

Innovations

Social Entrepreneurship and Youth Empowerment: Understanding the Nigerian Context

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Abstract

Introduction: the concept of social entrepreneurship has come to stay and many youth who have suffered the challenges of being unemployed may embrace this new phenomenon. Social entrepreneurship is an emerging concept that combines the passion of a social mission with business-like discipline, innovation, and determination. Nigeria has a large youth population, many of whom face high unemployment and limited economic opportunities. **Objective:** The study examines the role of social entrepreneurship and its potential in empowering youth in Nigeria. **Methodology:** The study reviews how social entrepreneurs in Nigeria are developing innovative solutions to youth development challenges, creating jobs, and empowering young people through their ventures. By examining various social enterprise models, case studies, and the existing challenges faced by youth, this study highlights the transformative impact of social entrepreneurship on youth empowerment, the key characteristics of social entrepreneurship for youth empowerment, the main challenges faced, and the policy implications for supporting this sector. **Conclusion:** The paper concluded that social entrepreneurship holds great promise for catalyzing youth development in Nigeria but requires a conducive ecosystem and greater institutional support.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship; Youth Empowerment; Nigeria.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the drafting of the manuscript. Conceptualization was carried out by Solomon U. Eze. Draft preparation and other contributions that led to the final paper were written by Cosmas A. Nwankwo, and Macdonald Kanyangale. Also all authors read and approved the final draft of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare relevant to this article's content.

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Introduction

Youth unemployment is a pressing issue in Nigeria where the youth population is significant with over 60% of its 5.5 million residents under the age of 35 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), the unemployment rate among Nigerian youth stands at approximately 40%. This situation has led to increased poverty, social unrest, and a lack of opportunities for personal and professional development. The 2022 National Youth Survey found that the youth unemployment rate in Nigeria was 32.7%, significantly higher than the national average of 23.2% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In the face of these development challenges, a new generation of social entrepreneurs in Nigeria is emerging, leveraging business principles and innovative approaches to tackle social problems and empower youth. Social entrepreneurs identify unmet needs in their communities and develop creative solutions, often using earned-income strategies to sustain and scale their initiatives. However, many young people in Nigeria face significant socioeconomic challenges, including high unemployment, limited access to quality education and skills training, and few economic opportunities.

It is becoming increasingly recognised that social entrepreneurship has the potential to serve as a mechanism for addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. According to Adewole (2022), the fact that it has emerged as a hybrid approach for transforming communities suggests that it has the potential to be used to address challenges such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, climate change, insecurity, and other social and economic issues in Africa. Ihejiamaizu and Udensi (2017) observed that social entrepreneurship is defined as the capacity to recognise a social problem as an opportunity and the application of entrepreneurial principles to organise, create, and manage a social venture in order to achieve the desired social change. The ability to view "problems" as "opportunities" and then to take the initiative to find solutions to those problems and meet these needs in a profitable manner is a necessary component of this ability. The essence of the matter is that customers pay to have the issue resolved. Consequently, social entrepreneurship generates wealth for the entire society as a result of its contribution to the development of communities and the preservation of the environment.

Social entrepreneurship has consequently arisen as a modern concern in addressing diverse social issues. This concept is particularly apt for tackling youth unemployment, as governmental initiatives have proven inadequate in resolving

the persistent issue (Yusuf, Precious & Sanusi, 2017). This approach is characterised by its dual focus on financial efficacy and social transformation, facilitating locally-driven solutions to various challenges that impede collective socioeconomic advancement (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). Social entrepreneurs thus provide a distinctive contribution to the realisation of the Africa 2063 agenda. Globally, the population of youth aged 15-24 is anticipated to rise by 8 percent over the next 15 years, from approximately 1.2 billion in 2015 to nearly 1.3 billion in 2030 (Adewole, 2022). Therefore, solutions targeting challenges faced by young individuals, such as unemployment, will generate a significant positive ripple effect throughout the entire African populace.

The study examines the role of social entrepreneurship in youth empowerment in Nigeria. It explores how social entrepreneurs are addressing the needs of young people such as create job opportunities, develop skills, and foster community engagement among the youth through their ventures, the key characteristics and impacts of their work, the challenges they face, and the implications for policy and practice.

