



8th International DEFSA Conference 2019

Hosted by Cape Peninsula University of Technology and IIE Vega School.

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Designing Social Value: Informed Programme Development for Future-Focused Social Entrepreneurship in Africa

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Abstract

The emergence of young African social entrepreneurs who design social change could translate to significant social value design that, in turn, could improve the future of several communities. Nevertheless, the designed value will only benefit the continent if it is substantial and sustainable. The problem is that many social entrepreneurial endeavours are implemented without a long-term future focus or an understanding of how social value is conceptualised. For this reason, tertiary institutions in Africa should consider presenting training or education related to sustainable social value design.

Social value design, taught in institutions in South Africa, is often linked to programmes in social entrepreneurship, but it could benefit other programmes as well. However, the educators who develop these programmes take on the role of a social sustainability designer when they respond creatively with relevant programme designs that address prevailing social, economic, educational, health and environmental problems. In addition, these educators have to be future-focused and have insight into what the end result (in this instance, the programme or module) should include. Those who enrol for these programmes or modules similarly have to design their projects to add intended social value, and they need a full understanding of what social value specifically entails. The relevant outcomes of these programmes should ideally be informed by practitioners who are currently engaged in the field and who are future-focused.

This paper reports on research done to inform programme design at a university in South Africa with a particular focus on social value design. The research design was a multiple case study, and future-focused social entrepreneurs in practice were interviewed. A purposive sample of nine cases was selected from various countries on the African continent with one of the criteria being that the endeavours were sustainable for more than two years and reflected a particular interest in the future of those for whom they created social value. The objectives for this research focused on 1) how participants define social value within their context, and 2) why they see this as sustainable for the future.

The paper makes recommendations relevant to programme design for future-fit social entrepreneurs. It has a particular focus on how to incorporate the various dimensions of social value for Africa into designing a training programme or modules that incorporate social value.

Keywords: Design for social sustainability, education, programme design, social entrepreneurship, social value

Introduction

It is known that the African continent is plagued with countless social ills having a negative effect on the countries' socioeconomic status. These include challenges such as poverty, poor education, ill health, food insecurity, youth bulge and greater dependence on government (United Nations World Youth Report, 2019; Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Report of Africa 2015; Karanda & Toledano 2012, pp. 205-206). Social value creation is an active means of social entrepreneurs designing value to address such issues in a sustainable way (Mulgan 2010, p. 41). Value design is a concept that has been interrelated with social entrepreneurship and is one of the measures used to determine social entrepreneurs' level of success (Mulgan 2010, p. 38; Kroeger & Weber 2014, p. 43). Similarly, social value is also relevant to the design disciplines. In this regard, future-focused young social entrepreneurs, also known as designers of social change, have started rising up as change-agents to solve some of these social challenges by establishing social enterprises as vehicles using various business models to drive social change (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey 2010, p. 682; Pirson 2015, p. 261; Claeys 2017, p. 429).

The social entrepreneur may be viewed as the driver or a 'social value designer' willing to solve complex social problems to meet pressing environmental or societal needs (Di Domenico et al. 2010, p. 262; Pirson 2015, p. 263). Societal needs are often addressed in sustainable social enterprises through value design (Korsgaard & Anderson 2011, p. 22). A social enterprise can be defined as "an enterprise that has a social purpose, run on business principles, democratically controlled and that reinvests 'profits' or surpluses into the businesses' social purposes" (ILO 2011, p. 2). However, a social enterprise has a dual mission that includes both social and economic objectives (Di Zhang & Swanson 2013, p. 106; Bhattarai, Kwong & Tasavori 2019, p. 47). Social value is prioritised above economic value by most social entrepreneurs, even though they actively seek commercial incomes (Dees 1998 cited by Hlady-Rispal & Servantie 2018, p. 62). The balancing act of managing the two-fold mission of adding social value while also being financially sustainable has proven to be challenging for socially-oriented entrepreneurs (Lumpkin, Moss, Gras, Kato & Amezcua 2013; GIBS 2018, p. 17, 23). This has resulted in an unusually high mortality rate among many social enterprises. Whether the social value design is completely lost is a question that can only be answered if one is able to define the dimensions of social value design.

