social entrepreneurial ecosystems, the authors argue that universities have a responsibility to lead change in Latin America, by integrating social entrepreneurship education into curriculums across all disciplines and adopting a gender perspective as an essential strategy. The fourth paper by Brogan and Dooley also features measures for education and skills development; their emphasis is on a holistic educational approach beyond employment and enterprise skills, which encompasses personal mentoring and education on social and community issues.

The fifth and final paper of the SI, "Climate just entrepreneurship: feminist entrepreneurship for climate action", by Elise Stephenson and Sarah Furman, is a thought provoking conceptual piece in which social entrepreneurship is envisaged as contributing to a larger climate justice framework. In this paper the authors employ a qualitative literature review grounded in Australian studies to identify five key concepts aligned to climate action. These concepts – climate entrepreneurship, social enterprise, circular economy, doughnut economics and gender equality and justice – are discussed to carve out the novel concept "climate just entrepreneurship" at their intersection. Feminist, First Nations and queer theory perspectives are used to build the Climate Just Entrepreneurship framework, while social entrepreneurship and circular economic models are used to support and complement it. Importantly, intersectionality lies at the core of the climate just entrepreneurship notion; the authors emphasise commitment to intersectional gender equality and women's inclusion in climate entrepreneurship policy and practice.

Future research directions

These papers have risen to the SI's challenge to explore the gendered dimensions of social entrepreneurship. They present research on the antecedents, enablers and significance of

social entrepreneurial action across multiple country contexts, and with specific attention to the experiences and perspectives of women. Together, these papers shed light on the importance of contextually shaped gender dynamics in influencing social entrepreneurial intentions and provide gendered insights into the various local ecosystems in which social entrepreneurs operate. Further these papers offer some practical guidance on how to improve these ecosystems, as well as pointing to the larger potential of social entrepreneurship to contribute to processes of gender equality and environmental stewardship.

As such, this collection has started to map out some fruitful directions for future research. Firstly, research on individuals' social entrepreneurial intentions can benefit from research approaches that are sensitive to gender and to socio-cultural context. Future work could explore the extent to which the antecedents and intentions for social entrepreneurship vary by gender, including those that identify as non-binary and across different geographic and socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, gender differences in the realisation of social entrepreneurial intentions and strategies for social entrepreneurial opportunity development are deserving of further research attention. Future research could provide deeper insights into the gendered dimensions of entrepreneurial agency, shedding light on how entrepreneurs of different gender identities manoeuvre within gendered social contexts to identify, assess and realise opportunities.

Future research can also shed light on the nature and characteristics of the ecosystems that support gendered social entrepreneurship. Insights from the papers in the SI into the role of universities, educational programmes (including community-based education and skills development) and partnerships can be tested and extended in other contexts. Questions remain about the extent to which social entrepreneurial ecosystems have distinctive characteristics (de Bruin *et al.*, 2023), and whether women and sexual and gender minority groups experience these ecosystems differently than men (e.g. Birdthistle *et al.*, 2022; Brush *et al.*, 2019). Future research should consider how local socio-cultural and institutional contexts – including gender norms – impact the environment for social entrepreneurship and the types of supports that are available (or perceived as available) to prospective entrepreneurs in local ecosystems. These insights can, in turn, contribute to practical initiatives to strengthen local social entrepreneurial ecosystems and make them more inclusive.

Community lies at the core of social entrepreneurial ecosystems (de Bruin *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, social entrepreneurship is community-centric since community is “where change happens” (Lumpkin *et al.*, 2018). Communities are also a context for the enactment of gender in social entrepreneurship (Dimitriadis *et al.*, 2017). However, while there is growing knowledge of the impact of social entrepreneurs on their communities, there is a large gap in understanding of how the community role of social entrepreneurs impacts their own well-being. Pertinently, the COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted well-being effects on women whose paid and unpaid “second shift” of work (Hochschild and Machung, 2012) moved to a “triple shift” with more unpaid home-schooling work (Hughes *et al.*, 2022). In a similar vein, future research could investigate if their community role leads to a triple shift for women engaged in social entrepreneurship. This research can combine with race/ethnicity intersectional study to investigate if cultural demands impose additional burdens. For example, do cultural expectations and obligations of Māori women social entrepreneurs in Aotearoa New Zealand, impose additional pressures on their time? It is important to understand how cultural embeddedness impacts women and other minority groups undertaking social entrepreneurial activity. However, it should be noted that cultural values also offer opportunities for social entrepreneurship and social innovation (de Bruin and Read, 2018). Indigenous communities bring different insights and ways of knowing into the entrepreneurship conversation and can inform our understanding of the importance of place in social entrepreneurship (Woods *et al.*, 2022). For instance, the place of wāhine (women) Māori within Te Ao Māori (worldviews of the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), mana (prestige/authority/power) and the concept of “Mana Wāhine” (Pihama, 2020), can provide novel perspectives on women as social change agents in the community.

Explicit attention to gender together with other intersecting social identities such as race/ethnicity and migrant attributes, will reveal a more in-depth picture of individual social entrepreneurial trajectories and the characteristics of ecosystems that support diverse social entrepreneurs. Thus future research could effectively respond to the call for intersectional study of social entrepreneurship (de Bruin and Teasdale, 2019). Research across multiple country contexts, across different geographies with different institutional configurations and cultural expectations and with attention to the agency of social entrepreneurs of different backgrounds and identities, will ultimately reveal patterns in what is required to nurture social entrepreneurship from intention to realisation, and to grow sustainable and impactful social ventures. We note here that mixed method approaches with corroborating quantitative and qualitative evidence, will be useful for capturing contextual nuances (Fan and Moen, 2022). Research that encapsulates the gender and intersectional aspects of social entrepreneurship and documents the social, economic and environmental impacts of social ventures will strengthen evidence for the value of social entrepreneurship and its significance for communities and societies in pursuit of sustainable development.

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