Literature Review

Social Entrepreneurship

The term of social entrepreneurship was first used in 1980 by Bill Drayton of Ashoka which is the global association of the world's leading social entrepreneurs. Drayton, founder of 'Ashoka', is credited with coining the phrase "social entrepreneur", to describe a person who recognises logjams in society and find ways to free them. According to Mazhar, Sher, Abbas, Ghafoor, and Lin. (2022), social entrepreneurs contribute to accomplishing Sustainable Development Goals by solving social problems and fostering the production of new forms of social value. In contrast to conventional business strategies, social entrepreneurs are more concerned with making a positive social impact than making a profit. Thus, social entrepreneurs pool their resources to solve social issues and create value through creative innovations. Santos, dos, Anholon, da Silva, Etulain, Rodrigues, and Leal Filho (2022) opines that "social entrepreneurship" means using entrepreneurial ideas to resolve social problems. Santos, et al, (2022) opines that "social entrepreneurship" means using entrepreneurial ideas to resolve social problems. The idea of social entrepreneurship has recently come to be recognised as an essential aspect that plays a role in the improvement of public welfare and prosperity (Onileowo, Muharam, 2024) More precisely, Social entrepreneurs develop original approaches to resolving social issues, putting the impact on society ahead of financial gain, and play an essential role in addressing societal difficulties and empowering disadvantaged groups and individuals, both of which they make significant contributions (Mars, 2022). In addition to being visionaries, they also possess realism and the drive to make dreams come true. According to

this study, social entrepreneurship is any entrepreneurial endeavour, strategy, or selfless effort directed towards creating a positive social impact.

Social Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

In Nigeria, entrepreneurship has roots that go back to the early 13th century, when various communities developed specializations in particular goods and services. For example, Saki is well-known for its pottery, Abeokuta for its tie-and-dye, Bida for bronze work, and Benin for carvings. In addition, Zaria, Ekiti, and Ipoti are well known for their leather goods, mat manufacturing, and weavers of Soke, respectively (Wale-Oshinowo, Uba, Adeyeye & Omobowale, 2019). In a similar vein, certain regions of the nation produce particular foods like rice, yam, and maize. Although Nigeria has long been known for its highly entrepreneurial culture, the concept of entrepreneurship has only recently received attention and been investigated as a field of study. Curiously, research from the literature reveals that, as a means of eliminating absolute poverty, government policies have consistently encouraged and supported the emergence and expansion of small businesses and entrepreneurship (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2023). It is important to note that poverty is not solely related to low income; it also encompasses factors like economic, environmental, technological, physical, institutional, political, socio-cultural, ethnic, and gender inequality that are not related to income or wages (Wale-Oshinowo et al. 2019).

Although Nigeria is not among the LDCs, as the number of impoverished people worldwide approaches one billion, new data from the National Bureau of Statistics indicates that over 67% of the country's population—more than 170 million people—lives below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), making poverty a major concern for both the government and the populace. Numerous elements have contributed to unemployment, including the undeveloped human resource pipeline, low productivity and wages in the unorganized sector, sluggish economic growth, unsuitable microeconomic policies, and imperfections in the labour market (Nwankwo & Ifejiofor, 2014). The country's high rate of poverty is primarily the result of these factors as corruption, bad governance, the rate of population growth, the nature of the economy, and the lack of basic infrastructure (Wale-Oshinowo et al. 2019). In addition to poverty, other indicators include scarcity of food, housing, climate change, unstable energy supplies, natural disasters, inadequate health care, inadequate infrastructure, and deplorable institutional structures in education.

Over the years, the Nigerian government has developed numerous programs and economic plans aimed at ending poverty. One of these initiatives is entrepreneurship, which involves empowering small-scale business owners and providing support to unemployed and underemployed individuals to start and run

their own businesses. Unfortunately, these market-based policy initiatives have not been able to effectively address the urgent need to alleviate poverty for a number of reasons, including a lack of coordination due to ignorance about the technical know-how and operational know-what. It is outside the purview of this chapter to go into great detail about the reasons behind the failure of the aforementioned policies and measures intended to mitigate the effects of recessions; however, this has been thoroughly examined in other studies (Wale-Oshinowo et al. 2019). Nevertheless, this failure serves as a reminder that more creative interventions are needed in order to address poverty from a more comprehensive standpoint.