Social value design, taught in institutions in South Africa, is interdisciplinary but traditionally situated within the management sciences (UJ Centre for Entrepreneurship 2019; UCT Bertha Foundation 2019). The outcome of entrepreneurship education research (including education for social entrepreneurship) demonstrated that there is still a need for more creative curriculum design, including interdisciplinary factors (Aldianto, Anggadwita & Umbara 2018, p. 297). There is thus an opportunity for educators to play an active role in social value design and take on the approach of being future-focused, provided that they understand the concept and the various dimensions it may hold.

The challenge is to gain a clearer understanding of social value before it can be included in modules for several programmes. Enabling educators to design programmes that promote social value design, while at the same time allowing participants in such programmes to design their own social value is an additional strategy for social sustainability. In this paper, the

researcher, therefore, aims to conceptualise the construct 'social value design' by referring to the experience and expertise of future-focused social entrepreneurs and practitioners. The purpose is to inform programmes or modules that build capacity for the benefit of social value designers.

The literature review on social value creation will be defined, describing how social value manifests in the African context, and how academic programmes in the design arena can be creatively used to support social value design.

Literature review

Social value normally has a positive connotation, generally described as "something of value for society" (Dietz & Porter 2012, p. 23). Sustainable value design is part of strategies designed to create value for the future, promoting an interdependence of social, economic and environmental systems (Stankeviciene & Nikonorova 2013, p. 1198). In this regard, understanding social value may allow better programme design for social sustainability, which acts as a critical design element for an educational programme for social entrepreneurship and interdisciplinary courses such as design programmes.

Social value design – principles from the social entrepreneurial realm

Social entrepreneurs are leaders aiming to find solutions to societal problems using alternative business models to help alleviate inequity and environmental challenges, therefore creating sustainable social value (Pirson 2015, p. 261; Sinkovics, Sinkovics, Hoque & Czaban 2015, p. 3, 43). The creation of social value in the case of a social enterprise is achieved by meeting organisations' social mission in a deliberate and structured manner (Katre & Salipante 2012, p. 987). As a result, social value creation meets the social needs of both the stakeholders and beneficiaries through the social mission at various levels of the enterprise, including contributing toward economic inclusion and growth (Corner & Ho 2010, p. 635; Cornforth 2014, pp. 10-11; Ngonini 2014, p. 406).

Social value is also used to assess the social impact made by social enterprises over time within a certain context or community (Lautermann 2013, p. 198). However, there is not much consensus among academics in terms of how social value should be measured, the general use of the term, or at which point social value has met the social need (Lautermann 2013, p. 187). Moreover, the understanding of social value is not easily generalised, actualised and quantified, making the evaluation of social value complex (Kokko, 2018, p. 424).

Academic programme designs that incorporate social value

The empirical evidence indicates that social value design goals are more easily achieved when entrepreneurs with more education and a stronger social network are aware and strategic in realising social goals through their businesses or projects (Brieger & De Clercq 2019, p. 195). The role played by higher education, therefore, is important in fostering [socio and] economic growth and creating awareness among students that enable the design of sustainable social values (Aldianto et al. 2018, p. 303).

The main aim of an academic would be to design future-focused programmes creatively that enable students [potential social value designers] to engage in a long-term problem-solving approach, focused on sustainability (Moore, Mascarenhas, Bain & Straus 2017, p. 2–3). As an example, the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was given prominence at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2005). Universities have realised the importance of influence on future leaders, designers, change-makers and academics and the positive impact

they can have on the sustainability and future of society (Harpe & Thomas 2009, p. 71). The academic programme, learning outcomes and competencies created through future-focused programme designs can be used to assess student learning and observe evidence of the knowledge and skills profile of students portrayed as being solution-focused and 'problem solvers' (McArthur & Sachs 2009, p. A64). At a university in Scotland, for example, students were included as co-creators as part of the pedagogical process, and they collaborated in the programme design (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten, 2011, p. 1). For the purpose of this research, the social value designers and practitioners in the social enterprise environment could be viewed as partners and co-creators of programmes or modules that promote social value.

