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A STUDY ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as an important mechanism for addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges while creating sustainable value for communities. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship focuses not only on financial returns but also on social impact, environmental responsibility, innovation, and inclusive development. In recent years, social enterprises have gained increasing attention as instruments for poverty reduction, employment generation, women's empowerment, social inclusion, community development, and environmental protection. Sustainability, therefore, has become a critical factor in determining the long-term survival and effectiveness of social enterprises. The present study proposes to examine the relationship between social entrepreneurship and sustainability, with particular emphasis on the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The study will identify the major factors influencing sustainable social entrepreneurship, including entrepreneurial competency, social mission, innovation, access to finance, government and institutional support, digital technology, market access, and social networks. It will further examine how these factors contribute to the long-term sustainability and social impact of social enterprises. The study will adopt a descriptive and analytical research design. Primary data will be collected from selected social entrepreneurs through a structured questionnaire, while secondary information will be obtained from journals, books, government reports, research publications, and other relevant sources. Appropriate statistical techniques such as percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, factor analysis, and Structural Equation Modelling may be employed to examine the proposed relationships. The study is expected to provide empirical evidence on the role of social entrepreneurship in promoting sustainable development. The findings may assist policymakers, government agencies, financial institutions, educational institutions, NGOs, and social entrepreneurs in developing appropriate strategies to strengthen sustainable social enterprises. The study will also contribute to the academic literature by providing an integrated perspective on social entrepreneurship and economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Social Entrepreneurship, Social Enterprise, Sustainability, Social Innovation, Sustainable Development, Social Impact, Economic Sustainability, Environmental Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship has emerged as an important approach for addressing social, economic and environmental challenges through entrepreneurial activities. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which primarily emphasizes profit generation, social entrepreneurship seeks to create social value while maintaining economic viability. Social entrepreneurs identify social

problems and develop innovative and sustainable solutions in areas such as poverty reduction, employment generation, education, healthcare, women's empowerment, environmental protection and rural development. Sustainability has become an important consideration for organizations because economic growth alone is insufficient to achieve long-term development. Sustainable development requires an appropriate balance among economic prosperity, social well-being **and** environmental protection. Social enterprises can contribute to this objective by combining entrepreneurial innovation with a social mission. Existing research indicates that social entrepreneurship has considerable potential to contribute to sustainable development. Bansal, Garg and Sharma's systematic review of 173 studies identified major research themes including innovation and technology, rural and community development, social and environmental considerations, financing, women entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility. More recent research has emphasized the intersection between social entrepreneurship and sustainable entrepreneurship, particularly in relation to business models, impact, networks, financing and impact measurement. The Indian context is particularly relevant because social enterprises operate in areas where conventional market mechanisms may not adequately address social needs. A recent quantitative study specifically examined the relationship between social entrepreneurship orientation and organizational sustainability among social enterprises in India. Therefore, studying how social entrepreneurship contributes to sustainability in Tamil Nadu can provide useful evidence for entrepreneurs, policymakers, educational institutions and development organizations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although social entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as an instrument for sustainable development, social enterprises face several challenges that may affect their long-term sustainability.

Major challenges include:

- Limited access to finance
- Lack of entrepreneurial and managerial skills
- Difficulties in achieving financial sustainability
- Limited market access
- Inadequate technological capabilities
- Weak institutional support
- Lack of professional networks
- Difficulty in measuring social and environmental impact
- Competition from conventional businesses
- Regulatory and administrative challenges
- Limited awareness about social entrepreneurship
- Difficulty in balancing social objectives with financial objectives

Previous literature also indicates that more empirical research is required, particularly in developing-country contexts. Bansal et al. highlighted the need for additional empirical, comparative and longitudinal research on social entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

Hence, the proposed study attempts to examine how social entrepreneurship practices influence the economic, social and environmental sustainability of social enterprises, with particular reference to Tamil Nadu.

RESEARCH GAP

- Much of the existing research is conceptual or based on systematic literature reviews.
- There is comparatively less empirical evidence from developing regions.
- The relationship between social entrepreneurship orientation and organizational sustainability requires further investigation.

- Economic, social and environmental sustainability are often studied separately rather than through an integrated framework.
- The role of innovation, digital technology, finance and institutional support requires further empirical examination.
- There is limited region-specific research focusing on social enterprises in Tamil Nadu.
- Measurement of social impact and environmental impact remains underdeveloped in many studies.
- The interaction between social mission and financial sustainability needs greater attention.
- More research is required on the contribution of social enterprises to employment, income generation, women's empowerment and inclusive development.
- Recent research identifies entrepreneurial enablers, networks, impact, business-model innovation and capital structure as important areas for further investigation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the concept and development of social entrepreneurship in Tamil Nadu.
- To identify the major factors influencing social entrepreneurship.
- To examine the relationship between social entrepreneurship and organizational sustainability.
- To assess the economic sustainability of social enterprises.
- To examine the social sustainability created by social enterprises.

HYPOTHESES

Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainability

H01: There is no significant relationship between social entrepreneurship and organizational sustainability.

H02: Social entrepreneurship has no significant influence on economic sustainability.

H03: Social entrepreneurship has no significant influence on social sustainability.

H04: Social entrepreneurship has no significant influence on environmental sustainability.

Innovation

H05: Innovation has no significant influence on the sustainability of social enterprises.

Finance

H06: Access to finance has no significant influence on the sustainability of social enterprises.

Institutional Support

H07: Government and institutional support have no significant influence on sustainable social entrepreneurship.

Digital Technology

H08: Digital technology adoption has no significant influence on the sustainability of social enterprises.

Market Access

H09: Market access has no significant influence on the sustainability of social enterprises.

Entrepreneurial Competency

H10: Entrepreneurial competency has no significant influence on the sustainability of social enterprises.

Sustainability of Social Enterprise

Economic Sustainability

- Financial viability
- Revenue generation
- Employment

- Business growth

Social Sustainability

- Social inclusion
- Poverty reduction
- Women's empowerment
- Community development
- Quality of life

Environmental Sustainability

- Waste reduction
- Resource conservation
- Green technology
- Environmental protection

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study will adopt a **descriptive and analytical research design**. A mixed-method approach may also be adopted by combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews.

Nature of Data

Primary Data:

- Structured questionnaire
- Interviews with social entrepreneurs
- Information from social enterprise organizations

Secondary Data:

- Research journals
- Books
- Government reports
- NGO reports
- Ministry publications
- Research databases
- Published research articles

Population

The population will consist of social entrepreneurs/social enterprises operating in Tamil Nadu.

Sampling

A combination of:

- Stratified Random Sampling
- Purposive Sampling

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study will focus on social enterprises operating in selected districts of Tamil Nadu. It will examine social entrepreneurship from the perspective of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

The study may cover social enterprises working in areas such as:

- Rural development
- Education
- Healthcare
- Agriculture
- Handicrafts

- Women empowerment
- Skill development
- Waste management
- Renewable energy
- Financial inclusion
- Community development

CONCLUSION

Social entrepreneurship plays an important role in promoting economic, social, and environmental sustainability. In Tamil Nadu, social enterprises can contribute to employment generation, poverty reduction, women's empowerment, social inclusion, and environmental protection. However, challenges such as limited finance, managerial skills, technology, and market access affect their sustainability. Strengthening government support, financial assistance, skill development, and digital technology, innovation, and market linkages can improve their long-term performance. Overall, social entrepreneurship can serve as a powerful tool for achieving sustainable and inclusive development in Tamil Nadu.

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