Particularly for Nigeria, small-scale industries are crucial to the nation's social and economic advancement (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2023). The idea of entrepreneurship is currently associated with Nigeria, and the rise of an entrepreneurial economy is arguably one of the most important and promising developments of the last few years. But the entrepreneurial economy encompasses both social and commercial entrepreneurship. In line with this, social enterprise/entrepreneurship emerges as a means of addressing the gaps left by the failures of commercial entrepreneurship and the institutions of politics and the economy. Stated differently, a market-based approach by itself is not sufficient to reduce poverty in people's lives; thus, there is a need for additional creative interventions, which this study conceptualises as "social entrepreneurship."

Only a few studies have examined social entrepreneurship as a viable solution for addressing social issues and promoting sustainable development (Moses & Olokundun, 2014); the influence of social entrepreneurship on reducing poverty in Nigeria (Mohammed & Ndulue, 2017). In the context of other African nations, Littlewood and Holt (2018) investigated social entrepreneurship in South Africa, concentrating on the impact of the environment on SE and how SEs can take advantage of their surroundings, while Ghalwash, Tolba and Ismail (2016) investigated the reasons why Egyptian entrepreneurs launch social ventures. None, though, provided a summary of social entrepreneurship in Africa, with a particular emphasis on Nigeria. By adding two significant pieces to the body of literature in the field, we broaden the discussion's focus. To be more precise, this paper summarised this by using the self-explanatory narratives of aspiring social entrepreneurs who operate across a variety of sectors to understand the characteristics of SE in the Nigerian context.

Youth Empowerment

The term youth refers to a person's early years of existence, growth, or development, particularly the years between childhood and maturity. According to Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy, everyone between the ages of 18 and 33 is considered a youth (Youth National Policy, 2019). Establishing and maintaining

the favourable circumstances necessary for young people to act independently and on their own terms as opposed to following orders from others is known as youth empowerment (UNESCO, 2019). A stable environment of equality, peace, and democracy, access to knowledge, information, and skills, a positive value system, political will, appropriate resource allocation, and supportive legal and administrative frameworks are some of these enabling conditions. Other factors include the economy and social base.

Youth empowerment refers to the process of equipping young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to take control of their lives and contribute positively to their communities (UNESCO, 2014). Empowerment encompasses various dimensions, including economic, social, and political empowerment, all of which are crucial for fostering active citizenship among youth. Yanto & Shang (2017) state that one of the most significant ways that social enterprises (SEs) create social value is through empowerment. Building social awareness, meaningful participation, social connections, fostering entrepreneurial skills, and power sharing between youth and adults are the five categories they use to categorise empowerment. However, this study defined youth empowerment as the process of encouraging young people to take responsibility for their lives. They accomplish this by first acknowledging their predicament, after which they take steps to enhance their access to resources and alter their consciousness by means of their attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Associated Theories of Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship are anchored on many theories that help explain the functionality of its principles. The following theories are discussed below:

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Using strategic resources to achieve a sustained competitive advantage is the goal of the resource-based view (RBV), which was developed from the concept of Penrose, Schumpeter, and Ricardo. According to Barney (2001), the resource-based approach places an emphasis on the characteristics of existing resources as well as strategies for ensuring the continued existence of an organisation, gaining a competitive advantage, and achieving long-term success. When it comes to superior firm performance, resources and capabilities are considered to be sources of excellence. According to Barney (2001), the resource-based view is predicated on the assumption that resources are static and distributed in a heterogeneous manner across the firms. Other stakeholders, such as buyers and suppliers, the level of competition, and the structure of the industry and market are examples of external variables. Nteere (2021) maintained that these are the strategic factors that have an effect on the company called external variables. Not only do these factors influence the conception of resources, but they also influence

how those resources are utilised. Firms that meet the criteria of VRIN (valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources) are considered to have the capability of achieving high performance, as stated by the resource-based view. Resources are inputs into the production process of an organisation, as stated by Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2023). These resources can be either tangible or intangible, and they can be either knowledge-based or property-based. Resources that are based on property are examples of tangible resources, whereas resources that are based on knowledge are examples of intangible properties. In order for an organisation to function properly, both should be present. Due to the fact that resources that possess value, rareness, inimitableness, and non-substitutability can generate competitive advantages and have a significant impact on the performance of an organisation, resource acquisition is a crucial aspect of the resource-based view. By maximising profits as a result of better utilisation of resources, social ventures will be able to accomplish their social mission, ensure that stakeholders value them, and be sustainable. This will be made possible by the resource-based view, which will enable social ventures to understand how the strategies that they invent and put into action will improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Opportunity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory

The Schumpeterian or Austrian school of thought asserts that entrepreneurs do not bring about change; rather, they capitalise on the opportunities that are brought about by change (in terms of technology, consumer preferences, and social norms), as Peter Drucker explained. A person who actively seeks out change, reacts to it, and then uses it as an opportunity is what he considers to be an entrepreneur. According to Drucker, the establishment of a business is neither essential nor sufficient for the practice of entrepreneurship (entrepreneurship does not require the existence of a business). Not every new organisation would be considered entrepreneurial or one that exemplifies the concept of entrepreneurship. Drucker believes that in order for a company to be considered entrepreneurial, it must either be innovative or change orientated. Additionally, Drucker makes it abundantly clear that entrepreneurship does not necessitate a profit motive. According to what he writes in his book on innovation and entrepreneurship, there is no better evaluation of the history of entrepreneurship than the establishment of the modern university, and more specifically the modern university in the United States of America. Following that, he goes on to explain how significant of an innovation this was at the time. Drucker (1985) also includes a chapter that discusses the role of entrepreneurship in public service institutions. After conducting research to determine what differentiates entrepreneurial management from administration management, Howard Stevenson added an element of resourcefulness to the opportunity-oriented definition. This was based on the findings of his survey. "the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled" is what he proposes serving as the core definition of

entrepreneurial management. Entrepreneurs, he discovered, not only recognise and pursue opportunities that administration managers fail to recognise and pursue, but they also do not allow their own initial resource endowment to limit the options available to them. For the purpose of accomplishing their entrepreneurial goals, entrepreneurs make use of the resources that are available to them. (Nteere, 2021) Administrators restrict their visions and actions by relying on the resources they already possess and the job description they fulfil. An entrepreneurial firm must not aim to make a profit, be innovative, or be change orientated, as stated by the Opportunity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory. At its core, a social enterprise firm is defined by this defining characteristic. They are also able to mobilise resources from other people in order to accomplish their social mission, which means that social entrepreneurs do not have to be constrained by the resources that they currently possess.

Schumpeterian Theory of Innovation

A central tenet of Schumpeterian theory is the importance of innovative businesspeople who disrupt and disorganise the conventional business model. A person who establishes a company, implements "new combinations of means of production," and is an innovator was what Schumpeter considered to be an entrepreneur. It is the responsibility of the entrepreneur, according to his theory of economic development, to disrupt the status quo, also known as the general equilibrium, through the implementation of innovative ideas. Entrepreneurship, which he referred to as the "creative destruction of capital," was the source of all the changes that he asserted could be attributed to the fact that they altered the normal circular flow of industry. The term "creative destruction" refers to a process of industrial mutation that revolutionises the economic structure from within. This process involves the destruction of the previous structure and the creation of a new one. According to Schumpeter (1934), innovation by entrepreneurs results in a flood of creative destruction because it causes obsolete inventories, ideas, technologies, skills, and equipment. Schumpeter argued that this phenomenon is a direct consequence of the entrepreneurial spirit. Schumpeter proposed that initiatives taken by entrepreneurs to provide new goods and services, establish new markets, develop new production methods, establish new sources of supply, and establish a new organisation were the best places to look for creativity and innovation. Schumpeter believed that the driving force behind change was one's own entrepreneurial spirit. The creation of new activities and markets is the result of innovation. In his proposal, he suggested that profits are the result of innovation within the company. A social entrepreneur should be innovative, create new combinations of means of production, and cause social change by causing disequilibrium in the market. This is the most important aspect of Schumpeterian theory of innovation on social entrepreneurship. A social entrepreneur should also create a social enterprise.