The dimensions of social value

Social value design is evolving. Therefore, the dimensions are fluid based on the context in which it is being addressed. However, from an academic programme design perspective, in revisiting the teaching and learning outcomes and defining key competencies, several assessment methods are important and often start with good conceptualisation of constructs (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner & Van der Vleuten 2007, p. 10; Hidalgo & Fuentes 2013, p. 450). The identification of these key dimensions of social value could inform outcomes and in this way, influence well trained *socially responsible* graduates.

Research problem

The challenge is that social value design within the African context has not been captured formally. This implies that an understanding of this concept in the African context is needed. This will create opportunities for educators to design programmes that promote social value design and simultaneously allow participants in such programmes to design their own social value as a strategy for social sustainability. Only after the concept 'social value design' is understood can one start to set outcomes for education and training purposes.

Methodology

'Social value' is an emerging concept. Hence, an exploratory approach was used (Myers 2010, p. 258; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012, p. 146) to understand how social value is perceived in the social entrepreneurship context. Nine social businesses were included from across the African continent as case studies, and thus the multi-case study research method was employed (Yin 2009; Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005, p. 171). The countries included in the study were South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. The selection criteria included:

- Participants had to be involved in endeavours that were sustainable for more than two years in Africa;
- Participants had to communicate a particular interest in the future of those for whom they designed social value; and
- Participants had to have a formally registered organisation as a vehicle through which to provide the solution.

The objectives relevant to this paper include 1) how participants define social value within their context (to deduce the dimensions of social value add), and 2) why they see this as being sustainable for the future (to ensure that all the definitions with dimensions are sustainable).

The researcher approached the executive director of an organisation known as Shared Value Africa Initiative (SVAI). Shared Value Africa Initiative manages a business network across the

African continent which attracts innovative social entrepreneurs both nationally and internationally who are interested in partnering with the private sector. The purposive sampling method was considered appropriate (Saunders et al. 2012, p. 160), and allowed direct access to specific social entrepreneurs to be selected from an available database. The selection of cases was limited to social enterprises applying innovative methods to meet social or environmental needs in a sustainable manner as these could be paralleled to strategic thinking, which is also considered a design act.

Since the participants were geographically far apart and expressed time constraints, the best means of gathering the data was using email as an online electronic tool. An email interview sheet, including a consent letter, was created. This was emailed to each of the social entrepreneurs to update and provide feedback. Once the data were returned, the researcher checked for completeness and followed up for clarity where necessary. Using email as a research tool created efficiency in tracking and keeping a log of all communication. In addition, basic desktop research was conducted on each case study to find available empirical secondary data to validate the primary data.

Findings

A detailed analysis was conducted on the nine cases. First, to analyse how social entrepreneurs defined social value, and second, to determine how social value was strategically created by each social enterprise.

In the first objective, an analysis was conducted on the description each social entrepreneur provided to define social value. It was found that the definitions provided by most of the social value designers were aligned to the social value created through the social enterprise, as well as taking the local context into consideration. Therefore, the solution designed to address the social challenge resulted in the social value being created. Each intervention directly aligned with the context of the local socio-economic and environmental challenges as uniquely presented in each case study.

The keywords and phrases that emerged, as reflected in bold in Table 1, is significant in that it describes the ‘practice lead’ definition of social value implemented by each individual social value designer.

Table 1. Social value in African social enterprises (self-compiled)

Organisation	Dimension of social value	Value added	Social value creation as defined by social entrepreneur	Social value design future-focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Code4 Change – South Africa (National) – (nine years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitate a culture of sharing (resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Education: FREE, scalable, affordable coding education – student-run clubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ‘Social value is over-rated and observed as an anomaly. Social value should fundamentally be created by all registered entities. For example, we’ve found tech giants, who promote the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ‘Student-run clubs, Competitive club model, leveraging third party resources, government collaborations, direct social and long-term educational policy impact.’

			image of being social, impactful and responsive, to being manipulative, greedy and monopolising. Liberate the market and restore justice and competition to the sector.’	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – BIC Farming – Nigeria (National) – (12 years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Design innovative infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agriculture: vegetable production, aquaculture, livestock, and hydroponics technology – soilless farming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Social value creation to me ...is the power to create a major paradigm shift So, social value is created when the impact of such pioneering, inventing, or innovation work has created or influenced the status quo in a particular culture. The value creator must have a strong vision and determination to see it through, else the process will not be completed.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “The fact that we don’t use soil for our vegetables like tomatoes while producing commercial quantity (soilless farming).”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mina Cup – South Africa (National & Spain) – (three years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Products designed to empower users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Female reproductive health and hygiene – menstrual cups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Creating social value for me means finding a way to change the lives of those in vulnerable situations. Uplifting others and helping them raise their standard of living and way of life in a sustainable way. Thus creating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Mina is sustainable, Proudly South African, a friend of the Environment, and a Role Model. Her circumstances do not define who she is – [reduces the number of days girls stay out of school]. Mina is Girl’s best

			social value.”	friend, an African Leader and Global Ambassador.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – B2B Hub – Kenya (National) – (nine months but piloted for more than two years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitate access (to resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wholesale, retail industry and financial sector through technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Stolink is a Mobile application that connects last-mile distributors to small scale retailers. We also aim at providing affordable credit facility to our mobile application users ...We plan to connect millions of Businesses by offering a direct link from one business to another with very much ease.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Social Project – South Africa (National & Zambia) – (three years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Educational tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Education: school in a box and Imbeko 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Social value, to me, refers to the value created for individuals and communities that improves their quality of life and access to opportunity, whether or not this is financially evident.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Speaking specifically about School in a Box, the product is unique in its design and usage scenarios, providing academic content and lessons using technology that is all contained in a simple trunk, with tablets and a server, and not relying on the internet at all.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Oxygen Africa – Zimbabwe (National) – (three years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitate a culture of sharing (resources and opportunities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Renewable energy – rooftop solar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Creating wealth and new entrepreneurs in the communities businesses operate in.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Commercial rooftop solar. Unique[ness] about our model is the financing whereby the off

				taker (client) makes money from the electricity.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Placet Enterprises – Tanzania (National) – (five years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitate access (to infrastructure and opportunities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Agriculture: farming sunflower, piggery project and general trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Briefly, this is creation of mutual relationship with the society in which the business operates for competitiveness and health of the society in general [using their land]. This helps to reduce social challenges which the business might encounter in the course of trading.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “This [farming] is necessary because it will allow the social entrepreneur continue exist and add value to society surrounding.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Water Access Rwanda – Rwanda (National & DRC) – (four years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitate access (to infrastructure and opportunities and resources) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Water collection, treatment and supply – clean water as a product and service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Creating social value deals with using resources of a certain community in such a way that gives back to that same community, allowing for growth in more aspects than what one project was dealing with ... re-invest their profits into the community to provide better living conditions for the residents and in return get more motivated and experienced workers ...” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Our company, through our public water points and mini-grids extracts water, purifies it and collects money from the users. Running these water points, means more employment for the community, better water routine that reduces the burden on women and children. Additionally, water committees established around these water points ensure that young people and women are represented, thus achieving

				gender equality goals in the process. A portion of profits from the water sales is re-investing in maintaining and growing the water system.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bakula Power – Uganda (National) – (two years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Design Innovative infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Renewable energy – infrastructure development, utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – “Creating social value is to create social benefits while creating financial benefits. Social benefits are pretty much all of the SDGs. I believe this philosophy is different because it believes that a company can do this while creating sustainable financial gains. It is not a philosophy of charity. I personally believe that adding social benefits to projects actually makes them sustainable, which in turn increases your likelihood of financial success.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We are providing electricity, clean water and sanitation to areas that do not have any. We are also investing in a business that directly supports the local economy.