Theory of Human Capital

Schultz (1961) proposed that human capital was comprised of the "knowledge, skills, and abilities of the people employed in an organisation." This is where the term "human capital" can be traced back to its origins, which date back to the early 1960s. The initial definition of human capital that Shultz provided is succinct; however, it is somewhat restricted in that it does not take into account the idea of "value" or the significance of "investment" in human capital. "...all human abilities to be either innate or acquired," was the definition that Schultz provided for human capital in 1981, when he revised this definition. According to Schultz (1961), "human capital" refers to "attributes that are valuable and can be elevated through appropriate investment." Human capital was defined by Becker in Nteere (2021) as the "knowledge, information, ideas, skills, and health of individuals." This occurred more than a decade after the initial definition. Similar to Schultz's initial classification. The definition is appealing because it incorporates an additional facet with regard to the "health of individuals." In point of fact, contemporary research about the contextual development of human capital within organisations places a significant emphasis on the health and well-being of individuals as a significant factor. Human capital is defined by Nteere (2021) as "the human factor in the organisation; the combined intelligence, skills, and expertise that gives the organisation its distinctive character to what it is." If they are properly motivated, the human elements of the organisation are those that are capable of learning, changing, innovating, and providing the creative thrust that can ensure the organization's continued existence over the long term. Nteere (2021) emphasise the significance of creativity, innovation, and change, calling attention to the role that these factors play in human capital. In addition to this, the definition places an emphasis on the role that motivation plays in the utilisation of these capacities. An acknowledgement of the significance of "distinctive character" is included in the definition. Last but not least, it makes a reference to the outcome of business sustainability, specifically the "long-term survival of the organisation." 2011 publication by Kwabena. Those individuals who work in social enterprises are expected to have the ability to learn new things, to be innovative, and to provide the creative thrust that, if properly motivated, can ensure the long-term survival of the social enterprise. This is the most important aspect of the Human Capital theory's application to social entrepreneurship. In addition, the theory examines the ways in which the acquisition of skills and knowledge over the course of time in social enterprises contributes to the overall sustainability of the enterprise organisation.

Social Network Theory or Social Capital Theory

The term "Social Capital" was first introduced in Hanifan's (1916) research on rural schools and community centres. Its origins can be traced back to the fields of sociology and political science. The term "social capital" was coined by Burt (1992),

who defined it as "friends, colleagues, and more general contacts through whom you receive opportunities to use your financial and human capital." The term "social capital" was first introduced by Nahapiet and Ghoshal in 1998. They defined it as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit." The similarities between social capital and social network theory were brought to light by Granovetter (1982), who used the term social network theory rather than social capital. It has been found that entrepreneurs are embedded within a larger social network structure, which accounts for a significant portion of their opportunity structure. Nteere (2021) state that "an individual may have the ability to recognise that a particular entrepreneurial opportunity exists, but may lack the social connections to transform the opportunity into a business startup." Having access to a more extensive social network is something that is being considered as a potential solution to this issue. Similarly, Reynolds (1991) mentioned social networks in his four stages of the sociological theory. This is in line with the previous statement. According to the research that has been conducted on this theory, stronger social ties to resource providers make it easier to acquire resources and increase the likelihood of taking advantage of opportunities (Nteere, 2021). The expertise that these individuals possess represents a form of cultural capital that nascent ventures can draw upon in order to identify opportunities (Nteere, 2021). A number of other researchers have suggested that it is essential for nascent founders to have access to entrepreneurs within their social network. It is necessary for social entrepreneurs to make use of social networks in order to advocate for financial support and to guarantee that their ideas are being supported by a variety of stakeholders.

The Role of Social Entrepreneurship in Youth Empowerment

- **Job Creation:** Social enterprises in Nigeria have the potential to create jobs for young people by addressing social issues while generating income. For instance, initiatives focused on agriculture, waste management, and renewable energy can provide employment opportunities for youth, thereby reducing unemployment rates.
- **Skills Development:** Social entrepreneurship initiatives frequently focus on skills training, equipping youth with practical skills that enhance their employability. Programs like the "Youth Skills Acquisition Programme" have been instrumental in providing vocational training in Nigeria. By offering training in areas such as digital skills, agriculture, and handicrafts, social enterprises can help young people develop the competencies needed to succeed in the job market.
- **Community Engagement:** Social entrepreneurs encourage youth to engage in community service, fostering a sense of responsibility and leadership. This

engagement helps to build social capital and strengthens community ties. For example, social enterprises that involve youth in community development projects can enhance their sense of belonging and commitment to their communities.