A summary of the definitions for social value demonstrated a variety of views as represented by each social entrepreneur. From Table 1 the definitions of social value can be summarised as follows: Code4 Change (South Africa) – “liberate the market and restore justice and competition”; BIC Farming (Zimbabwe) – “power to create a major paradigm shift ... to influenced the status quo in a particular culture”; Mina Cup (South Africa) – “changing lives”; B2B HUB (Kenya) – “no comment”; the Social Project (SA & Zambia) – “access to opportunity”; the Oxygen Africa project – “creating wealth and new entrepreneurs”; Placet Enterprise (Tanzania) – “is the creation of mutual relationship with the society in which the business operates for competitiveness and health of the society”.; Water Access Rwanda (Rwanda) –

“using resources of a certain community in such a way that gives back to that same community”; and lastly, Bakula Power – “creating social value is to create social benefits while creating financial benefits”. After analysing the data, it became evident that each social entrepreneur’s perception of social value creation as a starting point for the design of the solutions created for each of the social challenges considering the local context. The dimensions of the created social value may be viewed in categories, namely 1) facilitating a culture of sharing, 2) facilitating access (for instance, to resources or opportunities), 3) designing infrastructure, and 4) designing products and services. The main dimensions of social value design are what the participants viewed as sustainable across the nine cases. In summary, the categorised dimensions form part of the sustainability required for high social impact in each social enterprise.

In the second objective, the analysis focused on the creation of sustained social value through each social enterprise. As observed in each case study, social value creation seems to have many layers. Considering some of the cases, although the main focus might be, for example, the design and production of menstrual cups – as in the Mina case – there is also an element of empowering women and creating an awareness of personal hygiene and increasing the rate of school attendance. Another example is the use of hybrid business models, for instance, Code4Change and Mina Cup that offer products or services, as well as a sharing culture, to empower all stakeholders. In other instances, the sharing culture results in a mutually beneficial situation, such as Placet Enterprises using community land for farming, and Oxygen Africa is using rooftops for solar installation with an income generation opportunity. In addition, technology is used to improve access, such as the B2B Hub to connect more small retailers, or BIC Farming using agri-technology to produce larger commercial-sized crops with soilless farming. In the education space, providing offline access to academic content is valuable in Africa, as it is experiencing a limitation of infrastructure. In the case of Bakula Power, infrastructure is built to allow access to an energy source. In all these social value designs, there is a common element of long-lasting solutions focused on increasing social impact at a local level.

Implications of the findings for programme design

The social value dimensions which emerged from this research could, for instance, be used for programme or module design. The programme design can be co-created between the academic programme designer and the social value designer, which will result in a joint effort toward enhanced social value design in theory and practice.

One of the key outcomes of such new programmes or modules could be to facilitate opportunities for emerging social designers to incorporate social value objectives relating to social value design into the social enterprises’ long-term strategy. In addition, the most ideal situation would be to involve experienced local social value designers and practitioners to co-create and collaboratively provide input. Indicating what would be beneficial for the capacity building of social designers in adopting future-focused sustainable business models should result in long-term social impact. In Figure 1, a recommendation is made for a more interactive, participatory programme design model that facilitates a process where all the relevant actors. In this illustration, academics, social designers and practitioners, all have an opportunity to influence the content input and programme design, as well as desired outcomes.



Figure 1: Programme design model (self-compiled)

Conclusion

Design for social sustainability in Africa is a phenomenon that still needs to be further explored. There is an opportunity for the knowledge gap to be narrowed when academics collaborate and co-create with both experienced social value designers and practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of how social value is created. This co-creation is a principle of design thinking (Brown & Katz 2011, p. 382). Furthermore, this information should then be drawn from, using a participatory approach to develop new curricula incorporating the four broad dimensions of social value creation that can be aligned to specific outcomes. Social value and social entrepreneurship can also be included in design curricula in modules linking to the professional practice of students.

Ultimately, there will have to be a shift for academics to adopt a future-focused approach. The new approach should ideally influence emerging social entrepreneurs through the newly developed programmes to ensure sustainable interventions for the upliftment of society with the ultimate aim of social value creation. There is also an opportunity for these social entrepreneurs to draw from design practice principles to enhance their social value creation.

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