Challenges Facing Social Entrepreneurship

- **Access to Funding:** One of the significant barriers to social entrepreneurship in Anambra State is the lack of access to funding. Many social entrepreneurs struggle to secure financial support for their initiatives, limiting their ability to scale (Igbokwe, 2023). Traditional financial institutions often view social enterprises as high-risk ventures, making it difficult for young entrepreneurs to obtain loans and grants.
- **Policy Environment:** The regulatory framework for social enterprises in Nigeria is still evolving. The absence of supportive policies can hinder the growth of social entrepreneurship (NBS, 2023). Without a clear legal framework, social entrepreneurs may face challenges in registering their businesses, accessing government support, and navigating taxation.
- **Awareness and Education:** There is a lack of awareness about social entrepreneurship among the youth. Many young people are not familiar with the concept or the potential benefits it offers. Educational institutions often do not incorporate social entrepreneurship into their curricula, limiting exposure to this vital area.
- **Cultural and societal attitudes:** Some young people and community members were initially skeptical or resistant to the social enterprises' approaches, highlighting the need for greater awareness and acceptance of social entrepreneurship as a viable development model.
- **Monitoring and evaluation limitations:** The social enterprises faced challenges in effectively measuring and demonstrating the long-term impact of their youth empowerment initiatives, hindering their ability to attract additional support and investment.

Strategies for Enhancing Youth Participation in Social Entrepreneurship

- **Capacity Building:** Implementing capacity-building programs that focus on entrepreneurship skills, business management, and social innovation can empower youth to engage in social entrepreneurship. Workshops, mentorship programs, and training sessions can equip young people with the necessary tools to start and manage social enterprises.

- **Access to Finance:** Establishing micro-financing schemes and grants specifically for social enterprises can provide the necessary capital for young entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses. Collaborations between government, NGOs, and financial institutions can create funding opportunities tailored to the needs of social entrepreneurs.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for policies that support social entrepreneurship, such as tax incentives and regulatory frameworks, can create a conducive environment for youth-led initiatives. Engaging with policymakers and stakeholders to promote the importance of social entrepreneurship can lead to more supportive legislation.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Conducting awareness campaigns to educate young people about social entrepreneurship and its benefits can stimulate interest and participation in this sector. Utilizing social media, community events, and educational institutions to disseminate information can increase awareness and inspire youth to explore social entrepreneurship.

Methodology

This conceptual paper uses a qualitative research methodology to examine how social entrepreneurship empowers young people in Nigeria. It does this by thoroughly reviewing the body of literature from some Scopus and other high-factor journals. The literature review includes scholarly journal articles, trade publications, and government reports that are pertinent to youth empowerment and social entrepreneurship. The review's main objectives are to pinpoint the main forces behind social entrepreneurship initiatives, some existing social entrepreneurship in Nigeria and beyond. Some associated social entrepreneurship theories, among others.

Findings and Discussion

The project 'Youth Empowerment through Social Entrepreneurship' seeks to cultivate the skills of youth in recognising the value of community, environmental stewardship, and their involvement in social and political processes, while also fostering sustainable enterprises within the realm of social entrepreneurship (SE). This concept aims to motivate youth to expand their networks and participate in entrepreneurial endeavours addressing specific societal issues, such as aiding the homeless, ill, or elderly, fostering environmental preservation, and supporting vulnerable populations.

The intersection of social entrepreneurship and youth empowerment is characterized by the potential for social enterprises to create job opportunities, provide skills training, and promote community engagement among young people.

This relationship is essential for addressing the challenges of youth unemployment and fostering sustainable development in Nigeria. Social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a powerful approach for addressing complex social and economic challenges, including youth unemployment and underdevelopment (Tiwari et al., 2017). In the context of youth development, social entrepreneurs are creating initiatives that provide young people with skills training, entrepreneurship support, access to financing, and pathways to employment and economic empowerment (Mehtap et al., 2016; Pathak & Muralidharan, 2016). Studies have shown that social entrepreneurship can have a positive impact on youth outcomes, including increased self-confidence, leadership skills, and income generation (Tiwari, Bhat, & Tikoria, 2017).

The key characteristics of social entrepreneurship for youth empowerment as highlighted by Mehtap, Pellegrini, Caputo and Welsh (2016); Pathak and Muralidharan (2016) include:

- i. *Social mission*: A strong commitment to addressing the social, economic, and developmental needs of young people.
- ii. *Innovation*: The use of innovative business models, products, and services to tackle youth challenges.
- iii. *Earned-income strategies*: The use of revenue-generating activities to sustain and scale the social venture.
- iv. *Stakeholder collaboration*: Partnerships with government, civil society, and the private sector to leverage resources and expertise
- v. *Youth participation*: Involving young people in the design, implementation, and leadership of the social venture.

Some Social Entrepreneurship Programmes in Nigeria

Organisations engaged in social entrepreneurship in Nigeria aim to provide creative, long-lasting solutions to the environmental and social problems that Nigerian communities face. These organisations strive to make a profit and have a positive social impact. Examples of social entrepreneurship organisations in Nigeria include Wecyclers, a waste management company that encourages recycling in low-income areas; Gidi Mobile, a mobile learning platform that gives underprivileged communities access to education; and Andela, a tech talent accelerator that hires and trains young developers from across the continent. In addition to enhancing Nigerians' quality of life and fostering the growth of sustainable communities, these organisations are opening up new avenues for economic expansion. Some key examples are presented in the Table 1 below:

S/ N	Name of Organisation	Founded	Objective	Empowerment
1	Mobility Aid and Appliances Research and Development Centre (MAARDEC).	1991	Empowering individuals with disabilities by offering cutting-edge, reasonably priced appliances and mobility aids.	Empowered over 10,000 people with disabilities in Africa.
2	Tony Elumelu Foundation	2010	It supports entrepreneurship in Africa	Empowered over 20,000 African entrepreneurs
3	ImpactHer	2017	Assisting female African entrepreneurs in achieving their goal of acquiring globally renowned legacy businesses.	Successfully trained over 130,999 female entrepreneurs across 54 African countries
4	DIYlaw	2015	It is a technology platform that provides access to legal services and resources in Africa	It has empowered many Africans legally
5	Paradigm Initiative Nigeria	2007	It connects Nigerian youth with ICT-enabled opportunities.	Trained many Africans in ICTs
6	Amakom Youth Development Initiative (AYDI)	2017	It provides vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and job placement services for unemployed youth	Empowered over 2,000 young people and helped establish 500 small businesses
7	Onitsha Innovation Hub	2019	It is a technology-focused social enterprise that offers coding bootcamps, digital skills training,	Trained over 800 youth and supported the launch of 50 tech-enabled ventures

			and startup incubation for young entrepreneurs	
8	Anambra Youth Agricultural Initiative (AYAI)	2020	It trains young people in sustainable agriculture, provides access to farmland and inputs, and links them to agricultural value chains.	Empowered over 1,000 young farmers across Anambra State
9	She Leads Africa	2014	The program provides women with the support system, knowledge, and motivation they need to pursue their dreams.	Empowered over 700,000 African women
10	Global Network For Environment And Economic Development Research	2001	Turning slaughterhouse waste into a source of renewable energy through the use of biogas plants.	Many Nigerians have benefited from the programme

Source: Authors Concept

These and other social enterprises in Nigeria are demonstrating the potential of this approach to address youth unemployment, build entrepreneurial skills, and create economic opportunities for young people in the state.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated the significant potential of social entrepreneurship to address youth development challenges and empower young people in Nigeria. The social enterprises examined have employed innovative, holistic, and financially sustainable approaches to provide youth with skills, opportunities, and pathways to economic and social advancement. Social entrepreneurship presents a viable solution to the challenges faced by youth in Nigeria. By creating jobs, providing skills training, and fostering community engagement, social enterprises can empower young people and contribute to socio-economic development. However, addressing the barriers to social entrepreneurship, such as funding and

policy support, is crucial for maximizing its potential. By implementing targeted strategies, including capacity building, access to finance, and advocacy, stakeholders can enhance youth participation in social entrepreneurship, ultimately leading to a more prosperous and empowered youth population in Nigeria. Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Establish a social entrepreneurship fund and incubator program: The Nigerian government, in partnership with the private sector and development partners, should create a dedicated fund and incubator to provide financial and technical support to social enterprises working on youth empowerment.
- ii. Improve the regulatory environment: The state government should review and streamline the registration, licensing, and operational processes for social enterprises to create a more enabling environment for their work.
- iii. Promote awareness and acceptance of social entrepreneurship: Targeted public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community engagement initiatives should be implemented to build understanding and support for social entrepreneurship as a viable development model.
- iv. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation capacities: Social enterprises should be supported to develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to better measure and demonstrate the impact of their youth empowerment initiatives, attracting further investment and recognition.
- v. Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration: Stronger collaboration and coordination among social enterprises, government agencies, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector is needed to leverage resources, expertise, and networks for youth development.

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